

OBITUARY: JOHN MITALA LEAVES STRONG LEGACY

By Umaru Kashaka

The cruel hand of death has once again robbed Uganda of an illustrious, seasoned and humble public servant with a clean record of service spanning 48 years.

Dr John Mitala died of an undisclosed illness at the entrance of Masaka Hospital last Friday aged 74. At the time of his death, he was a senior presidential advisor on public service matters.

On Christmas day, President Yoweri Museveni directed that Mitala be accorded an official burial today in Kamwokya, Kalungu district.

An official burial means that the Government will cover all expenses and accord a gun salute to the country's longest-serving head of public service and secretary to Cabinet.

Mitala, who served as head of public service and secretary to Cabinet for 19 years, joined civil service in May 1973 as an industrial relations officer at the then ministry of labour and social welfare.

He later served as deputy head of the Public Service Commission, the Judicial Service Commission and deputy head of public service and secretary for administration from 1998 to 2002, when he was appointed as the head of the public service and secretary to Cabinet.

"Mitala will be deeply missed not only by the presidency, where he has been serving as senior presidential advisor on public service matters, but also by the region, continent, and the Commonwealth, where he notably served the African Association of Public Administration and Management (AAPAM)," Ofwono Opondo, the Government spokesperson, said.

AAPAM was established in 1961 to lay strategies for the Africanisation of the civil service as most African countries gained independence. Its membership includes African governments, private sector, civil society, international organisations, practitioners, academicians and young professionals.

MEETING MUSEVENI

The Office of the President said in a brief statement that Museveni met Mitala while at the University of Dar-es-Salaam in Tanzania in 1970, where a student relationship was created.

"Later, after the National Resistance Army captured power in 1986, the mother of Dr Mitala, who died in 2019,



Mitala (right) praying at All Saints Church in Kampala in 2019. Museveni directed that Mitala be accorded an official burial today in Kamwokya, Kalungu district

SCHOOLS ATTENDED

Mitala attended Kako Boys' Primary School from 1958 to 1960, where he completed Primary Six. He later joined Kako Boys' Junior Secondary School. In 1964, he joined Lubiri Senior Secondary School, where he served as school prefect in 1967. For his A'level, Mitala went to Sir Samuel Baker Senior Secondary School. He later joined the University of Dar-es-Salaam in Tanzania for a bachelor of arts in law management and administration and graduated in 1973.

In 1979, Mitala obtained a diploma in training methodology at Turin International Centre, Italy. In 1995, he joined Makerere University, where he graduated in 1997 with a master's degree in public administration and management. In December 2016, Mitala obtained a doctorate of philosophy (honoris causa) from Gulu University.

Dr John Mitala

became the first chairperson of the women council of Bukulula sub-county, currently Kalungu district," he said.

Mitala's family remained supporters of the ruling National Resistance Movement to date.

"He grew through the ranks up to the level of head of public service and secretary to Cabinet. Even when he was appointed a senior presidential advisor on public service matters, Mitala continued to advise the President till his death," the statement said.

"There is no doubt that the President has lost a close cadre."

GOT TO OFFICE EARLY

Dr Patrick Ibembe, the former special presidential assistant, said he had a working relationship with Mitala spanning 21 years.

"From May 2003 to June 2011, our offices were opposite each other. Since we both had a

habit of getting to office before 7:00am, we routinely caught up on various subjects, but in a boss/subordinate relationship," he recalled.

As head of public service, Ibembe said, Mitala was the "head boy" to all permanent secretaries in Uganda for 19 years.

He said Mitala superintended over the other permanent secretaries in the Office of the President; deputy head of service, State House comptroller, principal private secretary (PPS) to the President, PPS to the vice-president, secretary of the President (who heads the

executive office of the fountain of honour), secretary for ethics and secretary to the chancery.

Assuming additional responsibilities as director and chairperson board of directors of sensitive state parastatals, Ibembe said Mitala was of much help to him to engage some permanent secretaries.

"At the time, I was handed over a state parastatal that had initially been earmarked for privatisation on account of making losses. We had to operate on business principles, mostly with government entities. Mitala was of help in validating my value propositions to his permanent secretaries," he said.

Ibembe noted that the result was that

'MR CLEAN'

Milly Babalanda, the Minister for the Presidency and chairperson of the national organising committee that has been overseeing Mitala's funeral arrangements, said he was ethical and scandal-free.

"Just last year as you retired as head of public service, I lauded you for your long, outstanding ethical, scandal-free service to the nation. Integrity was your other name and now you are gone to be with the Lord. Rest in eternal peace Dr Mitala," she wrote in a tweet.

Mitala handed over office as the head of public service and secretary to Cabinet to Lucy Nakyobe, the former State House comptroller, early September last year.

During the handover ceremony, Babalanda hailed Mitala for his outstanding performance, which she said would be remembered for a long time in the public service of Uganda and generally in the East African Community.

"You have exhibited the highest qualities of a civil servant – a true proponent of the civil service

and code of ethics. Many Ugandans believe that serving in a public office means enriching oneself. However, for the time that I have known you, I have not heard your name in any public scandal. I want you, and request you to maintain this level of integrity for the remaining part of your service to humanity," she implored now the late Mitala.

Prime Minister Robinah Nabbanja said she was saddened by the loss of Mitala, whom she eulogised as a great public servant and very humble man.

She also said Mitala was an articulate, patriotic and remarkable time manager.

Agriculture minister, Frank Tumwebaze said Mitala was a great fountain of knowledge about public institutional building and systems.

"My first time to serve in Cabinet as Minister for the Presidency, Mitala was one of the senior government officials that inducted me," he said.



Minister for the Presidency Milly Babalanda

one year on assumption of his relationship role (director) profits were made and only continued to climb as validated by annual reports from the office of the Auditor General.

"Mitala was professional; we handled many capacity-building programmes together, for senior government officials. He was the best timekeeper I have met in my living memory and was simple, straightforward and candid," Ibembe said.

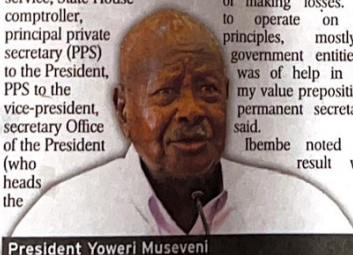
He also said Mitala's straightforward and candid nature almost brought him issues with his subordinates.

"At the time, we (Mitala and Ibembe) had been invited to induct an engaging and brilliant crop of undersecretaries. This lot included common names in administration cadreship

such as Ben Kigenyi, Aggrey Wuni and Godfrey Kaima. Mitala's technical presentation got a 'cold shower', but on account of a virtue and straightforwardness," he said, thanking him for his time and insights in absentia.

Samuel Baligiddie, a former diplomat, recalled the day he and the late ambassador Stephen Nabeta visited Mitala as head of public service to get his views on a project for compilation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' protocol manual.

"His office was full of files; even the office sofa sets. The enormity of his workload and hard work became obvious, yet with humility he gave us his input," he wrote on his Twitter handle.



President Yoweri Museveni

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