

To all UNI affiliates
To (titular and substitute) members of the UNI World Executive Board

Emma Mashinini

Dear colleagues,

It is with a heavy heart that I bring the news that our dear friend Emma Mashinini has passed away.

Emma left us in her sleep at the age of 87. Emma was a pioneer trade unionist in South Africa, in Africa and in the world.

We marvelled at her tenacity and passion when she addressed our UNI Global Union Cape Town Congress in 2014. The former General Secretary of CCAWUSA (now SACCAWU) sent a clear message: “Always ask yourself every day what am I doing to help working people? We must always struggle for them.”

Emma was proud to receive the UNI Global Union *Freedom from Fear* Award for her bravery in building her union and fighting against apartheid. She reminded us that the very first time she could vote she used a FIET pen to mark her ballot paper as a symbol of her appreciation for the global support in the anti-apartheid struggle.

Emma was born on 21 August 1929. Her early life was one of great hardship, the family being forcibly removed on numerous occasions and finally settled in Soweto. She dropped out of school at the age of 14; she had to work to look after her mother and started in a garment factory.

In 1955 Emma attended the 1955 Congress of the People in Kliptown. She said “that, maybe, is when I started to be politicised. Although there is another thing I have always felt, which is that I resented being dominated.”

Emma became a union organiser for the National Union of Clothing Workers (NUCW) and eventually was elected to its executive council. This was a time of great danger as union leaders were forced to go underground or into exile.

In 1975 she was elected General Secretary of the Commercial, Clerical and Allied Workers Union, which became affiliated to the former FIET.

On 27 November 1981, the police came to her home at dawn and arrested her under section 6 of the Terrorism Act. Emma spent 6 months in solitary confinement in Pretoria Central Prison.

After this period of imprisonment, Emma was treated in Denmark but left early to return home and renew her struggle and leadership position in CCAWUSA.

Emma’s achievements are stunning. She was involved in the creation of COSATU. In 1985 the American City of Minneapolis named 8th of March after her. In 2007 she received the National Order of Luthuli for her life-long contribution. In 1995 she was appointed commissioner for the restitution of land rights. In 1986 she was appointed director of the Anglican Church’s Department of Justice and Reconciliation. She also served on the South Africa Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In 1990 she became President of the Mediation and Conciliation Centre in Johannesburg.

In 1989, Emma published her autobiography, “Strikes have followed me all my life”. The book was republished in 2012. Emma tells of her struggle for the 40-hour week, unemployment insurance and her battle for women’s rights.

Emma is also remembered for her work to build FIET in Africa. She convinced unions to join from throughout the continent, insisted on a permanent office presence and worked to ensure that African unions had a voice at global level.

I have sent a message of condolences on behalf of UNI Global Union and we will be represented at her memorial service on Thursday, 13 July.

Messages can be sent to Bones Skulu, General Secretary of SACCAWU, at the following address: bzskulu@saccawu.org.za

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Philip Jennings'.

Philip Jennings

General Secretary