



Bereavement Notice

Ms Mandisa Monakali

(20 January 1960 to 3 November 2024)



South African Women in Dialogue joins Ilitha Labantu and our many sister organisations in mourning the passing of Mandisa Monakali, a giant in the African and global women's movement, and express our deepest condolences to her family and loved ones, and to all those who knew and treasured her.

Mandisa Monakali was a social worker, a public speaker, an educator, a community organiser, a lobbyist, and the beloved founder and President of Ilitha Labantu, an organisation she started in 1989, in Gugulethu, a township then still under the throes of apartheid, as the only crisis and counselling centre to support women survivors of gender-based violence.

The services provided by Ilitha Labantu range from counselling and support groups to safe houses for women to move in and move on with their lives. It is an organization that promotes peace and development with a focus on economic empowerment, and to eradicate violence against women. Monakali worked tirelessly to break down the barriers that prevent women from reaching out when they are faced with gender-based violence. At any time, women knew that they were welcome to walk in and seek help. Ilitha also focuses on providing food to women seeking help, noting “You can’t provide psychological support on an empty stomach.”

Mandisa Monakali was a survivor of gender-based violence who dedicated her life to advocating for the agency and empowerment of survivors of gender-based violence, and was known as a ceaseless warrior for women’s rights and wellbeing. She was also the President of the African Women Development Forum.



She participated globally in conferences and events, representing Ilitha and South Africa, including annually in the United Nations Conference on the Status of Women, and even attended the 1995 Beijing World Conference on Women as an activist in her own right, and she later focused her efforts on the attainment of the UN Sustainable Development Goal 5: To achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

Together with Litha Musyimi-Ogana, then Regional Director of The African Center for Empowerment in Kenya, she organized the Women's Peace Train during the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD). The Women's Peace Train journeyed from Rwanda to South Africa, and women from several African countries escorted the Peace Train to advocate for and demand an end to wars and conflict in their countries.

Mandisa Monakali was born in Cape Town, South Africa, where she attended ID Mkize High School, and she studied at the University of the Western Cape. where she attained a Bachelor of Arts in 1983 . She had been politically active for women's rights since the age of 16. During apartheid she started a program to educate women out of her home, but she was arrested for her activism and spent 18 months in jail. She continued to be a very committed and very active member of the ANC and the ANC Women's League all her life.

Mandisa Monakali had spent most of her adult life in human and community development, with a focus on gender development and leadership training for women and youth, and she was one of the organizers for *Take Back the Night* movement in South Africa.

Awards received include Cape Town's Woman of the Year award, the Femina Woman of the year, the SAA Women of the Year, the UN Human Rights Activists Award, and the New York Women Watch Award.

Her children noted that she was a "pillar of strength, an advocate for justice, and an unwavering supporter of those in need", and that she "dedicated her life to the service of others and left an indelible mark on our hearts and community."

"Women are power and strength," Monakali said. "Women are changing the world and it's about time the world should see that." "Do something," she used to say. "Start talking to each other and assist each other. No one should suffer, especially in silence." May her bravery, activism and wisdom nurture a new generation of women as agents of their own development.

May her eternal soul rest peacefully, and rise in power.