

A man who changed the world

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We tend to judge people based on the results of their actions, and the leadership of Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere offers an excellent opportunity to examine the quality of his leadership on that basis.

Mwalimu taught Tanzanians to think beyond tribalism, and to see themselves as part of a nation. He also encouraged us to see ourselves as Africans, and to act in a unified way to achieve our common goals.

Today's world is a dangerous one, imperilled by nuclear threats, but certainly safer than the days of the Cold War. And while former US president Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev are credited with ending the Cold War, they were not alone. Mwalimu Nyerere played a key role in preventing the proliferation of nuclear power. A man ahead of his time, Mwalimu Nyerere understood that preventing a global nuclear conflagration required unity. Nyerere called for multilateral negotiations to serve the interests of the whole world, and not just those of the nuclear powers. This would prevent the superpowers from making decisions at the expense of non-nuclear countries.

In 1985, along with the Prime Ministers of India, Greece, and Sweden, as well as the Presidents of Mexico and Argentina, and three other leaders, Mwalimu wrote a letter to Mikhail Gorbachev and Ronald Reagan calling on the two superpowers to suspend all nuclear tests for 12 months, suggesting that such a move could then be extended or made permanent.

The letter had an impact on the summit in Geneva between the two superpowers that year. Gorbachev welcomed the intervention of the six leaders, as it strengthened his hand in pressing the Soviet position that the main emphasis at Geneva must be on arms control.

Replying to the joint missive in an open letter, Gorbachev said that the Kremlin's temporary ban on nuclear testing could be extended into the New Year if the White House agreed to match it:

"We share your assessment of the importance of this measure, indeed, the cessation of nuclear tests would make it possible to slow down steeply, and in many respects preclude, practical work to qualitatively upgrade nuclear weapons, develop new types and enhance their destructive effect. In such conditions, the nuclear arms race would be tangibly undermined."

The letter and its response proved a success, resulting in a long-term agreement on the cessation of nuclear tests between the superpowers.

Mwalimu Nyerere's actions taught us that African interests can only be effectively protected if Africans and other continents unite to fight global problems. In fact, this had already been shown in 1959, when Mwalimu Nyerere, together with Archbishop Trevor Huddleston, founded the Anti-Apartheid Movement in Britain. In the 1980s, during the campaign for South African nuclear disarmament, the movement had a membership of 6,000 people, and attracted 700 organisations, including the Labour, Liberal and Social Democratic parties affiliated, which together represented more than 18 million people. Judging from the success of the tactics of unity that Mwalimu Nyerere used to mobilise the world to fight against apartheid in South Africa, it is evident that he successfully poses a challenge for the Tanzanians from the diaspora to find ways to work together that will unite the world to solve the problems that the African continent faces today. Africa will never get a fair trade deal if we Africans of the diaspora do not fight for it: in short, we can't solve the problems of Africa in isolation.

In conclusion, among the many good reasons why Tanzanians and non-Tanzanians admire Mwalimu Nyerere is that he used his intelligence to make the world a better place to live in. One notable admirer of Mwalimu Nyerere was three-times British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. She met Mwalimu in 1979 shortly after taking office, at the Commonwealth summit in Lusaka, Zambia, and one of her first ventures in international diplomacy. Thatcher later said that she was very impressed with Mwalimu Nyerere's intellect, open-mindedness, moderation, and good manners. The opinions of Thatcher are important for a person like me who was too young to remember Nyerere's years of leadership: most of what I know about the man has been learnt from, articles, books, and listening to his speeches.

Naturally, I was drawn to learning more about the achievements of Mwalimu Nyerere and which have impressed not only me but so many others. But at the end of the day, understanding Mwalimu's track record is not enough. Mwalimu Nyerere tried to do better every day and at every moment to improve the life of his people, and in celebrating the memory of his life, it is a call for all Africans to try to do better every day and at every moment. **F**