

In Memoriam: Mabogatsu Violet Sarah Matlou



Mabogatsu Violet Sarah Matlou (nee Phiri) was born on April 4, 1920 in Rustenburg, and died October 20, 2017. She started her schooling in Welgeval and completed it at Mmabeskraal under the tutelage of the Reverend Selope Thema, a prominent African National Congress (ANC) leader. She completed her high school education at Orlando High in Soweto.

Between 1940 and 1943, Matlou completed a nursing course in Johannesburg, and started working at the Non-European General Hospital. In 1947, she completed Midwifery at King Edward VIII General Hospital in Durban. In 1950 she married ANC Youth League member Joe Matlou.

Mabogatsu Violet Sarah Matlou was an active member of the ANC, attending marches and protest actions together with other women such as Dorothy Nyembe, Kate Molale and Maggie Resha. Her husband was arrested with 156 others in the 1956 Treason Trial and she single-handedly took care of her four children at the time. In 1961, Joe Matlou was sent to establish an ANC office in Botswana as a transit point for the liberation fighters. When the ANC redeployed Joe Matlou to Tanganyika (Tanzania) in 1963, she had to rely on her wits to reach Tanganyika some months later, bearing all the challenges of travelling with her children.

In Tanzania, she became the only woman in the Luthuli Camp at Kongwa in Dar es Salaam. Her husband moved again to Algeria to work for the ANC. Later, together with other ANC women members, she formed the first ANC Women's League in exile, with her as the first chairperson.

In 1966, she left Tanzania to join her husband in Ghana, a move which was also dogged by many challenges in the aftermath of Kwame Nkrumah's overthrow, as Ghana had expelled all freedom fighters and liberation movements in that country.



She appealed to the Government to allow her to stay in Ghana, which was granted on condition that she does not get involved in political activities. But she served the struggle in many other ways, opening her home to political activists and students from all over Africa. The regular gatherings at her home rekindled the spirits of activists such as Tsietsi Mashinini, Miriam Makeba, Zonke Majodina, and many others from various nations.

Matlou's medical knowledge benefited her neighborhood in Kanda, Accra, where she stayed from 1966 to 1985. She and her husband then returned to Botswana. Her husband died in 1991 and from 1994 to 1998 she stayed in the United States of America to care for one of her children who was involved in an accident. In 1998, she returned to South Africa.

On April 27, 2011, the President of the Republic of South Africa, Jacob G. Zuma honored Mabogatsu Violet Sarah Matlou with the *Order of Luthuli in Bronze* (the highest awards bestowed by the President of the Republic of South Africa upon citizens and members of the international community who have contributed meaningfully in making South Africa what it is today) for the sacrifices she made in advancing the struggle to achieve a free and democratic dispensation. She is survived by six children, sixteen grandchildren, and nine great-grandchildren.



Order of Luthuli