

We are gathered here today in memory of our dear colleague Leslie M. Gumbi. When we heard that he was no more we were shocked and saddened. Death has taken away a genuinely warm individual, more importantly a loving husband and father and deprived so many others, including us all, of a good friend.

While we mourn the loss of a colleague, we pay tribute and celebrate a life that was well lived. A life committed to the cause of freedom in his own country; and when liberty came, to building harmony and peace around the world. Not many leave behind a legacy of such dedication and accomplishment.

Leslie Gumbi was born on 7 March 1959 in Johannesburg, South Africa. He acquired a Master's degree in Political Science and International Relations and served in the South African freedom movement. He also wrote and published.

He served the democratic South Africa as a diplomat in its UN Mission in New York and later as his country's Deputy Permanent Representative in the UN Mission in Geneva.

While at the Department of Foreign Affairs he held important positions in dealing with arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation issues. He represented his country in numerous international meetings and conferences on a wide range of disarmament issues.

With his rich experience and expertise in disarmament, he went on to become South Africa's Ambassador to Austria and Permanent Representative to the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna. His joining the OPCW at the level of Director represented a natural progression for someone who had proved his mettle in the multilateral arms control arena.

Although his association with the OPCW was not too long, he has left a lasting impression in the minds of his acquaintances at the OPCW. Colleagues knew him as an affable, cooperative, helpful and dedicated official. Despite his established background and position, Leslie was a modest man; a real gentleman, not reluctant to organize and file his own papers.

He faced a challenge to his life by way of a grave illness, with great courage. Many others in his circumstance would have given up. Leslie fought till the last. His determination to carry on despite trying personal circumstances demonstrated his commitment to duties and responsibilities. In his own quiet and calm manner, he showed how to work through challenging times and to carry everyone along.

Life can be fleeting. But a life lived to the fullest stays in fond memories. Leslie through his decorum and grace endeared himself to many.

This is particularly a difficult and painful time for his family. In extending to them our heartfelt condolences, we wish them courage and strength to bear this irreparable loss.