



16 August 2023

Meme Erika Zachariah, the Children and the Entire Bereaved Family of the Late Colonel Lazarus Zachariah Shakala
Donkerhoek
Katutura East Constituency
KHOMAS REGION

Dear Meme Erika Zachariah and the Entire Bereaved Family

It is with sadness that I have learned about the passing of your beloved husband, father, uncle, brother and a Veteran of our National Liberation Struggle, the Late Colonel Lazarus Zachariah Shakala, on Saturday, 05 August 2023, at Katutura Intermediate State Hospital.

With the passing of the Late Colonel Lazarus Zachariah Shakala, yet another light in a glorious generation of the pioneering Veterans of our National Liberation Struggle has been extinguished.

These brave men and women were the vanguard of the liberation struggle. They fought with gallantry and intensity, taking on the might of the apartheid army and its regime. It is here that we learn about some of the virtues that epitomized these veterans of our struggle.

The Late Colonel Lazarus Zachariah, nom de guerre "Shakala" and also affectionately known as "China Man," emerged as an unsung hero whose impactful journey began long before the Namibia Trade Union movement of the mid-1980s.

The Late Colonel Shakala's path began with his involvement in the Ovamboland People's Organization (OPO, the forerunner of SWAPO, and his subsequent commitment to the liberation struggle at a young age, leading him into exile in Tanzania.

Driven by a fervent desire to see Namibia liberated, he underwent rigorous training in the then Soviet Union and Egypt to hone his military skills. Upon completion of his training he returned to Tanzania and assumed the role of a dedicated soldier.

Notably, he played a pivotal role among the second group of trained guerrilla fighters known as "G2" which consisted of Leonard Pillemon Shuuya (Castro) who was the second-in-command of SWALA, the forerunner of PLAN, Lazarus Haiduwa Zachariah (Shakala), Chief of SWALA Military Police, Helao Josef Shityuwete (Kandindima), Secretary, Elia Dume, Medical Assistant, Julius Shilongo (Kashuku), Reconnoitre, Eino Kamati Ekandjo (Ma-questions), Demolition Squad, and Jonas Shimueefeleni, Festus Nehale (Ndengu), Nghidipo Jesaja Haufiku (Kambua) and David Hamunime (Keenongoja).

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Although Castro was the second-in-command of SWALA, he was not trusted with the responsibility of leading the group, and this task was given to the Late Colonel Shakala.

Like the G1 group, which was armed with two PPSH sub-machine guns and two TT-pistols I had obtained in 1963 from the Algerian Government under Ahmed Ben Bella and led by the Late Comrade John Otto Nankudhu, affectionately known as “Koshiuanda”, Commander of the Commandos, the G2 group also traversed the arduous journey from Tanganyika through Zambia to Namibia. They left Kongwa in February 1966 and set off by Ranger Rover and headed West to the Tanzania-Zambian border, where they pick up their weapons and ammunition at Mbeya, and then entered Namibia through the Caprivi Strip.

In June 1966, the G3 group left Tanzania and consisted of Commander Kaleb Hanganee Tjipahura (Day by Day), his deputy Rudolph Kadhikua and S. Kakuambi, J. Haiduua, Betuel Naunjango, Tomas Haimbodi, Abel Shuudeni Aluteni (The Great), P. Hamalwa Ndadi, I. Ipinge and Eliader Muatale. In November 1966, the first five groups were deployed in Eastern Caprivi, Kavango and Ovamboland. This daring endeavor marked the establishment of SWAPO military camps within Namibia's borders during the mid-1960s.

While in Kavango district, the G2 group had a direct engagement with the occupation forces near the Kavango River, West of Rundu and suffered no casualties. However, when the enemy sent troop reinforcements, eight of the G2 group members were captured and only Comrade Julius Shilongo managed to evade capture that day but was later captured at Omugulugwombashe on 26 August 1966.

Leonard Shuuya Castro was also among the eight G2 captured but was later released from detention in Pretoria and was recruited by the security police in return for a large bribe. He was then sent back and betrayed the groups that were to follow later, leading to their apprehension after Castro's revelation to the Boers. On 26 August 1966, at 5 a.m., the security police led by captain Swanepoel and guided by Castro, attacked Omugulugwombashe with eight helicopter gunships and personnel carriers. This battle marked the beginning of our armed liberation struggle.

In August 1967 the Omugulugwombashe captives and those betrayed by “Castro” were put on trial in Pretoria together with ten SWAPO leaders such as Comrade Herman Toivo Ya Toivo, Eliaser Tuhadeleni (Kaxumba ka Ndola), Nataniel Maxuilili, among others. On 21 June 1967, less than two months before the trial began, the South African Terrorism Act was gazetted and was made retrospective to 1962. The Late Colonel Shakala was Accused number five in the case “The state v. Tuhadeleni and 36 others” and was released in the mid-1980s.

A new chapter unfolded with the formation of the Joint Trade Union Committee (JTUC) by internal SWAPO leadership and the Council of Churches of Namibia during the mid-1980s. Central to this initiative was the reintegration of political prisoners and the strategic foundation of the Namibia National Workers' Union (NUNW). Eminent leaders like Daniel Tjongarero, Frans Kambangula, Mokhanedi Thlabanelo, Anton Lubowski, Nataniel Maxuilili, and others welcomed back these released comrades.

In the post-prison phase, stalwarts including John Otto Nankudhu, Lazarus Shakala, Martin Kapewasha, Ruben Itengula, John Pandeni, Jerry Ekandjo, Petrus Ulenga and Ben Ulenga and many more seamlessly reintegrated into the fold.

Although the 1969/70 Tanga consultative congress did not mention the formation of trade unions, a decision to establish the National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW) in exile was taken on the 24th April in 1970. By 1985, workers had formed a Workers Action Committee in Windhoek - Katutura, which ultimately became the forerunner of trade union establishment.

These trade unions, mostly under the umbrella of the NUNW, were formally established from the mid-1980s onwards and provided workers with an organisational vehicle through which they could raise workplace grievances as well as broader political issues which were always deemed linked to the economic struggle.

This is how this period marked the establishment of NUNW and its affiliates, such as NAPWU, MUN, NATAU, NAFU, NDAWU, and NANTU and the Late Colonel Lazarus Shakala remained an indomitable foot soldier, dedicating himself to organizational work within the Metal and Allied Namibian Workers Union (MANWU).

He tirelessly crisscrossed the nation, championing workers' rights, unity, and empowerment through trade unions. His focus on workers' control and unity was unwavering, and his efforts contributed significantly to the formation and consolidation of NUNW and its affiliates. In the grand tapestry of NUNW's evolution, the Late Colonel Lazarus Shakala's legacy endures as a symbol of dedication, resilience, and unwavering commitment to the cause of workers empowerment and national liberation.

Thus, the story of his life offers many lessons for us today. Lessons in courage, lessons on the virtue of discipline and on the limitless capacity for endurance of the human being. But perhaps above all it is a lesson on devotion to a mission and to a cause, no matter how long and bitter the struggle. These were the honour codes that spurred the men and women of the Late Colonel Lazarus Shakala's generation and continued to guide them even once we attained our freedom and genuine independence on the 21st March 1990.

Though the Late Colonel Lazarus Shakala is no longer with us, the ideas for which he stood will never die. In bidding farewell to him, I call on our people, especially his children and grandchildren, to pick up where he left and strive to fight with equal measure to overcome the ills in our society and that will be the greatest and most befitting tribute in his honour.

To the Widow, Meme Erika Zachariah, the Children, Nawando Shakala and Olga Shakala and the Entire Bereaved Family, we share in your sorrow and we join you in celebrating a life well lived in the service of our people, punctuated by indelible marks of bravery and patriotism. Our thoughts are with you as you go through this difficult time of mourning. May you be comforted by all the words of honour that have been ascribed to your beloved husband, father, uncle, brother and a Veteran of our National Liberation Struggle, the Late Colonel Lazarus Zachariah Shakala.

As the family comes to terms with this tragic moment of the dark cloud hovering around you, allow me on behalf of the Veterans of our National Liberation Struggle, the Nujoma family and indeed on my own behalf, to convey our deepest condolences and heartfelt sympathies for this loss. It is my sincere wish that we may all be comforted and granted fortitude during this difficult time of mourning.

May His Soul Rest In Eternal Peace!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Sam Nujoma', written over a horizontal line.

FOUNDER
The Sam Nujoma Foundation

Sam Nujoma
FOUNDING PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA