

**LIMBIKO TEMBO,
HIGHLY RESPECTED EDUCATOR PASSES**

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Limbiko Tembo, a highly respected educator, social activist and advocate of culturally-grounded education who dedicated thirty years of her life to the vocation of teaching and institution-building, has passed, following a courageous struggle with ovarian cancer. She made her transition June 16 at home surrounded by members of her immediate extended family.

Born in Watts, California, May 3, 1958, Ms. Tembo, whose birth name was Laurinda Neal, grew up in Compton, graduated from Gardena High School and went on to study at California State University, Long Beach. There she earned a B.A. in Liberal Arts with a Clear Multiple Subject Teaching Credential in 1981 and continued post-graduate specialization studies in social and cultural diversity in education.

At CSULB, Ms. Tembo took a class with professor and then chair of the Department of Black Studies, Dr. Maulana Karenga, who is also the creator of *Kwanzaa* and the *Nguzo Saba*, The Seven Principles. Her continued study and work with him in the organization Us and its related institutions and the resultant development of their close friendship was, according to her conversations with her other friends and colleagues, a turning point and a deeply transformative experience in her life. Her name change to Limbiko Tembo reflected this transformation, a coming-into-consciousness and commitment to African ways of understanding and engaging the world.

Ms. Tembo embraced Dr. Karenga's philosophy of *Kawaida* and the *Nguzo Saba* which stressed recovery of the best of African culture for paradigms, perspectives and principles; the centrality of cultural grounding; social justice; social change; and striving constantly to bring forth "the best of what it means to be African and human in the world". Applying this to education, she stressed respect for the dignity, culture and potential of each



student; intellectual excellence; positive value orientation; and the use of knowledge in the interest of community, society and the world. She applied these principles and served for three decades at the Kawaida School of African American Culture as teacher, vice-principal and principal, as well as in her public school instruction.

Ms. Tembo taught public school at Roosevelt Elementary in Compton and then at El Rincon Elementary in Culver City, earning praise from principals, fellow faculty, staff, students and parents as an excellent and dedicated teacher and a genuinely good and

gentle person. She was especially praised for her ability to work with what was called "difficult students" and was regularly assigned and also requested the most challenging students. In a letter of commendation from parents of one of her students to El Rincon and the Culver City School District, she is praised as "a remarkable teacher" who "has the ability to place herself in the role of her students, regardless of culture, academic ability or disability". Moreover, it says "she has helped students to succeed who have not been successful academically or behaviorally in other classrooms" and "transform(ed) students who were disruptive and not performing or on task" and "... it is unbelievable".

Deeply committed to continuously learning and sharing the richness, diversity and value of African culture and insights of Kawaida philosophy, Ms. Tembo studied Kawaida; the African classical sacred texts, the *Husia* and *Odu Ifa*, translated and edited by Dr. Karenga; and became a *Seba*, a moral teacher in the *Kawaida-Maat* tradition. She also took seminars at the Kawaida Institute of Pan-African Studies, taught advocacy class for incoming members of Us and lectured at conferences and other forums on Kawaida educational philosophy.

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Moreover, Ms. Tembo lectured and conducted community and educators' workshops on teaching and celebrating Kwanzaa and the Nguzo Saba at various venues. She taught cultural workshops for children at the Watts Summer Festival and organized and taught a major children's workshop on Kwanzaa at the U.S. Post Office's unveiling of the first Kwanzaa Stamp at the Museum of Natural History, the site of the unveiling.

As Ms. Tembo helped expand the Kawaida philosophy of education, she was also influenced by the writings of Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune, Dr. Anna Julia Cooper and similar African American educators. In a lecture on the role of education and the essentiality of women educators in the process, she stated "Mary McLeod Bethune said that 'Knowledge is the prime need of the hour' and Anna Julia Cooper said that 'women are vital to the regeneration and progress of the race'. And we, the women and educators of Us are still following them. We are still stressing the indispensability of quality education for a good life and a decent and dignity-affirming living. And we are still stressing the essentiality of women to our people's education and to our restoration and movement forward on the upward paths of our ancestors".

In her commitment to Movement activism for a just and good society and world, over the years, Ms. Tembo assumed various roles and responsibilities. Those included her positions as: executive circle member of Us; and board member of the African American Cultural Center and the National Association of Kawaida Organizations. Furthermore, Ms. Tembo was a member of the NAACP, the Coalition in Support of Haiti, Committee for Equitable and Sustainable Development in Africa, and the International Black Coalition for Peace and Justice. She also participated in numerous other community and public projects and demonstrations for social justice and positive social change.

In addition, as an active advocate of women's rights, Ms. Tembo was a founding member of the Senut Sisterhood, a Sisterhood of the World African Community; a teacher and mentor in its Majando (rites of passage) program

for young girls, as well as a member of the International Black Women's Congress and the National Council of Negro women. Finally, Ms. Tembo was co-founder and co-publisher, with her sister and friend, Chimbuko Tembo, of the University of Sankore Press, an independent press committed to continuing the historical legacy of African scholarship and learning of its ancient namesake, publishing books on continental and diasporan African life, culture and history.

Seba Limbiko Tembo is survived by her parents, Oscar and Arvinola Neal; her sister Pam Neal-Robinson; her brothers Melvin and Anthony Sr. Neal; her niece, Ingrid Robinson; and her nephews Anthony II, Kristopher and Christian Neal. She also is survived by her immediate extended family, Dr. Maulana Karenga, Tiamoyo Karenga, Chimbuko Tembo and Thanayi Karenga, as well as her larger extended family, the advocates and members of Us.

Maziko (Transition Services) will be held Friday, June 26, 11:00am at the African American Cultural Center, 3018 West 48th Street, Los Angeles. In lieu of flowers, contributions can be made to the central focus of Ms. Tembo's work, the Kawaida School of African American Culture (SOPPAAC) which will be renamed The Limbiko Tembo Kawaida School of African American Culture in memory and honor of her. For information call (323) 299-6214.
