

**TRIBUTE TO THE LATE  
MRS. ELISABETH TANKEU  
COMMISSIONER FOR TRADE AND INDUSTRY  
AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION  
BY  
MRS JULIA DOLLY JOINER  
COMMISSIONER FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS**

20 October 2011

Chairperson of the African Union Commission

United Nations Under Secretary General and Executive Secretary of the UNECA

Honourable Minister of Sports and Education of Cameroun

Excellencies Ambassadors/Permanent Representatives and other Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps

Representatives of the Partner Community

Colleagues, Commissioners

Directors and Staff Members of the Commission,

I stand before you duty bound but with great sadness and indeed a heavy heart to perform not only an unusual and unexpected task, but I must admit, an extremely difficult one: to say farewell to someone who was very dear to us, who represented a special and priceless colleague and to me personally a confidant and the senior sister that I never had before. The loss of a friend, a companion and that elder sister that I discovered in Addis has deepened my consciousness that life is truly transitory and irreplaceable and that alas, in the designs and purposes of the Almighty, we mortals have no say.

As fate would have it, we are gathered here today to pay tribute and reflect in a special way on the life and contributions of our dearly departed colleague, Commissioner Elizabeth Tankeu, whose demise was announced on the 16<sup>th</sup> of October. With the passing of Mme. Tankeu, we have lost not only a colleague and a close associate but a stalwart pan-africanist. Elizabeth Tankeu was one of a kind who will always be remembered by us, her colleagues and the numerous friends and acquaintances she had, because she stood out on her own and left an unforgettable impression. As we

gather on this sad and sorrowful occasion to say our final goodbyes, let us remember the individual that she was; how she touched our lives; her contributions to the integration ideals of the African Union and its Commission and indeed to the peoples of Africa.

Mme. Tankeu has left many lasting legacies. An imposing personality, she was well-rounded and very compassionate – dedicating her life to advocating for those without a platform to do so and those less fortunate than herself. The storehouse of fundamental human rights, and good judgment, she exhibited frankness and intolerance to man's inhumanity to man, which attitude engendered her forthrightness and the fortitude with which she relentlessly pursued equality and equity issues, truth and justice. A serene and warm-hearted disposition, the remarkable equilibrium of her personality has endeared so many of us to her over the years. She was frank and spoke what she felt and believed in openly; she consistently sought to invite reflection/analysis, to draw out dialogue and indeed debate, always showing respect to others with an even temper and unmatched mastery and versatility.

For over the period of the eight years that we have together rendered service to the African Union, we can hail at this moment her sterling qualities of a woman of great integrity, warmth and more importantly, as a staunch activist for Africans, wherever they may be. Bringing to the table, years of academic and professional experience, we consider ourselves very fortunate to have known such a woman in our lives and work.

On the work front, Commissioner Tankeu was highly respected for her devotion to duty and commitment to the organization. She was a mentor, a visionary and a leader. The embodiment of commitment, competence and excellence, the assiduity with which she carried out her duties and responsibilities has left an indelible mark in the work of the Department of Trade and Industry which she transformed with her vision and purpose. As an African, she believed in African ownership of its resources and fairness in trade and as such played a central role in promoting African common positions in negotiations

at the World Trade Organization and in the Economic Partnership Agreements. We witnessed Mme. Tankeu giving of herself tirelessly and selflessly and it was right at that time when the Department would have basked in her ingenuity as it prepares for the debate on the theme of Intra-African Trade for the January 2012 Summit that alas, she heeded her last call.

The gap that Mme Tankeu has left in the Commission will not be easily filled and she will be surely and sorely missed. We take comfort that although she is gone from us physically, she is still with us in spirit. We will continue to have fond memories of her good works and deeds, her love for humanity, especially the underprivileged, the distressed and the disadvantaged. The greatest tribute that we can pay to our departed sister and colleague will be to incessantly draw inspiration from her life and example and pursue the noble cause of justice and equality that she so diligently gave her life to. No doubt, that is the least that we can do in memory of this deep, brave and yet gentle soul who illuminated our lives with such friendship and love. I have faith that the inspiration of her personality and her contributions will still cut through the sometimes tortuous course of Africa's integration.

For those of us who were intimately linked to her, it is no secret that Mme. Tankeu was a very passionate person. She loved and appreciated selflessly and was bold in expressing her true feelings. One of my enduring lessons from her was how she placed family at the centre of her life. Mme. Tankeu epitomized the resilience of a devoted wife and mother as we saw her, over the years, struggle with an ailing husband who predeceased her just under a year ago and through the aches and pains caused by her own health condition but yet reported for work and even in her latter days in Addis Ababa, treated files from her residence.

At this hour of grief, we remember in a special way, the members of her family who, much more than all of us, will bear the greatest burden of the loss. Mme. Tankeu was a loving and caring mother and grandmother who dreamt of providing every opportunity to

her children, biological and adopted. She loved her children and it was evident to all who knew her well. Her children and grandchildren were truly in her life and I remember the last time I saw her prior to her medical evacuation, how she asked that I pray for her. "Pray for me petite sœur," she beckoned, "as I want to be granted a few more years to see my grandchildren grow up".

Our deepest sympathies and heartfelt condolences therefore go out to her children, grand children, siblings and the entire family. Losing a loved one is never easy and on behalf of the Commissioners, I offer our sincerest love and fervent prayers that God will continue to comfort them and give them sustenance and strength to deal with this tragic loss in the years that lie ahead.

Elizabeth Tankeu is no more. She lived a full and prosperous sixty seven years of life and in her last days, she held onto God and her family who were present to return the love she had so freely given. Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> October 2011 will be remembered as the day the Lord gracefully wrapped her safe in his arms and with a "glow" of peace, our dear sister made her transition to begin a new chapter of her life in eternity. I know that to her, faith had given the hope of life beyond the grave and as we bid our dearly departed a final farewell, there is no doubt that she is now resting in the tranquility of her Master's Kingdom.

Adieu, grande sœur! We cherish and bless the years we spent with you. Rest in peace till we meet again!