

BENJAMIN WILLIAM MKAPA DCL

Mr Chancellor,

There's something familiar about Benjamin Mkapa's story; a graduate joins a political party with socialist leanings, rises rapidly through the establishment then leads a landslide electoral victory, he focuses on education and helps shift the economy to a successful and stable mixed model. He is popular though he does suffer criticism over his military policy from Clare Short. Then after 10 years he steps down, voluntarily.

Tell this story to a British audience and few would think of the name Mkapa. Indeed, if you showed his picture most British people would have no idea who he was. This anonymity and commendable political story are huge achievements for he was a leader of a poor African country that was still under colonial rule less than 50 years ago. He's not a household name because he did not preside over failure, nor impose dictatorial rule, he did not steal his people's money or set tribal groups in conflict. He was a good democratic leader, an example in a continent with too few.

The potential for failure was substantial. His country of 120 ethnic groups shares borders with Mozambique, Congo, Rwanda and Uganda. It ranks 31st in size in the world, yet

when it was redefined in 1920 the national education department had three staff.

The defeat of Germany in 1918 ended the conflict in its East African colony and creation of a new British protectorate, Tanganyika. In 1961 the country achieved independence and three years later joined with Zanzibar to create Tanzania.

Born in 1938 in Ndanda in Southeastern Tanzania, the last of four children, Benjamin Mkapa attended local schools before completing a University degree in Uganda. He joined the Tanzanian foreign service in 1963. Benjamin became a journalist, then editor before being promoted in 1974 to press secretary for Julius Nyerere, Tanzania's founding president. He held a succession of ministerial and ambassadorial posts in the late 1970s and 1980s; colleagues and visitors recall the friendly and unassuming hospitality of Benjamin and his wife Anna. His ability and popularity led to leadership and in 1995 he took 62 percent of the vote in Tanzania's first multiparty presidential elections.

President Mkapa worked to strengthen Tanzanian democracy, entrench civil rights and fight poverty.

He slimmed down the civil service and clamped down on corruption. He steered the country to greater international trade and investment with the result that, by the end of his

second term most of the country's debt burden had been removed. In 2002, he was appointed, together with the President of Finland, Co-Chair of the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalisation and in 2003/4 he was chair of the 14 member Southern African Development Community.

Despite their limited resources, the Tanzanian government in which he was foreign minister in 1979 led the overthrow of the bloody dictator Idi Amin and as President he remained active in conflict prevention and resolution in the Great Lakes Region.

He encouraged investment in education so that the country is ahead of target in working towards universal literacy, this in the face of drought and disease. HIV affects at least 1 in 30 people. He used his last radio broadcast in office to urge his fellow Tanzanians to confront and defeat this scourge.

A Tanzanian in my place would describe this man as “Bwana-mkubwa” which means “very important man” – “the biggest”. He, I have no doubt, would dismiss such flattery in the same way that his mentor and role model, Julius Nyerere would have done. But Mr Mkapa has done more than simply follow the path created by that great statesman. He has sustained the best of his political legacy but had the strength to adapt the ideology which could not sustain the economic growth they so badly needed. He has engaged with the world to convince them

of the need to help poor nations to help themselves, to free them from the yoke of poverty.

In his speech at the funeral of President Nyerere, he used the name familiar to his people, “Mwalimu” : “teacher”. Benjamin Mkapa no longer stands in that great man’s shadow. He has earned recognition for his selfless service to Tanzania and his advocacy for the poor of the world.

I commend him to you Mr Chancellor for the honorary degree of Civil Law but before we offer our usual applause can I ask you all to join me in offering him the Swahili tribute: Mwalimu”.

Citation by Professor John Burn