

Mortal remains of the late Cuba-based medical students to be repatriated next week

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The mortal remains of the two Cuba-based medical students who drowned in a swimming pool in Cuba at the weekend will be repatriated next week. This emerged during a visit by KZN Health MEC Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo to the grieving Ngeleka family at KwaNzimakwe, on the south coast of the province today.

It is alleged that the students who drowned, Sibusiso Thanks Ngeleka and Sihle Cebo Makhaye, both aged 24, had been part of a group who had hired a house to celebrate the birthday of one of their fellow compatriots.

There was sorrow at the home of fourth year-student Sibusiso Thanks Ngeleka when MEC Dhlomo arrived, accompanied by Departmental chaplain Mr Sigungu Shangase, and officials from the Ray Nkonyeni Local Municipality. An emotional MEC Dhlomo said that Ngeleka's passing is particularly difficult for him as he has known the student personally and previously interacted with him on numerous occasions to resolve certain challenges regarding his studies.

MEC Dhlomo said that the death of any medical student – particularly those studying in Cuba – is always sad and a major setback for the affected families, community and the country. *When these children are recruited, we prioritise those who are academically bright, but who also come from poor homes that cannot afford to pay for their studies. When they get into the programme we then expect a lot from them, including graduating and coming back to help the country to address the shortage of doctors. We also expect them to grow and develop themselves, their families and their communities. When you empower one child from a poor background, it actually means that their own children and future generations will not need bursaries. Similarly, we had hoped that these two will also come back and become notable members of the community. But now we are in mourning. We are in great pain, but our pain cannot compare to that which is felt by their families,* said MEC Dhlomo.

MEC Dhlomo is due to visit the Makhaye family, who have also lost a son during this drowning (who was in the fifth year of his medical studies), at Umhlabuyalingana this weekend.

He said it is hoped that the mortal remains of both students' will be repatriated from Cuba to South Africa by the middle of next week, as the necessary processes - including post-mortems – are yet to be completed.

Since its inception in 1996, the Nelson Mandela Fidel Castro Medical training programme has enabled South Africa to begin to address the shortage of doctors in the country by sending young aspirant doctors from poor communities for medical training in Cuban universities, while also recruiting some Cuban doctors to local shores. There are currently 2885 South African medical students in Cuba in various levels of study. No fewer than 590 doctors have already qualified from the training programme, while 98 students are doing their final year in South African medical schools.



MEC Dhlomo

comforts Mancane Ngeleka, a grandmother of late student Sibusiso Ngeleka



MEC with

members of the Ngeleka family (from left) Ntombifikile (Sibusiso's aunt), Lungi Ngeleka (Sibusiso's mother) and Sibusiso's grandmother Mancane.