



**MINISTRY: FINANCE**  
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**PARLIAMENTARY TRIBUTE TO KADER ASMAL**

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**TREVOR A MANUEL, MP**

- Madam Speaker, Honourable Members, I am deeply conscious of the need to assiduously avoid this sounding either like a CV or an obituary. There's too much kick in the old pony yet to even begin to contemplate any of those. This afternoon is about paying tribute to a colleague and comrade who, for the past 14 years has given meaning to the title, Member of Parliament. He has served this institution and the executive so exceedingly well during this period.
- I have to declare that I have a triple view advantage – we served together on the ANC National Executive Committee for 16 years, in the Cabinet for 10 years and yes, whilst he would call it 'shared a house', I should, in the interest of correctness advise that I squatted in his house for 10 years. Definitions are immaterial – but since it remains unresolved, he'd say squatter would have ityotyombe in the garden, and I took over increasingly larger parts of his house where he didn't dare enter, after a while.

- When I moved into the house, I had visions of order – rotations for cooking and dishwashing duty and the like. None of it ever took place – we lived primarily off Louise’s organisational capabilities (malibongwe!) – each week she would pack food for the freezer which was carefully marked, and all Kader had to do was microwave the daily portion. This was a really difficult task for Comrade Kader, the microwave oven, if it still exists, probably bears sufficient dents and craters from the odd explosion that took place there. So, please scratch Kader’s name off your list of celebrity chefs.
- But work, the intellectual engagement - reading, writing or interpreting has always been the Honourable Asmal’s deep and driving passion.
- When he returned from exile in Dublin, he came to live in Cape Town. He arrived as one of the great legal minds of the ANC, with a fierce reputation. He was located at the UWC and from there participated fervently in the work of refining the ANC Constitutional Principles and became an integral part of the negotiating team. I am sure that there is so much richness and detail from this period, and Kader’s place will be recorded as one of the lead roles.
- It was with this reputation that Kader stood around with a number of us who had been invited by President Mandela to the Union Buildings on 11 May 1994 while a tense round of negotiations took place on the allocation of portfolios. Individually we were advised of our assignment. Now, I can kiss ‘n tell, and say that I didn’t think Kader was overjoyed when he was assigned Water Affairs and Forestry. He did not ever admit to it, but I had a sense that he was a bit disappointed that his legal skills were not called upon.

- Madiba's faith in Comrade Kader was so completely unbridled. He knew that he could depend on Kader to take on a portfolio whose predecessor few remembered, even then!
- Kader attacked the portfolio with gusto. Hauled out the RDP, calculated the number of miles of water piping and the number of taps that the country needed, and badgered Derek Keys and Chris Liebenberg as Finance Ministers and Jay Naidoo in the RDP office. Water had just become the sexiest portfolio! The portfolio now included aspects that previously could never have been considered, such as Working for Water, and a National Water Act (1998) whose transformational impact is part of his great legacy. He was appointed to head the World Commission on Dams by the World Bank, and he was awarded the prestigious Stockholm Water Prize. But perhaps his greatest accolade comes from the United Nations Development Programme who chose to launch their Human Development Report, that was themed on water in 2006, here in South Africa because, as the report states "South Africa is one of the very few countries that spend less on military budgets than on water and sanitation." Not bad for a lawyer, whose association with water until his appointment appeared to be confined to two frozen bits that he dropped into an amber fluid!
- But with all of the challenges in the portfolio, including all of the learning he had to do about head and weirs and pumping systems and recycling and... had time to take on other responsibilities in Cabinet – he was responsible for the establishment of the National Conventional Arms Control Committee, an idea that he led because he wanted to turn around the bad reputation that Armscor

had acquired for itself and the state under apartheid. Similarly, the Executive Ethics Code has his DNA all over it. Again, we should be reminded that his sterling contributions to the functioning of democracy and the strengthening of parliamentary oversight sets this Parliament apart.

- Kader was deployed to the Education Portfolio after the 1999 elections. I have not yet confirmed why he was so delirious – was it the joy of tackling education, after law, his great passion, or was it the sadness of separation from the Water and Forestry portfolio. Few things in life can prepare an individual for such a huge change. But, Kader was ready.
- Even he would admit that he found the going a bit tougher. In Water Affairs, he could pretty much decide things; whereas in Education, the Constitution assigns the delivery of the most challenging part of education, schooling, to the Provinces. By the time he was assigned a measure of federalism had already taken root – the Act even established the Council of Education Ministers, rather than a MinMEC. So yes, he should own up that the going was tough.
- But again he attacked the most glaring problems – the acquisition and distribution of learner support materials and the school- building programme with the same vigour, but perhaps with less success. Objectively it was just too hard. And often we would talk about these difficulties and his frustrations until 3 or 4 in the morning. The portfolio has been and still is, very difficult. Add to this the odd uprising or instance of maladministration at a tertiary institution and the work of the Education Minister is more than cut out.

- This did nothing to dampen his enthusiasm – he drove the curriculum changes focused on Outcomes Based Education, in the face of some stiff opposition from traditionalists; he established an Advisory Committee on Tertiary institutions and took the hard route of amalgamating a number of them and significantly upgraded the Register of School Needs in order to allow for the monitoring of the state of school infrastructure.
- But this job wasn't big enough for Kader either, so he was appointed by UNESCO to chair an International meeting of Experts to draft a Convention on Cultural Diversity. Again, he did this with aplomb. The world recognised his efforts and the French Republic admitted him to the Legion d'honneur.
- Since 2004 he has served as a Member of Parliament, and not in the executive. At first he chaired the Joint Committee on Defence. I claim responsibility for his redeployment from there – South Africa was assigned the task of Chairing the Financial Action Task Force for 2006. The FATF is a complex multilateral body based in Paris, which deals with the prevention of money laundering and terrorist financing. We picked on the good Professor to head our chairing initiatives. I thought it would be a stretch – law, water, arms control, parliamentary ethics, education, defence – but no chance, Kader once again did South Africa proud.
- He has been able to address himself to all the tasks assigned, with the energy he has, for two reasons – firstly, his values. When he was awarded the Legion d'honneur he said, "I am a product of our struggle for freedom. Like my political movement, we have drawn inspiration from the intellectual and

political patrimony of humanity, which has shaped the contours of our Constitution.” That defines the Kader I know – in service of his movement. His values are so strong, they provide him with a solid platform to work from. The second reason that I am aware of is the deep yet critical support that he enjoys from Louise.

- His life’s work has placed Comrade Kader in the position where he can criticise and advise, and everybody knows that it emanates from one who loves his organisation and democracy very, very dearly.
- One problem, aside from cooking is that he is a complete technophobe. He has only just learnt to dial on a cellphone. He still struggles with a Dictaphone and sending an sms or using a computer – these are all too futuristic.
- But then, he’s not young. Approaching 74 now, Kader’s take on learning is completely exemplary. In all the years we lived together this was a task he never let up on – he reads every day. As a Minister, cabinet documents, letters, submissions, technical books, international reports, and many, many novels.

This is a discipline we all should have, a shared commitment to life-long learning. Kader read every single day – regardless of other duties, including the many cocktails on the diplomatic circuit he attended – when others might have been ‘tired and emotional’ after these, Kader would return home to work. That is the distinguishing discipline!

- When he concluded the UNESCO report, he relied on the words of the great poet Bertolt Brecht and said,
  - *When the battle of the mountains is over*

- *Then you will see*
- *That the real battle of the plains will begin.*

- So Kader, the battle of the mountains here in Parliament is over for you, because you made the call. Now the real battle of the plains will begin for you.
- I so hope, you did not have to time your retirement to coincide with Fidel. But there, the same old problem arises, Kader.
- Go well into the labyrinth of academia, your presence will be sorely missed because you have taught infinitely about the meaning of what it takes to be a parliamentarian.