

# MEC Dhlomo assures ongoing support for family of fallen student from Manguzi, who had just seven months to complete his medical studies in Cuba

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JUST seven months from now, the humble Makhaye homestead at Manguzi would have erupted in excitement at their son's homecoming, along with \*262 other students from KZN who are due to return after five years of medical studies in Cuba.

Sihle Cebo Makhaye, 23, a straight-A student, would have been left with just 18 months' experiential training in South Africa before graduating as a doctor, making his poverty-stricken family and poor rural community proud.

In this area, located just 20km from the Mozambican border, out of a population of 172077, 90% of residents are considered indigent; 40% are on social grants, while 60% - mainly youth - are unemployed, according to Umhlabuyalingana mayor Cllr Nkululeko Mthethwa. Only 3% of the economically active population earns more than R1600 per month, 18% have had no formal education, 57% did not complete matric, and just 2% have obtained a tertiary education.

For those who knew Cebo though, becoming a doctor would have been a natural progression for the "wonderkid", whose top academic achievements always belay his poor origins.

Despite coming from a poor home, Makhaye's academic exploits had already long earned him two bursaries, including one in high school, and another from the local Tembe kingship, with which he enrolled at the University of KwaZulu-Natal before his enrolment into the Cuban programme. He had endeared himself to the local community, learners (he regularly held motivational talks at his former school) and educators – including one who once gave him a blank cheque to buy himself clothes at a major retail store before going to Cuba to study for the first time in 2012.

"We always knew that he would make it in life in a big way. He was just incredibly intelligent. You only had to teach him something once, and it would be in his head," said Mr Zakhele Zwane, Makhaye's former teacher at Hambisanani High school.

Mrs Chrsitine Mthembu, from Malangabi Primary school, said: "There was never any doubt that Cebo would go a long way in life. As a teacher, you could not really go around bragging that you had helped him perform well. He had it in him. He was academically gifted. We were looking forward to him becoming a doctor." But it was not to be.

Makhaye, a fifth year medical student, was laid to rest today after he and his friend, fourth year student Sibusiso Thanks Ngeleka, drowned in a swimming pool in Havana, Cuba, on the night of 02 December 2017. Their mortal remains were repatriated to South Africa on Sunday. Makhaye, whose father died when he was 10, and whose mother worked as a supermarket cleaner, was laid to rest today.

At an emotion-charged funeral on the premises of his homestead, he was remembered as an incredibly talented perfectionist who excelled in all that he did, whether it was playing tops, reprising Christiano Ronaldo's football skills from TV, or in his academic studies. He had a knack for mathematics and physical science.

Mayor Cllr Mthethwa, who knew Cebo personally, said he hopes that youth from Umhlabuyalingana will use Cebo's story as an inspiration to get themselves an education. "We thank the Government for having given a student from this area an opportunity to uplift his family and himself. We know that there is a shortage of doctors in our country, like in other parts of the

world. In Cebo, we had pinned many hopes. Now that he has left us, the question is, how many doctors will emerge from this community? We might never be able to produce another doctor. But we do hope that Cebo's life story will encourage others to get up and go and study..."

Fighting back tears, one of Makhaye's three sisters S'ne, said: "It is extremely difficult to say goodbye to our brother. We loved him, and he always told us that he loved us. We don't have much, but he raised our profile as a family. He made our lives easier. He gave us hope. He was just the best. Only the Lord knows why this had to happen. We know that God is with us. This, too, will come to pass... What is most painful is that he was so young. The Holy Scripture says the Lord hurts and the Lord heals. We thank the Lord for the short time that he lent our brother to us. We are now waiting for the Lord to heal us."



*Mr Sihle*

*Makhaye*



*KZN MEC for Health, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo, speaking at the funeral of Sihle Makhaye*



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Speaking at the funeral, an emotional MEC Dhlomo said: "We know that some people are against this Cuban programme, particularly the political opposition. But we will protect it, because of the huge impact that it has. By giving an opportunity to children who are academically bright, but come from poor families, this programme is making a big difference in our country. It is helping us to alleviate the shortage of doctors while breaking the chain of poverty for many

families. These children who have passed away would never have had a fighting chance to study medicine because they come from poor families.

“We are here to give support to the Makhaye family, just like we did with the Ngeleka family. As a Department, we are hurting. But our pain can never be greater than theirs. We have our chaplain and religious leaders among us. We will make sure that they give continuous support to both families, because a sudden and unexpected death can be particularly difficult to deal with.”

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.

ENDS

\*A total of 728 fifth year Cuba-based students from other parts of SA will return in July

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