TRIBUTE TO PROFESSOR GUY MHOHE

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Director

International Labour Office for Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa and
Swaziland in Pretoria,

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A year ago, when we heard of the sudden and untimely passing of Guy Mhone, it came as a rude shock that deeply saddened those of us that knew and worked with him in the International Labour Organization (ILO). His death has made us appreciate that in his short life, through the dedication of his time and effort, Guy had made a huge contribution towards achieving what the ILO was established to do, that is to create and promote decent work for all. We are therefore pleased to have this opportunity to celebrate his life by sharing the marvellous work of Professor Mhone in the context of his engagement with the ILO. We thank the organizers of this Colloquium in particular Professor Patrick Bond, for inviting the ILO to participate.

Guy’s interaction with the ILO can be seen in two parts: -on one hand as a bona fide staff member of the ILO between 1985 and 1990 when he worked with the then ILO Southern Africa Team for Employment Promotion (SATEP) in Lusaka where he was Senior Regional Advisor for Employment for Southern Africa, and moved to Harare at the establishment of the Southern Africa Multidisciplinary Advisory Team (SAMAT) as Senior Labour Market Specialist; and on the other hand as a technical assistance external consultant up to the time of his death in March 2005.

During his stint in the mainstream ILO, Guy inspired most of his colleagues with his practical intellectual base. Let me demonstrate this point by quoting from such an inspired colleague, Mpenga Kabundi who was then a regional advisor and specialist in enterprise development in Lusaka and Harare. Mpenga remembers Guy as a mentor and here is what he says: “-----Guy took time to explain to me the ILO approach to job creation and employment promotion. He helped me at that early stage of my ILO career to understand, in my approach and my advisory services to our constituents, the imperative of promoting an integrated social and economic perspective. I owe much of what I am doing today, to Guy. He took time to reshape my worldview while encouraging me to remain very critical and to avoid any
dogmatism, including what we were doing and “preaching” as “best practices”. On
the informal economy, for instance, Guy constantly reminded me not to romanticise
it, but to help transform it. It reshaped my view about it, forever”.

Mpenga remembers joint missions undertaken with Guy learning experiences. Of the
missions he says: “Each statement I wrote, I made sure that it was of high intellectual
standard and was up to the latest theoretical state of knowledge. Guy used to "tease"
me: ‘Mpenga, when was the last time you found out that SED theoretical and
empirical foundation, as you practice it, was challenged and reconfirmed as
sound?’ When such a question is repeated 5, 7, 9 times as he would do with me, it
was no longer a joke, but a reminder and advice that to be a good regional adviser, I
needed to stay in touch with the trends in my professional field.

“‘Mpenga, being an intellectual is not about what you know, but what difference
it makes in people’s live, mostly for those who really need your help’. That’s how
Guy was advising me to reshape statements in my reports. He wanted me to
understand the difference between a ‘good reading report’ and a ‘relevant report’.
This statement reflects how Guy himself used his intellectual endowment, always
fighting for and defending the least privileged be they individuals (informal
economy actors), countries or region (Africa).”

I quoted Mpenga Kabundi1 extensively because many of us who worked with Guy
can identify fully with these the expressed sentiments.

From mainstream ILO, Guy went on to become Chief Technical Advisor for a project
on labour market policy for Lesotho in the mid-1990s. Thereafter, Guy Mhone
continued to contribute to the work of the ILO through research, publication and
debate on issues of employment, gender equality, poverty alleviation, social dialogue
and social protection. We recall his contribution in numerous publications on for
example rethinking microfinance strategies for poor women in Southern Africa,
strategies to combat youth unemployment and marginalisation in Anglophone
Africa, the intricacy of gender poverty and employment in Southern Africa, enclavity
and constrained labour absorptive capacity in Southern African economies. In this
regard, let me share with you what another colleague, Amelita King-Dejardin of ILO
Geneva has to say of her work with Guy:

“Guy’s understanding of the political economy of Southern Africa and Eastern
Africa, his critical reflection on policies that have been adopted in the region, and the
importance he gave to employment as well as the values of ILO made him a valuable
partner of the ILO in the region. We acknowledge his significant and substantive
contribution to the launching of the gender poverty and employment (GPE)
programme in Africa in 2000 and the development of GPE training materials for
Southern Africa”.

1 Mpenga Kabundi is currently the Director of Skills Development Department at ILO in Geneva.
Suffice it to say that Guy Mhone was respected for quality work that he produced for the ILO. His contribution to the core mandate of the ILO to create and promote decent work for men and women is therefore acknowledged.

For those of us who worked with Guy (as we simply referred to him) and knew him at a personal level, we had a privilege of working with a pleasant, unassuming, level headed, modest person, with high interpersonal skills. I personally was part of both of Guy’s interaction levels with the ILO and I have indeed lost a dear colleague and a friend.

We remember Guy dearly at the ILO. May his soul remain in eternal peace.