

Statement by Zwelinzima Vavi on the passing of Comrade Ruth Mompoti

12 May 2015

I am deeply saddened to hear that we have lost a great heroine of the revolutionary struggle, Comrade Ruth Mompoti, who passed away early this morning following a long period of ill-health. I send my condolences to her family, friends and many comrades in the movement,

Born in 1925, Comrade Mompoti devoted her life to the struggle for freedom and a better life for the people of South Africa. She was born in an area of the North West Province which now bears her name – the Dr Ruth Mompoti District Municipality.

She was employed as a teacher in Vryburg from 1944 to 1952, after which, from 1953 to 1961, she worked for Comrades Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo in their Johannesburg law practice.

She had already been involved in the Defiance Campaign in 1952 and in 1954 joined the African National Congress, became a founding member of the Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW) and was elected to the National Executive Committee of the ANC Women's League. She was a leader of the historic Women's March on 9th August 1956.

After being forced into exile in 1962, she remained a member of the ANC's National Executive Committee and became secretary and head of the ANC's women's section in Tanzania.

After serving as the chief representative of the ANC in the United Kingdom for many years, she was appointed to the delegation that opened talks with the South African government at Groote Schuur in 1990.

In August 1992, she addressed the United Nations Special Committee against Apartheid on the subject of women and that day was then declared an International Day of Solidarity with Women in South Africa.

In 1994, she was elected to parliament and then served as the South Africa Ambassador to Switzerland from 1996 to 2000. Finally, in her 75th year, she returned to her roots and was elected as mayor of Vryburg in the North-West Province.

We must always treasure the memory of comrades like Ruth Mompoti and never forget the debt we owe them. They were prepared to sacrifice everything for the sake of the struggle for liberation and progress, without expecting any reward except the support and love of the people she fought for.

More than ever today we need real revolutionary cadres like her, especially in her own NW province which has degenerated so quickly into an area where the liberation movement is riddled with factionalism and corruption, used as a route to riches by tenderpreneurs, at the expense of the workers and the poor communities.

That is why we must honour the Ruth Mompatis of our movement and return to the values that she fought for and lived by all her life.

Issued by Zwelinzima Vavi (former) COSATU General Secretary

