

Profile of the late Ambassador Lindiwe Mabuza

Lindiwe Mabuza was a South African politician, diplomat, poet, academic, journalist, and cultural activist. She passed away on 06 December 2021 at the age of 83 from cancer. She was an anti-apartheid activist who went served South Africa as a member of the first democratically-elected Parliament of South Africa. She then proceeded to a career as a distinguished diplomat.

The late Ambassador Lindiwe Mabuza was born in the coal-mining town of Newcastle, KwaZulu-Natal in 1938. After passing her matric, she enrolled at Roma University in Lesotho. In 1961, she moved to Swaziland, where she taught English and isiZulu literature. In 1964, Mabuza began graduate studies in English at Stanford University, California. In 1969, she became an Assistant Professor at Ohio University. She taught literature, history, studies of international racism and injustice for eight years.

Mabuza joined the African National Congress (ANC) in 1975 and became a journalist for the ANC's Radio Freedom, which was based in Lusaka, Zambia. Her concern with women's issues led to her involvement with Voice of the Women (VOW), the ANC's feminist journal, which encouraged women to write poetry. The VOW gave its readers a forum in which to express themselves and their feelings and to tell the world about their lives. These stories were later published in a collection in 1980 under the title *Malibongwe*. She is the co-editor of *Oliver Tambo Remembered*, a tribute to one of South Africa's greatest leaders.

Mabuza was a widely-respected poet. She has had five volumes of poetry published around the world. Her publications include: *Malibongwe*, *One Never Knows – poetry and short stories by African Congress Women*; *From ANC to Sweden*, *Letter to Letta*, *Africa to Me*, *Voices that Lead* – all poetry collections. *To Quincy* is one of her longest poems that was published in *Feminist Studies* in 1995.

Through her role as Chairperson of the ANC Cultural Committee from 1977 to 1979, Mabuza gave expression to her creative and artistic spirit. In an interview in 1995, she stated: "Poetry is part of the struggle. You use the armed struggle; you use

political methods... You recite a poem. It's better than a three-hour speech. It gets to the heart of the matter. It moves people."

Mabuza was instrumental in the creation of the ANC's ensemble *Amandla!* She promoted the concept in Scandinavia. In 1986 she moved to the United States of America and organised anti-apartheid boycotts and rallies and put pressure on major corporations to withdraw their investments and facilities from South Africa.

Almost all of her various callings – educator, radio journalist, writer – pointed towards one goal, which was to abolish apartheid in South Africa. In 2014, she was awarded the presidential Order of Ikhamanga in Silver for "her excellent contribution to mobilising the use of arts and application of creativity for democracy – displaying that cultural activism played a significant role in achieving democracy."

Mabuza served as South African Ambassador to Germany, Malaysia, the Philippines and the United Kingdom. She received numerous awards, including an honorary doctorate degree from the University of Durban-Westville in 1993, the University of Edinburgh in Scotland, in 2003 and the Yari Yari Award for contributions to Human Rights and Literature from the New York University in 1997. In 2003, while serving as South African High Commissioner to the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, she was named by *Diplomat Magazine* as Diplomat of the Year.

For her selfless dedication to the South African struggle against apartheid and for her contribution as an ambassador and poet, Rhodes University will confer on the late Ambassador Lindiwe Mabuza a Doctor of Letters (DLitt) (*honoris causa*). Her daughter will receive the honour on her behalf at the April graduation ceremonies.