

JABU NDLOVU MEMORIAL LECTURE BY KZN ANC DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON

COMRADE WILLIES MCHUNU IN DURBAN

18 June 2011

Comrades, I would like to express my sincere appreciation for allowing me to join you here today to share some of my views with you, especially on issues that affect our young workers of today.

I am equally pleased that we have come together on this special day to celebrate the service to humanity of a woman who left a permanent mark in our lives and our history, Comrade Jabu Ndlovu.

This memorial lecture affords us the opportunity to celebrate the life and teachings of Jabu Ndlovu to our young workers, not only as a SAMU leader, but also as a leader beyond the confines of the labour movement.

As Comrades, we remember Jabu's strength and her commitment to the struggle.

She made herself available to serve in many community structures in various capacities. Given her outstanding leadership qualities, it is not surprising that when NUMSA was formed in 1987, Comrade Jabu became known and respected through her courage in speaking out in public platforms at a time when it was very dangerous to do so.

This is the woman who would sacrifice everything for a working class to have a better life. She reminds us of the 'Viva Moss' campaign and the Sarmcol campaign that took Jabu overseas in 1988. The aim of the trip was to mobilize international support for the two campaigns.

Comrade Jabu won the hearts of many trade unionists on her travel. When she died, they held memorial services in places like London, Cambridge, Norwich and Liverpool. NUMSA and Jabu's family received many messages of support and solidarity from comrades and friends she made overseas.

When the political war between the UDF and the Inkatha Freedom Front (IFP) was getting worse in 1985, about 20 to 30 thousand people had become refugees and thousands of homes had been

burnt in Natal, COSATU decided to conduct research into the violence. As a NUMSA member and because of her work in the community, Jabu was asked to help with COSTU's research.

In March 1989, Jabu went with a group of lawyers and COSATU representatives to Johannesburg to tell the world about the violence in Imbali through a press conference.

Soon after her trip to Johannesburg, Jabu was off again. This time, she went as a delegate to the NUMSA congress in Johannesburg on May the 20th and 21st, representing Southern Natal. But because of violence, Natal delegates left early. They wanted to be home before dark.

Comrade Jabu and another delegate travelled in the same car. The driver dropped them off at Jabu's house at about five o'clock on Sunday, just as the sun was beginning to set.

What they did not know was that her house was going to be set alight that night and two people were killed in the attack and Jabu was taken to hospital. She lived for ten days – long enough to name her killers before she died.

Needless to say, the international pressure to isolate the apartheid regime and to expose the brutality of the previous racist regime that was responsible for the so-called black-on-black violence amongst our people became more meaningful because of such platforms as conferences, meetings and interactions with the world in which comrades like Jabu Ndlovu played a prominent part.

As we commemorate our youth who fell on June 16, 1976, we also remember Jabu Ndlovu with fondness in our hearts because we would not have been where we are today if it was not for the input of the likes of Jabu Ndlovu and Mama Sisulu whom we laid to rest on this memorable month.

Before Jabu Ndlovu died, she told one of her friends and a fellow worker that, and I quote: "I know why I am in this condition now. But if I become well again I will go forward with the struggle. I am prepared, because there is no other way. I know what I was fighting for, I was fighting for my rights and the rights for other people as well. I haven't done anything bad, that's why if I get well again I will go forward with the struggle."

We take this opportunity to commend the work done by Jean Fairbairn who wrote a book called 'Flashes in her soul – The life of Jabu Ndlovu', which has preserved Jabu's story so that it can be told to future generations who must be reminded of the suffering and courage of communities ravaged by

the war, and especially to tell stories of the role of women in realizing the ideals of an apartheid-free, non-racial, non-sexist and democratic South Africa that will all cherish today.

Comrade Jabu never accepted that a woman's place was in the home and in the kitchen. She fought not only for workers' rights and justice, but also for women's emancipation.

Now that we live in a democratic dispensation and in celebrating the service to humanity of this illustrious daughter of our soil, we are reassured in our resolve to serve our nation as we take this opportunity to call upon all our young workers, particularly women, to remain unshaken. Let us pick up the spear of our fallen heroes like Jabu Ndlovu and continue with the fight to bring about justice, fairness and equity in the workplace and society at large.

I want to congratulate NUMSA for introducing the youth desk that will enable our young workers to address challenges facing them in the labour fraternity. As you take positions of shop-stewards, you are also expected to go out and be activists in your communities.

As part of the Alliance, the trade unions should be seen to be producing reliable leaders of tomorrow. You should always be the vanguard of the working class. You are the ones who represent the interests of the majority of the workers in this country. You cannot fail them – their plight is in your hands.

I thank you.