

Remarks by H. E. Sibongiseni Dlamini-Mntambo
At the Festival of Life in honour of Pius Adesanmi,
26 March 2019.

Family, friends, co-workers, and students of Professor Adesanmi,
Our late struggle icon former President Mandela once said <I quote>

“What counts in life is not the mere fact that we have lived. It is what difference we have made to the lives of others that will determine the significance of the life we lead.” <end quote>

I am deeply humbled to have been asked to say a few words in celebration of the life of Professor Pius Adesanmi. I am also honoured to have known him as a dear friend and brother.

That Sunday morning of 10 March I was going through my morning news when I learned about the fate of the Ethiopian airline. After reading a few articles and sharing perceptions on social media, I moved on to other news from the continent and around the world— after all, in my mind, what were the odds of knowing any of the victims –that was until a message from a friend jogged me, and as they say the rest is history.

The news of the passing away of Professor Adensamni shook the South African High Commission beyond belief. Like everyone who has worked closely with him, we share a similar sense of shock, loss and sadness. Our hearts are still

heavy with grief, mourning a friend of the Mission, a friend of our beautiful country South Africa.

Indeed the South African High Commission was fortunate to have benefitted from the Professor's wisdom. We collaborated on quite a few projects which were undeniably successful because of his positive influence. About a year ago – in March 2018, the South African High Commission was honoured to work with the Institute of African Studies (IAS) on a seminar entitled “Solidarity and Shifting Patterns of Hegemony in Southern Africa”. In November last year (2018) we again worked with the IAS for the centennial celebrations of Nelson Mandela; and most recently in January 2019 on a welcome reception for South African Professor Shireen Hassim.

I remember when we were organising the Nelson Mandela centenary which was initially scheduled for September 2018, we were panicking at the Mission because we had not heard anything from him in a long time. The e-mails were not responded to and we could not reach him on the cellphone. Our guest speaker had confirmed the date and we needed to ensure that all the pieces were fitting together. Of course as some of you would know our guest speaker was the Right honourable Brian Mulroney, the former Prime Minister of Canada and because of his busy schedule getting him as a guest speaker is near impossible.

When Professor Adesanmi finally responded to the e-mails we learned about the horrific accident which nearly took his life. He apologised “for the inconvenience ”as though he had caused the accident and he indicated that he

would still love to be part of this important project except that because of the severity of his injuries he had been booked off.

While we understood the challenges of getting this guest speaker, the Mission felt that Professor Adesanmi was to be part of this event since we worked with him on it from inception. We took chances and approached the former Prime Minister's office and informed him that Professor Adesanmi who plays a crucial role in the event had been involved in an a car accident and requested to move the date to November. The Right Honourable Brian Mulroney acceded to this request to accommodate Professor Adesanmi. Indeed, Pius had charisma that drew you in. It was powerful. So powerful that it could make even former Prime Ministers change their schedules.

Aside from the events we coordinated together, I turned to Pius occasionally for his academic eye. He had an excellent command of English. He would look at some pieces of writing, especially opinion pieces and – as they say around here – he would “give it to me straight”. This I appreciated immensely, because true friends do not only tell you what you want to hear, but also what you need to hear. So he would read through my writing and then tell me – nicely – that my writing was not exactly impeccable. But – despite his towering physical presence - he was so gentle and diplomatic that his criticism did not leave you deflated, but rather it elevated you. He had no interest in breaking others down. He wanted to uplift us all.

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Pius led a significant life. He had a vibrant personality and his unique gift in connecting with others came through in his interactions. He was a unifier who had the ability to look past boundaries. The oceans seemed like a small thing when he bridged the distance between Canadian and African societies. And even within Africa, Pius did not care if you were Nigerian or South African or from anywhere else on our great continent. He saw you as family.

A man of integrity, he contributed exceptionally to Africa, speaking truth to power through his books, columns and talks.

Today it feels like our family has lost a great son. But I accept that we should not dwell on the sadness of his passing, but join in celebrating the life our brother, Professor Pius Adesanmi. I am blessed to have known him. My team in the South African High Commission is forever indebted and on behalf of the South African High Commission please accept our deepest condolences, May his beautiful soul rest in eternal peace.