

David Martin laid to rest

Herald Reporter

RENOWNED writer, photographer and publisher David Martin, who died last weekend, was buried at Glen Forest yesterday with two Sadc leaders — one current and the other former — joining President Mugabe in mourning the accomplished journalist.

Mozambican President Cde Armando Guebuza and former Tanzania President Cde Benjamin Mkapa sent condolence messages to Martin's wife, Phyllis Johnson.

They described Martin's death as a great and irreparable loss not only to his family, but to the Sadc region too.

In their messages, which were read at the graveside just before burial by Minister of Policy Implementation Cde Webster Shamu, the two leaders described Martin as a soldier whose contribution to the region would be cherished.

The Tanzania Gender Network Programme also joined diplomats, the Josiah Tongogara Foundation, Government officials, war veterans and service chiefs in saluting Martin's contribution in the fight against imperialism in moving eulogies delivered at Martin's residence and at the graveside.

Secretary-general in the civil division department in President Guebuza's Office, Mr Antonio Sumbana, also sent his condolence message.

Mr Sumbana worked with Martin while he was Mozambican ambassador to Zimbabwe.

In his message, Cde Guebuza said he learnt with great sorrow and incredulity the passing away of the accomplished writer, whom he described as a great friend of Mozambique and its people.

He said Martin's untimely death was not only a loss to Johnson, but to the whole Sadc family as well, including Mozambique.

"It is also a loss to Mozambique as we will miss his advice and encouragement as we soldier on, building a better and prosperous Mozambique. His tremendous contribution to the region will also be remembered," said Cde Guebuza.

"At this moment of mourning, sorrow and sadness, I would like to, on behalf of the people and the Government of Mozambique and on my own behalf, extend to you Phyllis Johnson, our deepest sympathy and heartfelt condolences."

In his message, Cde Mkapa, who worked with Martin as a fellow journalist, chronicled Martin's good works, saying he was a household name among journalists and politicians in the 10 years he lived in Dar es Salaam from 1964 when he worked as a journalist at the Tanganyika Standard newspaper.

He said had Martin's death would draw opposing reactions.

"There would have been those who would have rejoiced that their arch-enemy, the indefatigable journalist who exposed their heinous crimes, who unmasked their dark deeds and campaigned tirelessly against them, was no more.

"Then there would be the many thousands who counted him as one in their ranks, indeed as one who was in the firing line with them as they fought on the political, diplomatic and military fronts for the liberation of the people of the region and beyond."

He said no person in post-liberation Southern Africa who knew Martin would not have been moved by his death

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and commended him for continuing to travel and write despite his ill health in the past four years.

"But David was not easy to intimidate. He gave and took the challenges, traded questions and criticism with other journalists, myself included, then on rival party newspapers.

"He reported on events and leaders as he understood them, initially annoying many," he said.

The Minister of Rural Housing and Social Amenities, Cde Emerson Mnangagwa, read President Mugabe's condolence message in which he described Martin as a symbol of journalism wedded to people's struggles, a rare type of journalism that broke free from the empire to connect organically with freedom struggles in the region.

The ceremony started at Martin's residence in the morning with Cde Shamu as master of ceremony and Father Fidelis Mukonori giving a sermon both at the house and at the graveside.

There were messages on the dedication of Martin from representatives of Tanzania, Mozambique and Namibia.

Others who delivered messages were the Josiah Tongogara Foundation Trust chairman, Professor Simbi Mubako, Zanu-PF secretary for information and publicity Cde Nathan Shamuyarira, Cde Mnangagwa, who is a Zanu-PF Politburo member, Commander of the Zimbabwe Defence Forces General Constantine Chiwenga, friends and relatives.

Cde Shamuyarira, a journalist in his own right, urged the current crop of

journalists to emulate Martin in working with total commitment and insisting in investigative journalism based on facts.

He said Zimbabwe was currently being subjected to a lot of unwarranted criticism, with the media accentuating the crisis. "We should spend a lot of money in training journalists and promoting journalism in the country," said Cde Shamuyarira.

Phyllis Johnson, Martin's wife, in her vote of thanks at the graveside, said she got strength from the Government, President Guebuza, Mr Mkapa and other people who extended support to her in her moment of grief.

"If you wonder where I get my strength, it is the way David lived his life, it's from all of you here and those not here. I feel David is still here. When children who loved him arrived last night, I got strength. I picked up the phone this morning and someone said it's (Mr) Guebuza, I got strength from that," said Phyllis.

Fellow writer Ngugi Wa Mirii, musician and war veteran Chinx Chingaira, who sang revolutionary songs at the cemetery, Zimbabwe Prison Services Commissioner Retired Major General Paradzai Zimondi, Mrs Angela Josiah Tongogara, the former commander for Zimbabwe National Liberation Army (Zanla), also attended the burial.

Cde Mnangagwa laid a wreath on behalf of President Mugabe while Cde Shamuyarira did so on behalf of Vice President Joseph Msika.