

**THE ANGUISH OF THE ENDLESS “NEVERNESS”
A TRIBUTE TO PROF BONGANI MAWETHU MAYOSI BY THE
MINISTER OF HEALTH, DR AARON MOTSOLEDI
CAPE TOWN, 4 AUGUST 2018**

Your Excellencies

Family, friends, colleagues and comrades of the Bongani
Ladies and gentlemen, fellow mourners

Let me express my humble gratitude to the Mayosi’s family for asking me to speak on this sanctified and yet onerously painful occasion. It is, therefore, with a very heavy heart that I rise to bid him farewell.

Many of us gathered here most probably know Bongani fairly well. Bongani Mawethu Mayosi’s name marked him out as an African hero who would radiate our continent’s rainbow; a messenger of the ancient indigenous knowledge of our people and carrier of faith, hope and wisdom. His name conjures up images of gathered Elders giving thanks and exchanging wise sayings. And that is what he grew up to become.

Many, very impactful things have been said about Bongani, since his passing. To this let may add my own voice of violent desperation: Through all the gloom of strife and agony, thy gentle light, beloved of all, doth shine; the nation brings their tribute unto thee, Bongani, in praise and song; to honour thee, mine country's pride! The door of Heaven opened too early and in thy house the sunlight gleamed.

Research is about finding light, adding knowledge to that which was unknown before. Bongani was committed to research focused on improving the science of medicine and the training of medical professionals in this country and elsewhere. He was passionate about enabling Medical schools to become better places for students to learn and for teachers to work. He was a transformational leader and change agent who had great dreams of what public health could be. He had a gift of innovative thinking, a visionary spirit, and the tenacious patience required to successfully lead meaningful educational reform in the training of doctors with particular focus on the African Child.

Having observed those qualities in Bongani, I reckon that the only legacy that will preserve Bongani’s memory with us is to keep a united front as

citizens and work hard to transform the leadership landscape of our institutions of high learning towards excellent performance in articulating the values of our Constitution and democratic society.

Bongani had a noble dream, and today I would like to call on all us to rise up to that dream. He said this at his inauguration as the seventh Professor of Medicine and Head of the Department of Medicine in the University of Cape Town's 87-year history:

“Public academic health centres must take the lead in setting the pace for the future of medicine in Africa. There is a tendency for the privatisation of excellence in medicine through the flight of skilled and experienced doctors to the private sector, and the concentration of new medical technology in private hands. The public academic health centres need to exercise leadership by putting forward an agenda for increased productivity, innovation, building, and skills that was advocated by Frantz Fanon (African psychiatrist and one of the first authors of damages done to African mindsets by colonialism). In this way, we will reclaim our role as the pacemakers of the health system and secure the future of medicine in Africa in the new millennium”.

In addition to his devotion to his work and to the improvement of health education locally and globally, Bongani always found time for his colleagues, his friends, and his family, especially his parents, his wife, and their two daughters. This, we know is true. In his own words, on the above mentioned occasion, Bongani said: “I would like to acknowledge, too, with gratitude, the love, support, and understanding of my wife, Nonhlanhla, and my children, Vuyi and Gugu, our pride and joy, for without them, my life would be incomplete”.

Having worked and interacted with Bongani quite a lot ever since I became the Minister of Health, I learned a great deal about his love for his family. They were never far from his thoughts. It was a privilege for me to have been a part of Bongani's life. Although much too short, his, was a life well lived! He was a determined, visionary, collaborative, goal-oriented, caring person who loved life and all that it offered. Through both his scholarship and his practice, he made a significant contribution to our Faculty of Medicine, to the University of Cape Town.

His many awards and public recognitions reveal that his, was a distinguished career of considerable importance! His contributions to medical training and

research were powerful and his work ethic more than remarkable. Energy, commitment, integrity are all words that begin to capture my image of Bongani.

Many have called him a gentle giant, someone known for his humility. This was illustrated after being elected to the National Academy of Medicine when he said: "I am indebted to my mentors, my students, my collaborators and, above all, my wife and children who have supported and inspired me over the years".

How I wish we had many more like him. But he was one of kind and will be sorely missed as a colleague, scholar and friend.

But Bongani had much, much more to give his beloved country and his family. We need to acknowledge as a health fraternity that we did not do all we could to help him cope with his anxieties, feelings of helplessness – despite his many strengths. We appear unable to see past people's strengths sometimes and always assume they are coping.

Bongani's passing must, therefore, makes us pause and contemplate how we live our lives, how we support each other in our homes, as well as at work. As we celebrate Bongani's life and achievements we need to commit to doing more to understand our anxieties and vulnerabilities - and in our interactions to be more concerned about each other's wellbeing.

Nonhlanhla, my sister. I admire how you have announced the passing of Bongani. Your courage will help us deal with the many taboos related to mental health issues. This has already resulted in many doctors reporting their own battles with depression and other forms of mental illness.

This is surely a wake-up call to all of us – to take mental health more seriously both individually and as a country. This will inform our awareness campaigns moving forward.

Fellow mourners, ladies and gentlemen

It is the '**neverness**' that is so painful. Never again to be here with us; never to sit with us at the table, never to travel with us, never to laugh with us, never to cry with us, never to embrace us as we achieve excellent marks, never to see his children marry. All the rest of our lives we must live without him. Only our death can stop the pain of his death. A month, a year, five years - with that we could live. But not this forever!

My sister, Nonhlanhla, Bongani's dear wife, as you step outdoors into the moist moldy fragrance of an early summer morning the realisation would come that never again will he smell this. As JOB 7:9-10: "***a cloud vanishes and is gone, so he who goes down to the grave does not return, He will never come to his house again; the home you shared with him will know him no more. Therefore, I will not keep silent; I will speak out in anguish of my spirit...the bitterness of my soul***". One small misstep and now this endless 'neverness'.

Bongani, a caring and beloved family man, a cherished colleague, a scholar and friend, you will be missed by many, but never will you be forgotten by those who were fortunate enough to have known you!

There is an Eskimo saying that may help us through our grief and I quote: *Say not in grief: He is no more, but live in thankfulness that he was.*

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