

Love and tears as Ma Sisulu laid to rest

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INLSA FINAL WORDS: Anglican

Archbishop Thabo Makgoba delivers a sermon at the closing of Albertina Sisulu's funeral. The Struggle icon and ANC stalwart was laid to rest next to the grave of her husband Walter Sisulu at Croesus Cemetery in Bosmont. Picture: Matthews Baloyi

The sun came out to warm what was a day of mourning and celebration of Albertina Sisulu's life at Orlando Stadium.

One by one, state and foreign dignitaries, Sisulu's relatives and mourners walked sombrely into the stadium along the long red carpet leading to the middle of the field.

Among the foreign dignitaries were Zimbabwean Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai, Lesotho Prime Minister Pakalitha Mosisili, former Zambian president Kenneth Kaunda and Tanzanian President Jakaya Kikwete.

"Ma Sisulu has been such a fantastic and beautiful ornament that God feels should come back and decorate heaven," Desmond Tutu said.

Tutu was one of the first to arrive at the stadium, along with ANC Youth League president Julius Malema, soccer boss Irvin Khoza, former cabinet minister Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, government spokesman Jimmy Manyi, media personality Basetsana Kumalo and Joburg mayor Parks Tau.

President Jacob Zuma, Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe, Minister of Police Nathi Mthethwa and members of the SANDF stood in formation and welcomed foreign dignitaries and Sisulu's family.



A DAUGHTER'S anguish: Lindiwe Sisulu weeps at her mother's grave during Saturday's state funeral. INLSA

Zuma hugged each of the Sisulu relatives, who were led by Defence Minister Lindiwe Sisulu and her brother Max, Speaker of the National Assembly.

When the coffin arrived, the ANC flag draped over it was replaced by the national flag. SANDF members carried the coffin and led the procession in a slow march.

Mbulelo Lolwana, who took part in the clergy's procession led by Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town Thabo Makgoba, was honoured to perform his duties at a state funeral.

"Laying to rest a Struggle leader and someone who helped set us free is a huge privilege and honour. It's an honour and great feeling to serve in this funeral," he said.

Singers, Zinhle Dube and Zwai Bala, sang a love song in memory of Walter and Albertina Sisulu.

"I love you, Albertina. I love you, Walter," was the love story of ANC stalwarts Albertina and Walter Sisulu that played itself out at Orlando Stadium.

The lyrics were the words of a young Walter declaring his love for Albertina.

The duo ended their song with exchanges of love, to the amusement of President Jacob Zuma, Motlanthe and thousands in the stadium.

The song, in memory of the Sisulus, is part of a musical that will be staged in theatres soon.

While Walter and Albertina will never see the musical, their children, after listening to the rendition, would be likely to attend its premiere.

The lyrics captured what Albertina's eldest son Max, ANC Women's League veteran Gertrude Shope, Sisulu's grand- and great-grandchildren as well as Zuma expressed in words.

What had been a quiet and solemn start to the funeral programme soon erupted into shouts as the crowd roared after Graça Machel read her husband Nelson Mandela's tribute.

At the gravesite in Croesus Cemetery, more than a dozen flower arrangements perched on white stone pillars around the Sisulu gravesite, as pallbearers placed Ma Sisulu's coffin next to that of her beloved Walter, who was buried in 2003.

Groundsmen polished the silver railing at the grave and the silver shovels to make sure everything was spotless.

Onlookers watched proceedings from behind a fence on the opposite side of the cemetery.

A marquee was reserved for the family and dignitaries.

Albertina's send-off on Saturday was the 47th anniversary of the day in 1964 when Walter, Mandela and other Rivonia Trial accused were sentenced to life imprisonment.

Lindiwe battled to fight back tears after throwing sand on the coffin, and had to be comforted by family members.

As their final farewell, relatives threw roses into the grave.

<http://www.iol.co.za/the-star/soweto/love-and-tears-as-ma-sisulu-laid-to-rest-1.1082838?ot=inmsa.ArticlePrintPageLayout.ot>