



water & sanitation

Department:
Water and Sanitation
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

ADDRESS BY MS. NOMVULA MOKONYANE, MINISTER OF WATER AND SANITATION, ON THE OCCASION OF A MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR FORMER CUBAN PRESIDENT FIDEL CASTRO HELD ALONG WITH THE CUBAN ENGINEERS CURRENTLY WORKING WITH THE DEPARTMENT

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South Africa stands in shock, joining the world in mourning the death of Fidel Castro, the 90 year old Cuban revolutionary whose passing in the recent days plunged his country into 9 days of mourning over the communist ideology he espoused.

It is therefore befitting that as a country that regards itself as a friend of Cuba to stand with the Cubans supporting them in this period of their loss and in remembering one of the greatest men of the 20th century. A father of the revolution.

South Africa and the region as a whole will remain with good and fond memories of a man who reached out selflessly and shared the expertise of his country with all of us. Today our hospitals enjoy warm medical care by Cuban doctors spread all over our 9 provinces. The water sector is also a beneficiary of President Fidel Castro's '*big golden*' heart, as we currently enjoy services of 35 Cuban Water specialists who are also in all our provinces sharing their knowledge and skills with our water workforce.

All these men and women who left their loved ones to come and assist us in South Africa and elsewhere, took courage from their leader who fully supported the ideals of creating a safe, just, equitable and free society.

Fidel Castro was a socialist revolutionary who, despite his middle-class upbringing and private school education, was connected to the Cuban masses, with whom he launched the revolution that brought him into power on 1 January 1959. Education and Health were some of the strongest pillars of his administration, which branded the Cubans in a very unique way comparatively.

Fidel had furthermore sent thousands of soldiers to Southern Africa during the Cold War.

Those troops helped socialist governments come to power in Angola, Namibia, Mozambique and Ethiopia. Fidel Castro was a revolutionary at a time when African countries were captured and colonized by imperialist forces.

When America could not stand him, Africa embraced him like no other leader. Even after handing over power to his brother Raul in 2006, he survived for another decade before dying of natural causes at the age of 90. By virtue of his charismatic personality, longevity in the office and ability to torment a succession of US presidents, President Castro was a major 20th century figure. He became a hero to many.

Our country can certainly have sympathy with the Cuban nation because we too like you (them) have lost an iconic leader and hero, the late former President Nelson Mandela, who shared a vision of a country united with the late President Fidel Castro. The South African nation is still coming to terms with losing the father of our nation and once again this will bring us and the Cuban nation together in empathy and understanding of the road ahead. However, like we they should build on the legacy left by President Castro in facing the years ahead.

Since the death of our dear Comrade and President, Fidel Castro, we have noted that the sad news have globally affected so many, and in reaction the world leaders have said the following:

Vladimir Putin, Russian president said, "This distinguished statesman was a sincere and reliable friend of Russia. This strong and wise man always looked with confidence to the future. His memory will live forever live in the hearts of Russian people".

President Xi Jinping of People Republic of China praised the Communist leader and stated that "Castro was a good and true comrade. He added that "Castro will live forever". Globally the world has commended on Cuban health service and egalitarian education system.

Jean-Claude, President of the European Commission said that Castro was a "hero for many".

Mikhail Gorbachev, ex- Soviet president, said "Fidel held his ground and strengthened his country at the time of the harshest American blockade".

Barrack Obama is the 1st President to visit Cuba since 1959 revolution that brought Castro to power. Obama vowed to extend a hand of friendship to the Cuban people. He stated that "history will record and judge the enormous impact of this singular figure on the people and the world around him".

Nicolas Maduro, Venezuela President said that Fidel was an example of the fight for all people of the world. Cuba stood alone in the face of the supreme reign of US hegemony.

To my fellow Cubans staff, your pain is also our pain:

1. *Fidel Castro was a survivor. He survived guerrilla warfare in the 1950s and claimed the leadership for nearly half a century.*
2. *He survived a botched attempt to overthrow him, quickly defeating about CIA trained exiles, who invaded Cuba at the Bay of Pigs in 1961.*
3. *He and the rest of humanity, survived the Cuban missiles, which brought the USA and USSR to the brink of nuclear war in 1962.*
4. *Fidel Castro as a leftist challenged American hegemony in Africa, Caribbean and Latin America. He openly courted the embrace of the Soviet Union and this was viewed as an offence that forever stained his relations with USA.- even 25 years after the collapse of Soviet Union.*
5. *1961 when Washington breaks all diplomatic relations, and furthermore the US sponsors an abortive invasion by Cuban exiles (1400 soldiers) at the Bay of Pigs, Fidel Castro had won against the invaders and declared Cuba a communist State;*
6. *He survived CIA and FBI schemes to kill him, including ones involving toxic cigars, women assassins, exploding seashells and tons of assassination plots to kill him.*
7. *In the end, not only did Castro survive, he burnished his image to many members of the United Nations and even became NAM president, wherein USA was requested to lift its economic embargo against Cuba, led him to be admired world-wide for over 25 years.*

The overwhelming support for this non-binding resolution led him to release million of Cubans to assist Africa and Latin America by providing social-uplifting expertise either through dispatching doctors, engineers, teachers, etc.

His famous quote was *"They talk about the failure of socialism, but where is the success of capitalism in Africa, Asia and Latin America"*. Thus this *"medical diplomacy"* had won Cuba many friends worldwide.

The collapse of the Soviet Union, which had propped up the Cuban economy, did not discourage him but he soldiered on, experimenting with limited forms of capitalism.

Castro's last public appearance was at the 7th Congress of the Cuban Communist Party.

He said *"Our turn comes to us all, as I am now 90 years of age, but the ideas of Cuban communism will endure"*.

His other famous quote was *"A revolution is not a bed of roses. A revolution is a struggle between the future and the past"*.

Dankie

Ngiyabona