

SPECIAL OFFICIAL FUNERAL  
SERVICE FOR

*Ms Yasmin 'Jessie' Duarte*

Sunday, 17 July 2022



19 September 1953 – 17 July 2022

# *Obituary Of Ms Yasmin 'Jessie' Duarte*

**19 September 1953 – 17 July 2022**

Ms Yasmin Duarte, lovingly known as Comrade (Cde) Jessie, was born in the township of Newclare, Johannesburg to Ebrahim and Julie Dangor. She was the fifth born of nine siblings, and the only daughter. She completed her high school education at Coronationville Secondary School. Thereafter, she joined an exchange programme to the United States of America, living with an American family that she remained in touch with until her death.

Cde Jessie grew up in a family that valued ideas and books, as well as rigorous debate and argument. This laid the foundation for her activism. She was also an avid art collector and music lover. In the 1970s, influenced by her experience, travels and other activists that she came into contact with, she became involved in the Black Consciousness Movement. By 1979 she already played a leading role in the women's movement, under the mentorship of Mama Albertina Sisulu. In 1981, she was elected as Secretary of the Federation of Transvaal Women (FEDTRAW).

As a leader of FEDTRAW, Cde Jessie played a critical role in the rebuilding of the South African women's movement, travelling across the country to help form the Orange Free State Women's Organisation, and building and uniting women's structures in the then Northern (now Limpopo), Eastern (now Mpumalanga) and Western Transvaal (now North West), Eastern Cape and Border, and Western Cape and Natal (now KwaZulu-Natal).

Working together with Mama Sisulu, she was also the contact person for links between the internal and external women's movement, as well as the South African Communist Party (SACP) through Mama Ray Alexander Simons. At the same time, she was mother to two young children, Yusha (born in 1975) and Zoe (born in 1977), whilst also taking care of her younger siblings, Abbas and Zane Dangor.

The women's movement played an important role in the formation of the United Democratic Front (UDF) in 1983, along with the trade union, civic, youth and student movement. Throughout the 1980s, Cde Jessie was an activist in all campaigns of the UDF, including going door-to-door during the Anti-Tricameral Parliament campaign.

During the early 1980s she worked with Reverend Beyers Naudé to set up and administer a scholarship fund to educate and skill African National Congress (ANC) and UDF activists, developing a progressive core of public servants. She was detained without trial in 1988, released and placed under restriction orders until the State of Emergency was lifted.

With the formation of organs of people's power in the 1980s, she played a role in organising underground operations by identifying safe houses and women who acted as couriers, and distributing 'recipe books' for military operations. Like many activists of the time, Cde Jessie and her family were harassed by the apartheid regime, and isolated in her community, yet she remained steadfast.

According to the family, the Dangors had greater access to books than food, and Cde Jessie saw books as essential to life. This nurtured her enduring love for literature, writing and storytelling. She worked at progressive publisher Ravan Press, established in 1972, and encouraged authors like Gcina Hlophe and Barbie Schreiner. Cde Jessie was one of the founders of the Congress of South African Writers, launched in July 1987, to mobilise progressive writers and nurture the alternative press.

Her activism and commitment to the working class was another enduring commitment. Following the formation of the Congress of South African Trade Unions, she played a role in mobilising domestic workers and was part of the Strike Committee for the 1987 National Union of Mineworkers strike.

After the unbanning of the ANC in 1990, she served on the Interim Leadership Core of the then Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vaal (PWV) Region (now Gauteng) to rebuild the ANC. She was also instrumental in the re-establishment of the SACP. She was tasked with setting up the offices of Cdes Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu, and served as Cde Mandela's special assistant from 1990 to 1994.

In the heat of the apartheid-sponsored violence during the early 1990s, she worked closely with Cde Ronnie Kasrils in the East Rand and West Rand, to assist in the establishment of self-defence units and went on to be part of the National Peace Accord structures. During the negotiations leading to democracy in South Africa, from 1991 to 1994, she was a member of the Regional Executive Committee of the then PWV (now Gauteng) region.

Cde Jessie was amongst the pioneering members of the Gauteng Provincial Legislature and served in the provincial Cabinet as the first Member of the Executive Council (MEC) for Community Safety and Security in Gauteng (1994-1998), pioneering the concept of community policing, focusing on domestic violence and social crime prevention.

As MEC for Community Safety and Security, she participated in the Johannesburg Pride marches, and remained a campaigner for the rights of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex community. She was also a firm advocate for the decriminalisation of sex work. These issues were all part of her fight to protect the rights and dignity of all vulnerable and exploited groups.

From 1999 to 2003, Cde Jessie served as South Africa's High Commissioner to Mozambique, a critical period for strengthened relations between the two countries. She also served in the Department of International Relations and Cooperation as the Deputy Director-General for Africa, as the newly formed African Union started to take shape, with South Africa playing a leading role.

Cde Jessie was elected to the National Executive Committee (NEC) of the ANC in 1997 at the 50th National Conference in Mafikeng. She also served as the National Spokesperson for the NEC, and was elected Deputy Secretary-General of the ANC in 2012 at the 53rd National Conference, re-elected at the next conference, and a position she held until her passing on Sunday, 17 July 2022.

Cde Jessie was an internationalist, a fighter for the rights of oppressed peoples everywhere, especially women and children. Her commitment to the cause of the people of Palestine, Western Sahara and against the Cuban Blockade remained unwavering.

During her final days, in the midst of her struggle with cancer, she initiated a book project, to tell the stories of the building of the women's movement during the 1980s.

Cde Jessie will be remembered as a fierce and unapologetic proponent of non-racialism, an outspoken fighter for the rights of women, and a loving matriarch of the Dangor, Duarte and Whitley families.

She is survived by her children Yusha and Zoe, grandchildren Kristin, Monique, Mueen and Ameera, and remaining siblings Mohamed, Moosa, Abbas and Zane.

May her soul rest in eternal peace!

# *Programme*

## **SPECIAL OFFICIAL FUNERAL SERVICE FOR MS YASMIN 'JESSIE' DUARTE**

**Sunday, 17 July 2022**

### **PART ONE**

Family Prayer and Family Rites

Procession departs for the West Park Cemetery

### **PART TWO**

**Funeral Programme at the West Park Cemetery**

**Programme directors:**

**Mr Mohamed Dangor and Minister Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma**

- 14:00 National Anthem
- 14:05 Opening by Programme Director
- 14:10 Reading of the obituary: **Ms Kirstin Whitley**
- 14:15 Tribute by the Family: **Mr Zane Dangor**
- 14:20 Tribute by the ANC: **Mr Paul Mashatile**
- 14:25 Musical item
- 14:30 Tribute by the Premier of Gauteng: **Mr David Makhura**
- 14:35 Prayers

**14:40 Eulogy by His Excellency President of the Republic of South Africa, Mr Cyril Ramaphosa**

14:45 Removal of the National Flag from the coffin by the SAPS and handing over to the family

14:50 Last Post and Reveille sounded

14:55 SAPS bearers and Ceremonial Guard of Honour withdraw

15:00 Vote thanks: **Mr Abbas Dangor**

## **PART THREE**

### **At the gravesite**

Immediate family and President Ramaphosa

# *National Anthem*

Nkosi sikelel' iAfrika  
Maluphakanyisw' uphondo lwayo,  
Yizwa imithandazo yethu,  
Nkosi sikelela, thina lusapho lwayo.

Morena boloka setjhaba sa heso,  
O fedise dintwa le matshwenyeho,  
O se boloke, O se boloke setjhaba sa heso,  
Setjhaba sa South Afrika - South Afrika.

Uit die blou van onse hemel,  
Uit die diepte van ons see,  
Oor ons ewige gebergtes,  
Waar die kranse antwoord gee.

Sounds the call to come together,  
And united we shall stand,  
Let us live and strive for freedom,  
In South Africa our land.



REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

