



3<sup>rd</sup> April 2024

The Children and the Entire Bereaved Family of the  
Late Meekulu Mukwanambwa Linda Shihepo  
Omundudu Village, Engela Constituency  
**OHANGWENA REGION**

Dear Children and the Entire Bereaved Family

It is with sadness that I have learnt about the passing of your beloved mother, grandmother and a Veteran of our National Liberation Struggle, the Late Meekulu Mukwanambwa Linda Shihepo on Friday, 8<sup>th</sup> March 2024.

Indeed, on this day, a great shadow has fallen and hangs heavy across the entire land as the Late Meekulu Mukwanambwa Linda Shihepo is no more. For those who knew her, who worked alongside her, who counted and relied on her, who learned from her, who loved her, it is unbearable that we will never see her again.

The news struck a deep and solemn note as the Late Meekulu Mukwanambwa Linda Shihepo passed on at the age of 99 years and four months when she was about to go and celebrate her centenary on 22<sup>nd</sup> November this year.

As such, once again the stroke of death has taken one of the Veterans of our National Liberation Struggle who has been a citadel, a rock and a tower of strength to her family and community at large who have looked to a mother, grandmother and a leader like her for reassurance and for certainty.

Indeed, our country has produced men and women of distinction who have provided leadership during trying times and kept the torch of freedom alive both at home and abroad during the most difficult times of our National Liberation Struggle.

One such person was the Late Meekulu Linda Shihepo, affectionately known as Mukwanambwa, a Veteran of Namibia's liberation struggle and one of the fearless Leaders and Commanders as well as Commissar and woman combatant of the South West Africa Liberation Army (SWALA), later renamed the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN), SWAPO's Military Wing.

The late Meekulu Mukwanambwa was highly respected by SWAPO PLAN Combatants as she possessed distinctive qualities that made her as equal to both a Commander and a Commissar of the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN), SWAPO's Military Wing.

The Late Meekulu Mukwanambwa joined the Liberation Struggle under the banner of SWAPO in 1960. Her residence has served as a hub for SWAPO's Political activities as it was used to shelter SWAPO political militants such as Comrade Helao Shituwete, a cousin of Meekulu Mukwanambwa's spouse, the late Comrade Martin Shihepo. She also sheltered the late Comrade Kaxumba Kandola and Comrade Andimba Toivo YaToivo, among others, some of whom were involved in the battle of Omungulugwombashe on the 26 August 1966, in Omusati Region.

These political activists used to train and dug trenches and while they were in military training the Late Meekulu Mukwanambwa was preparing meals for them as they were engaged in clandestine SWAPO operations. In fact, the life story of the Late Meekulu Mukwanambwa is a tale of tremendous selflessness, resolute bravery, and unyielding determination as her pivotal role as a resolute figure in Namibia's Liberation Struggle stands out as a symbol of resilience, consistency and unwavering commitment.

Perhaps most importantly, in the midst of the historical turmoil that characterised our country between 1960 and 1990, people like Meekulu Mukwanambwa, also known as "Meme WoMailikano," made significant contributions to the Liberation Struggle, highlighting the important role that women played for the attainment of our Freedom and genuine Independence on the 21st March 1990.

Initially, women were not allowed at the front, and it was part of SWAPO's mission to advance the fact that women had an important role to play, and our male comrades were sensitized to the fact that we had to open up and allow the women to fully participate in the war of liberation. This took quite a while but eventually it became part of the culture of SWAPO and women played their part in the armed liberation struggle, along with their male combatants.

In this regard, I remember when I launched the book titled "Mukwahepo – Woman, Soldier, Mother" on 17 October, 2013, which tells the story of Meekulu Mukwahepo as written by Comrade Dr. Ellen Ndeshi Namhila, UNAM Pro-Vice Chancellor for Administration, Finance and Resource Mobilization, as I was reading the life story of the late Comrade Meekulu Mukwahepo, it reminded me how the Namibian women have shown resilience in the face of enormous challenges and how they sacrificed so much for our freedom and genuine independence.

Similarly, Comrade Dr. Ellen Ndeshi Namhila published the book titled "Tears of Courage" which records and Documents the life stories of five women who were, knowingly and unknowingly, drawn into the beginnings of Namibia's armed liberation struggle in 1966 and suffered torture, imprisonment, daily harassment and the loss of family members at the hands of the white minority South African regime.

In this regard, it was the resilience of women like these which kept our freedom fighters alive, fed, clothed, sheltered, nursed, and informed about the movement of the enemy. We therefore acknowledge their immense contribution and sacrifices for our freedom and genuine independence.

For instance, Meekulu Mukwanambwa's homestead has acted as a command centre, distribution station, rest area, and medical facility for PLAN combatants. Her own son Elia and her daughter Lahya joined SWAPO in 1980 and her residence served as a pivotal point for the liberation activities, going beyond its traditional functions.

The homestead functioned not just as a gathering place but also as a crucial hub for the planning and coordination of PLAN operations. Her homestead transformed into a haven, a hidden storage facility for weapons, and a symbol of optimism and determination.

PLAN Combatants said Meekulu Mukwanambwa had a soothing aura and that they always felt safe and at ease in her company, even during trying and difficult times. As a result, when the enemy came after them, they would flee into the large forest of Meekulu Mukwanambwa and wait for an opportunity to ambush them, but the enemy would just turn around and leave.

When one of our PLAN Combatants got injured during the crossfire they preferred to recover in Meekulu Mukwanambwa's house. The SWAPO PLAN Intelligence units who were dressed in civilian attire also stayed within her home and felt more secure in her company.

When people were reluctant to offer refuge to SWAPO PLAN Combatants, in the SWAPO operational area, Meekulu Mukwanambwa welcomed our Combatants and this act differentiated her from others in fighting the war of liberation.

We already highlighted that Meekulu Mukwanambwa's homestead served as a covert stockpile for SWAPO's military equipment, which were transported from Omamwandi, the PLAN Northern Region Headquarters located on the East of Ondjiva, to Meekulu Mukwanambwa's homestead in Omundudu Village, acting as a vital distribution hub.

Our PLAN Combatants led by Commander Retired Colonel B. Shikesho, who was under command of Commander Hamutenya waNandenga (Zulu), moved the weapons to Meekulu Mukwanambwa's homestead so that they could be distributed later.

This allowed for the coordination of attacks against South African military bases located throughout Namibia, including Oshakati, Omungwelume, and several other military outposts. The weapons were meticulously hidden inside Meekulu Mukwanambwa's home and the big forest (EKOVE) before being distributed to key locations and used in attacks against the South African colonial forces.

In addition to her responsibilities in logistics and military strategy, Meekulu Mukwanambwa exemplified the qualities of compassion and empathy in the midst of the harshness of the armed conflict. Her dedication to providing medical care to injured PLAN Combatants, even at the risk of her personal safety, demonstrates a deep devotion to the cause of our freedom and the welfare of our Freedom Fighters.

Her last patient among SWAPO PLAN Combatants was a survivor of the battle of Ondeshifilwa on 1 April 1989, who was injured but managed to flee the scene and reached Meekulu Mukwanambwa's residence. She nursed him for two weeks until he was strong enough to travel back to Angola.

The injured combatant's name was Shondela who sustained injuries at Ondjengo battle that was commanded by Commander Jerry Mukete in 1980.

There was also another occasion when one of our PLAN Combatants sustained injuries to both upper legs during the 1982 Battle at Epundi and was unable to descend from the tree where he had sought refuge from approaching enemy soldiers. He didn't make the decision to ask for assistance until after nightfall.

After helping the injured PLAN Combatant, a neighbour of Meekulu Mukwanambwa's discovered the PLAN freedom fighter's injuries and hurried to inform Meekulu Mukwanambwa. When Meekulu Mukwanambwa arrived to help the injured PLAN Combatant, she discovered that he had lost a lot of blood and was unable to descend on his own. She then bravely scaled the tree to save the injured PLAN Combatant. She first helped the injured warrior to his feet before climbing back up to get his AK-47 a second time.

Meekulu Mukwanambwa and her two neighbours provided medical attention to the SWAPO PLAN Combatant, cutting off his blood-stained trousers, washing and bandaging his wounds and then placing him on a bicycle and pushing it to Endola Parish to Pastor Onesmus Shanyengange, who transported the injured fighter to Mr. Andreas Namweya's house in Onangubu village on a bicycle.

The PLAN fighter waited to be moved to Ondibo until the security situation improved for him to be moved for days while hiding beneath pumpkin leaves, recovering till his strength returned. The warrior was then brought to Meme Mwendapeni's home in Ondibo and crossed into Angola.

Another example of Meekulu Mukwanambwa's resilience and contribution to the Liberation Struggle was in 1982 when a PLAN Combatant, namely, Comrade Andreas and other fellow PLAN Combatants went on an offensive to sabotage a Water Tower Reservoir at Oshakati, Okatana, which was supplying water to the white minority South African military bases in Oshakati.

During this attack, Comrade Andrew was seriously injured and taken to Meekulu Mukwanambwa's home by Mr. Mwenyo Waafenu. He stayed in Meekulu Mukwanambwa's care until Commander Centrale evacuated him back to Angola.

Most importantly, we remember how the Late Meekulu Mukwanambwa was courageous when fear gripped everyone else, she encouraged and rallied the villagers of Omundudu, ONDESHIFILWA community, and neighboring communities to organise the burial of the murdered PLAN Combatants who were ruthlessly massacred at ONDESHIFILWA and Okahenge villages and left unattended to decompose on 1 April 1989.

On that occasion, she pleaded with the fellow villagers, saying:

*"Let us bury our children. We must not succumb to intimidation or discouragement when it comes to burying our own children, who have been killed and left to decompose and be devoured by dogs. If their intention is to bring about our destruction, then they should proceed with their acts."*

While she was rallying the villagers, one of the survivors from Ondeshifilwa was left in her house, recovering from injuries sustained during the skirmishes that resulted in the massacre of twenty-three (23) PLAN fighters.

Meekulu Mukwanambwa also exerted a significant impact in the spiritual and moral realms, offering guidance and bestowing blessings upon SWAPO PLAN Combatants and new recruits embarking on the perilous journey to go into exile.

Her portrayal as "Meme WoMailikano" was thus not just a symbolic title, but rather held significant meaning, providing comfort, inspiration, and spiritual nourishment to those involved in the challenging fight for freedom. They would come to her house in the middle of the night, expecting her to come out and bless them before they embarked on their long journey into exile in Angola.

I will fail in my duties if I do not mention Meekulu Mukwanambwa's strong insight and attentiveness which were critical in detecting and disrupting enemy attempts to infiltrate and undermine PLAN operations. Meekulu Mukwanambwa's discovery of enemy forces masquerading as PLAN fighters in January 1982 saved potentially catastrophic defeats for the liberation struggle, emphasising her crucial role in the security and integrity of PLAN operations.

In January 1982, she was the first to recognise Black Soldiers of enemy South Africa defense Forces posing as PLAN fighters. She successfully thwarted the enemy's covert mission, avoiding potentially disastrous results and preventing the planned elimination of SWAPO's military component.

When confronted with an antagonist, Meekulu Mukwanambwa, frequently turned to prayer. Her prayers often included the line, *"O God, bestow tranquillity upon our native land. May God bring an end to the struggle that pits brothers against their own siblings"* This action immobilised and confused the enemy forces, weakening their attitude.

In 1984, Meekulu Mukwanambwa was arrested for several months without trial and experienced intense abuse and unyielding interrogation. The captors aimed to obtain intelligence regarding the whereabouts and tactics of PLAN combatants, and to coerce her into confessing her alleged participation in activities labelled as terrorism by the apartheid regime, which were linked to SWAPO.

Despite the immense demands, harassment and pressure, Meekulu Mukwanambwa unwaveringly maintained her innocence, stating that she was simply a citizen unintentionally caught in the midst of the opposing forces of the ongoing struggle. Throughout this difficult experience, Meekulu Mukwanambwa has shown unwavering determination.

After Namibia gained independence, Meekulu Mukwanambwa was elected as the first chairwoman of the SWAPO branch in her area, where she committed herself to the ongoing mobilisation activities of the party and served in this position until she retired, making a notable and influential contribution to the growth and political discussions in her community.

In conclusion, Meekulu Linda Shihepo Mukwanambwa's legacy demonstrates the critical role that women played in the liberation struggle. Her numerous contributions, which include logistical support, medical treatment, spiritual direction, and community mobilisation, demonstrate the tremendous power of individual fortitude and collective resistance in making history.

Meekulu Mukwanambwa was greatly respected and loved by her family, by her community, by her comrades in the SWAPO Party and by her friends with whom she had longstanding and cordial relations. We have thus lost not just a dependable comrade but also a dear friend, who had many virtues. She was generous in spirit and had a charming personality.

We thus mourn the passing on of a brave Comrade, a gallant freedom fighter and one of the foremost pioneers of the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN), SWAPO's Military Wing, who has served the Namibian people with distinction and tenacity.

She dedicated her youthful and adult life to the struggle for the liberation of Namibia and endured hardship but never wavered. For this reason, her exemplary deeds shall be remembered by the present and future generations. As we bid her farewell, let us recall the values for which the Late Meekulu Mukwanambwa stood for and honour her by committing ourselves together to build a united, democratic and prosperous Namibia.

She was a principled woman of great courage, in times of both calm and difficulties. She was honest and never hesitated to speak up for what she believed to be right. Her life was full of meaning and accomplishment in the way she dedicated herself to serve the people of our country. We will remember her for her kindness but above all for her ever-present sense of calm, even in a crisis or when under extreme pressure. She was a voice of reason and a voice of wisdom.

To her movement, the SWAPO Party, she worked so hard on a daily basis to advance its cause. But her greatest loyalty was reserved for her country and its people. In this regard, we bid her farewell, but also commemorate and acknowledge her immense contributions to our country.

To her family, our hearts go out to you as you go through the grief of a loss so overwhelming. As you walk through this difficult time, it is our wish that you are consoled by the knowledge that the formidable legacy of your beloved mother, grandmother and a Veteran of our National Liberation Struggle, the Late Meekulu Mukwanambwa Linda Shihepo lives on.

Her courage, her compassion and her service to the people of Namibia will remain a light that brightens our darkest day. May it be that others step forward to follow in her footsteps and take up her mantle.

To the Children, Lahya Penny Nakale, Elia Shihepo, Beata Armas, and Olivia Shihepo, I wish you to find peace in your hearts, as you go through this very difficult time. I also wish that you remain with a memory that your beloved mother, lived her life for you and the people of our country.

As she finds her final resting place, allow me to thank our government for honouring her with an Official Funeral. This is a practical demonstration of the need to keep our history alive so that it is imparted to the younger generation.

In closing, may I ask you to join me in paying a fitting tribute, with honour and reverence, to a gallant freedom fighter and an unwavering patriot.

Against this background, on behalf of the Veterans of our National Liberation Struggle, the Nujoma family and indeed on my own behalf, I extend our heartfelt condolences and deepest sympathies to the entire bereaved family members for the loss of the Late Meekulu Mukwanambwa Linda Shihepo. May we all be granted fortitude during this trying time.

May her rest be as peaceful as she was and may her revolutionary spirit live on!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Sam Nujoma', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Sam Nujoma  
**FOUNDING PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA**