

A life devoted to helping those in need

June 9 2014 at 10:00am



INLSA SELFLESS ACTIVIST: Epainette Mbeki

pictured at her home at Ngcingwana outside Idutywa in the Eastern Cape. Epainette was the mother of former president Thabo Mbeki and businessman Moletsi and the wife of treason trialist Govan Mbeki. Her funeral will be held at the family home on Saturday.

Staff Writer and Sapa

TRIBUTES from all over the country have poured in to the Mbeki family following the death of ANC stalwart Epainette Mbeki.

Epainette, 98, was the mother of former president Thabo Mbeki and wife of treason trialist Govan Mbeki.

Her third son, Jama, died in 1982 and her daughter, Linda, in 2005.

Ma Mbeki, as she was affectionately known, had a heart problem and chest infection and had been in hospital since May 25.

She died in the Life St Dominic's Hospital in the Eastern Cape on Saturday.

Her funeral will be held at the family home in Ngcingwane, Idutywa, Eastern Cape, on Saturday.

The Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, Thabo Makgoba, said yesterday: "We thank God for the life of Epainette Mbeki, a self-giving activist, community builder and a mother of the nation – in sum, a child of God who was blessed with a long life.

"We send our condolences to former president Thabo Mbeki and to Moeletsi Mbeki.

"An era passes with their mother's death, and our hope is that the current generation of leaders, as well as those to come, will learn from her wonderful example and take a leaf from her book."

ANC Women's League president Angie Motshekga hailed Mbeki as a stalwart of the Struggle and an activist who in her own right played a pivotal role in South Africa's history and transition to democracy.

"We know that (like) countless other wives and mothers, she never experienced a harmonious and peaceful family life, sacrificing for the cause of our liberation.

"She was always rooted in the struggle of her people and actively organised and assisted men and women in her Eastern Cape community, sometimes out of her own pocket. No matter the hardships she faced personally, Mbeki never turned away those less fortunate than her family."

The National Union of Mineworkers' acting spokesman, Livhuwani Mammburu, said: "She devoted her life to her community and her spirit will live on as an inspiration to all. Ma Mbeki was a rare and unique individual who had a heartfelt concern for the poor, downtrodden and rejected."

Mbeki had inspired her community with her absolute commitment to the poor and the strength of her love and humanity.

"Ma Mbeki was an activist, loyal, selfless, committed, dedicated, indefatigable and a humble servant of the people and communities she served," said Mammburu.

Mbeki resigned from the ANC and joined Cope in 2008.

Cope spokesman Bongani Mahlangu described her as a "dear mother, great leader, community builder, a teacher, a Struggle heroine and a humble servant of the people".

"Mama has inspired so many women until the very last days of her life.

"As it is a loss to the nation, it is a gain in heaven. She has left behind a legacy that will never be erased. It is a great loss to the Mbeki family, the community of Ngcingwane, Congress of the People nation."

Cosatu conveyed its condolences to the family and hailed Mbeki as a heroine who raised three children and continued to work in the Struggle after her husband, Govan Mbeki, was sentenced to prison for life in the Rivonia treason trial.

"Cosatu dips its banners honour of a revolutionary heroine who devoted the whole of her long life to the liberation of her people," Cosatu spokesman Frans Baleni said.

The Commission for Gender Equality had heard with "great sadness" of Mbeki's death, its chairman, Mfanomezile Shozi, said.

"The commission sends its heartfelt condolences to the family, relatives and people of South Africa."

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