

RIP Dr Thandi Cynthia Ndlovu

Activist, medical practitioner, and owner of Motheo Construction - the largest female-owned construction company in SA - Dr Thandi Cynthia Ndlovu has passed away following a car crash over the weekend while she was on her way to a funeral in Rustenburg.



Dr Thandi Cynthia Ndlovu, owner of Motheo Construction, passed away following a car crash on Saturday, 25 August.

Ndlovu was born in Soweto, where she attended Orlando High School, and where she became a founding member of the Student's Christian Movement. At the time of the Soweto Student uprising in 1976, she was serving as the administrative secretary of the student representative council at the University of Fort Hare, where the political repression at the time forced her to abandon her Bachelor of Science degree. She spent the next few years being trained within the ranks of Umkhonto we Sizwe, the military wing of the ANC, and during 1976 she was posted with other cadres to Novo Catengue, a military training camp in the South of Angola.

Within the MK she served as a senior political commissioner, charged with a literacy and education programme, and as a military commander. Although she had not yet trained as a doctor, she served as medical officer, and in 1978 she was sent to the then Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) where she obtained further training. Upon the completion of her training, she was sent to the ANC headquarters in Lusaka where, amongst many other positions, she served as administrative secretary of the Women's Section.

While working for Radio Freedom between 1978 and 1984, she addressed the United Nations Conference on the Year of the Child in 1979 and the United Nations Conference on the International Women's Decade in 1980. She attended several UN forums where she addressed issues of women and children under apartheid rule.

Establishing Motheo Construction

Ndlovu obtained a Bachelor of Science in Human Biology from the University of Zambia in 1984 and obtained an MBChB from the same university in 1991. She worked as a medical practitioner in private practice prior to 1994, and dedicated herself to the built environment through Motheo Construction, the company she established in 1996. She was the founder and executive chairman of the Motheo Group of companies, and the managing director of Motheo Construction. By 2011 the Motheo Group had delivered over 30,000 serviced sites and over 50,000 affordable housing units spanning six provinces, translating into over R1.2bn worth of affordable housing all across South Africa.

She was a founding member of South African Women in Construction, and its president between 2009 and 2011, and the deputy chairperson of the South African Women in Dialogue (SAWID) Steering Committee.

In her position as one of the founding members and deputy chairperson of South African Women in Dialogue, chaired at the time by Dr Brigalia Bam, she co-facilitated the SAWID/Democratic Republic of Congo Peace Dialogue in March 2003, and the South Africa/Burundi Peace Dialogue in July 2004. She was the leader of a delegation of South African women from different political parties attending the 2007 Women in Politics Conference in Juba, South Sudan.

Dynamic and humane leader

"Ndlovu was an incredibly dynamic and humane leader who had travelled widely representing her country and her organisations on various international fora, and she dedicated her many talents to address some of the most intractable

problems in South Africa, like the availability of affordable but quality housing," said the SAWID in a release on the unexpected passing of one of its founding trustees.

"Her compassionate perspective, wisdom and wide experience in various countries put her in a unique position to grasp the complexities of South Africa, and her deep and committed religious faith, gentle humour and soft-spoken feminist leadership was an inspiration to many. Her generosity and humility was legendary, and her contribution and legacy cannot be overstated. South Africa, the Motheo Group and the many women's organisations that she served selflessly, including SAWID and African Women in Dialogue, (AfWID), have lost a figure of immense stature, inspiration and personal integrity.

"Our deepest condolences to her children, husband, family, colleagues, and all the thousands of people who knew and loved her."

Dedicated businesswoman and selfless leader

South African Housing and Infrastructure Fund (SAHIF) CEO Rali Mampeule described Ndlovu's passing as a sad day for the built environment industry in general and the construction industry in particular. "The construction industry has lost a heroine, a dedicated businesswoman and a selfless leader," said Mampeule who knew Ndlovu very well and had interacted a lot with her in recent weeks.

"Dr Thandi paved a way for a lot of women in the industry and she was on a mission to unlock more opportunities for others. She was one of the shining stars in the construction industry, thanks to her 20 years' experience in the sector."

"We'd like to send our heartfelt condolences to the Ndlovu family and friends. The news of Dr Thandi's passing came as a shock, especially this month (Women's Month) which we've dedicated to women in construction. May her soul rest in peace," Mampeule added.

Ndlovu was nominated as Business Woman of the Year by the Business Woman's Association of South Africa in 2013, and at the time of her death she was gracing the front cover of the August 2019 edition of *Forbes Africa* magazine.

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