

Alex Magaisa's death 'an irreplaceable loss to Zimbabwe'

University World News by Kudzai Mashininga

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On the memory board of the University of Kent's school of law, the grief of students is palpable following the death of their law lecturer, Zimbabwean Dr Alex Magaisa, whom the institution said was beloved throughout the world.

One student wrote that the academic had the "biggest impact on my academic" performance. Another said he was "a figure so difficult not to love".

Students described him as a "lecturer I can never forget", one who taught "the content in a less conventional but more impactful and relatable way" and an "approachable professor".

"Dr Alex Magaisa was one of my favourite seminar leaders throughout my degree and taught me both public law and company law. At the beginning of [my] third year, I was very worried about the introduction of masks clashing with my need to lip-read, as I am deaf, but Dr Alex came up to me randomly after the first seminar, asking if there was any way he could support me.

"That meant a lot because I had encountered few seminar leaders that cared about students and their disabilities on a one-to-one basis," wrote Nigerian student Toyosi Badejo-Okusanya on the board.

Everyone appeared to concur. Magaisa was the kind of professor who made an impact.

Kent Law School

Kent Law School, where Magaisa had been teaching public law, company law and capitalism, contract law, and international financial services regulation, said it was feeling his loss. He died of a heart attack on 5 June.

"Alex was a constitutional law expert, a passionate campaigner and formidable thinker who was admired around the world for his teaching and contribution to reform in his beloved Zimbabwe," the law school said on its **website**.

“For many thousands in Zimbabwe, Alex was nothing short of a lion-heart, a hero. At Kent Law School, we feel his loss immediately and join with Alex’s friends and admirers around the world in recognising his powerful legacy in matters of human rights, democracy, support for the rule of law and constitutional reform.”

The views of Professor Lydia Hayes, a colleague, were added: “Dr Alex Tawanda Magaisa was an incredibly gifted teacher and formidable academic writer. For 15 years, he has inspired colleagues and students alike. He was warm, gentle, kind and charming – a true gentleman – yet passionate and sharp-minded, a considerable intellect. We will miss him greatly.”

Zimbabwe

Kent Law School is right. In his native Zimbabwe, Magaisa was also a hero and is being mourned by both ordinary citizens and fellow academics.

Born in 1975, Alex Tawanda Magaisa read law at the University of Zimbabwe and at the University of Warwick and joined Kent Law School in 2007.

In Zimbabwe, he was instrumental in the crafting of the country’s 2013 constitution. He also served as an adviser to Dr Morgan Tsvangirai, the former prime minister of Zimbabwe, in 2012 and 2013.

An authoritative voice on Zimbabwean legal and political matters, he appeared on Al Jazeera, CNN and the BBC, and ran his blog *Big Saturday Read*, with contributions that had the overall thrust to promote constitutionalism in Zimbabwe.

On **Twitter**, Zimbabwe’s former higher education minister, Professor Jonathan Moyo, said he was gutted by the news of Magaisa’s death and described him as a “fierce interlocutor”, “prolific writer” and an “indefatigable contributor” to the quest for a better Zimbabwe.

“His tragic death leaves an unfillable void in the country’s public discourse,” wrote Moyo.

Also on Twitter, Lovemore Madhuku, a University of Zimbabwe constitutional law lecturer, wrote: “Alex Magaisa was our newest intellectual giant and an outstanding icon of his generation. His clarity of thought was both refreshing and inspiring.”

‘One of the finest legal brains’

In an interview, a pro-democracy campaigner in Zimbabwe, David Coltart, told *University World News* that Magaisa was one of the finest legal brains Zimbabwe had ever produced.

He said his ability to simplify complex constitutional issues so that the general public could understand them was unparalleled. Coltart said the academic was a man of principle who, throughout his life, stood for constitutionalism and respect for the rule of law and democracy.

“His role in the development of the new constitution was critically important and his role in the implementation of that constitution going forward was also fundamentally important and it is in that role that the country has been robbed of this great legal brain.

“He was always passionate about Zimbabwe and he saw his time in Britain as temporary. His loss is irreplaceable to our nation,” said Coltart.

In another interview with *University World News*, Donald Marevanhema, a former Zimbabwe National Students Union spokesperson and the director of the Students Solidarity Trust, said the student movement in Zimbabwe is devastated.

“The great giant has fallen ... we join the whole world in mourning a fighter and a human rights defender. Above all, we salute the great work he has left behind, the lives he has impacted and changed. Such a great legacy will stand the test of time,” he said.

Zimbabwe’s biggest opposition party, the Citizens Coalition for Change led by Nelson Chamisa, said a dark cloud had fallen over the nation following Magaisa’s death.

It said he was a patriot who contributed to the betterment of Zimbabwe in a number of spheres and leaves a rich legacy and an indelible mark on the struggle for democracy and good governance in the African country.

“Magaisa was unafraid to speak truth to power and to offer constructive criticism to friends and foes alike. He had a remarkable capacity to deconstruct complex principles and ideas into bite-size treatises that gripped the attention of citizens of all walks of life,” said Fadzayi Mahere, the party’s spokesperson.

In the meantime, the tributes on the memory board created by Kent Law School continue to acknowledge Magaisa.

Stella English wrote: “I felt the whole world stop when I heard this terribly sad news that Alex had passed. I had the pleasure of being taught public law by him this past term in the area of finance, for which he was nothing short of an expert. He had the most wonderful energy about him and, in his own words, had a love and obsession for public law.”

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