

ERIC EDWARD KHASAKHALA, MP EMUHAYA.

When Eric Edward Khasakhala succumbed to death in July of 2000, many were amazed at the response from leaders all over the country. This was indeed a fallen hero, who lived humbly without recognition of his role in pre-independence and independence politics. One person who took time to mourn a friend and compatriot is none other than current President, [Mwai Kibaki](#), who attended the funeral service in Nairobi and the burial in Western province, cancelling a political meeting to honor his friend (read EA Standard July 30th 2000). But more interesting was the fact that Kibaki took the opportunity to reiterate how important a role Khasakhala played in the freedom struggle. He even emphasized how close Khasakhala and luminary [Thomas Joseph Mboya](#) were. It is even rumored that a Mboya Presidency would have had Khasakhala as Vice President had history not been changed by an assassin's bullet in 1969.

Eric Edward Khasakhala was born on 26th March 1926. He was the eldest son of Daktari Zakayo Kwendo and Mama Damary Oyando Kwendo. He started off with a humble beginning, as the Son of a Preacher and local doctor. He became an apprentice of his father, and at an early age associated with the locals in assisting them in various projects. Responsibility came to him at the early age of 29, when his father succumbed to illness and passed away on July 13th 1955.

Eric completed his formal education at the famous Maseno High School, and became a teacher. He was one of the first African Principals of a High School. It was as principal that his early leadership qualities were identified by then Colonial Governor Sir Patrick Renison. He started his exemplary political career in 1957, when he was elected secretary of North Nyanza District Congress. Between 1957 and 1960, he served as Secretary of all African Political Parties of Kenya. During the same period, he became one of the founder members of the Pan African freedom Movement for East and Central Africa (PAFMECA), which was launched at Mwanza, Tanzania. He joined the legislative Council of Kenya in 1961 as a representative for Nyanza North. In 1962 he was among distinguished Kenyan leaders who attended the famous Lancaster House Conference that drew up Kenya's Constitution. He was later elected the first Member of Parliament for Emuhaya in 1963. As Assistant Minister for Education in the early Sixties; he was instrumental in drafting up the early education system for Kenya. Between 1966 and 1970, he held the high ranking post of Vice-President for Western province, being one among only seven other regional Vice-Presidents, including [Daniel arap Moi](#), Jeremiah Nyagah, Mwai Kibaki, Ronald Ngala among others. He represented Kenya attending various International Conferences in his capacity as Vice Chairman of the Commonwealth Kenya Chapter. He served the [Kenyatta](#) and Moi regimes diligently as a faithful Minister. He is more historically remembered as being the first Chief Whip of Independent Kenya, charged with the immense responsibility of organizing and running the affairs of the first Legislature.

Khasakhala often fell a victim of his loyalty to friends. Many wonder why with such an illustrious political career, he never made it to full Cabinet Minister. Eric was a rising Political star right from his inception into active

Politics. In 1958 he caused shock waves by defeating political heavy weight Tom Mboya to clinch the post of Secretary of All Political Parties of Kenya. Mboya instantly became interested in this man and they became very close and intimate friends. Khasakhala, a Pan Africanist by heart, joined Gikonyo Kiano, Ronald Ngala, Mboya and others in travelling to Egypt and Mwanza, Tanzania to form the Convention of African Association, which would bring together African countries to form a united front to forge independence. "Eric was a very good friend and confidant of Thomas Joseph Mboya", words of Mwai Kibaki during Khasakhala's funeral.

This liaison with Mboya would cause ripples in the Kenyatta Government. In fact so suspicious was the regime that despite Khasakhala's seniority in Western Province, Kenyatta opted to give Ministerial slots to Masinde Muliro and James Osogo, and the less colorful James Otiende fearing that this rising star would be a thorn in the flesh of the Cabinet. In 1966 when then Vice President [Odinga](#) had fallen out of grace, Mboya organised the famous Limuru Conference which saw eight regional Vice Presidents being elected representing each Province. Mboya's influence would be felt when he ensured the election of his comrades including Khasakhala, Moi, Nyagah, Ngala, Kibaki, Sagini among others. Khasakhala remained a loyal friend and confidant of Tom Mboya. It is noted historically that Khasakhala and Kibaki are remembered as some of the only brave government officials who attended and were welcomed to Mboya's tense Funeral at Rising Island in 1969.

Kenyatta passed away peacefully on August 22nd 1978 and Moi, his long-serving Vice President took over. Moi was a good friend of Khasakhala, but once again fate and providence would take its course. Khasakhala would still not make it to the Cabinet. This was because there was a new player in Kakamega politics; the late Moses Mudavadi. When Moi rose to power he gave Mudavadi the Ministerial position, despite Khasakhala being the senior most politician in the area. This was because Moi in essence owed his well being to Mudavadi. It was Mudavadi who introduced a then reluctant Moi to the Colonial establishment which started off his political career, while the latter was working in Rift Valley. Mudavadi was never comfortable with Khasakhala, Joshua Angatia, Martin Shikuku and other Kakamega leaders. He was instrumental in rigging them out in the infamous 1988, "Mlolongo elections", replacing them with his cronies and sycophants. Previously in 1987 Khasakhala had played host to then Vice President Mwai Kibaki and other leaders in what became a very successful harambee for Bunyore schools. You must remember that this was the period when Kanu was steadily sidelining Kibaki, thus anyone who associated with him was seen as being anti-establishment. The function attracted many of Khasakhala's old friends including Kenneth Matiba, and a host of leaders from all walks of life. Mudavadi snubbed the function and was naturally incensed by the success of the whole affair.

Khasakhala never abandoned his friends, at whatever cost or consequence. That was one of his greatest values, and may well have been the cause of his imminent downfall. Khasakhala played politics, without bearing grudges. The most important thing for him was the uplifting of living standards of the common man. On top of all these, he was also a devoted family man. He was

only 29 years old when his father died. He therefore took up the responsibility of taking care of his siblings, as well as starting his own family. He was a caring and loving father who always emphasized the importance of Education as a foundation of life. He ensured that all his children were educated to the level to which they were able to attain. But above all, he reiterated that Education, University Degrees and Wealth were nothing if one did not contain Humility and Wisdom. Those are by far the qualities that made him remain a respected figure, in and out of Public office.

On 14th July 2000, Eric Khasakhala was pronounced dead at 4.55 p.m. He had been admitted to the Pavilion section of Aga Khan Hospital, where he spent a month. Initial diagnosis could not determine what was wrong, but finally, it was discovered that he was suffering from advanced Lung Cancer. Eric never smoked a cigarette his entire life, in fact he despised smoking. Today's air pollution and related factors were some of the causes of this. It was a sad day for his family members. He fought a protracted battle all through his illness, always giving hope to those who visited him at the hospital. Visitors at the hospital included Cabinet Ministers, Members of Parliament, Religious leaders and members of the general public. Despite Doctors restrictions, it was often hard to control the crowds that filled his room.

"I have never witnessed such a crowd before; we even have people sitting by the pulpit". These were the words of Rev. Peter Njoka, Provost, All Saints Cathedral. On Wednesday July 26th a Requiem Mass was held for Eric Edward Khasakhala at All Saints Cathedral, Nairobi. It was attended by a large crowd of people. The Public address system had to be extended outside of the Church to accommodate the crowd. Touching Tributes were read by family members, Cabinet ministers, and others during the funeral and burial services. The Burial Service held at his Ebwali Village home, saw history made in that region. An estimated crowd of over twenty five thousand people lined up the routes and filled the local school. Leaders from All Political Parties, Cabinet Ministers, members of Parliament and people from all walks of life attended the burial in Bunyore proving that indeed Eric was a National Hero. The bourgeois of the Luhya community, including all Cabinet Ministers from Western Province, technocrats and the larger business community was brought together in a rare show of solidarity. Khasakhala had spent a good part of his last days emphasizing on the coming together of the business and political Luhya leadership to enhance development in the area. Maybe in death he had achieved that goal. Even though Khasakhala had been out of active politics at the time of his death, he was buried as a nationalist, with many leaders from all tribes and communities attending and vouching for his role in Kenyan Politics.

Below are some of the tributes attributed to the late Khasakhala by a cross-section of leaders; "Eric was a diligent leader, who never wavered in his support for the ruling party and my Government."--- Daniel T arap Moi, Presidentt of the Republic of Kenya. "Eric was an honest man, never ready to change any aspect of his character to please anyone." ---Hon. Mwai Kibaki, Chairman, Democratic Party of Kenya and old friend addressing mourners.

"He was one of those leaders who inspired some of us to take up the careers that we took, in essence he was a mentor to myself and others."--- Hon. Amos Wako, Attorney General, Republic of Kenya, addressing mourners. "He was a good friend of mine, but more so of my fathers, the late Jaramogi Odinga Oginga. He always emphasized on enhancing unity among all Kenyans."--- [Hon. Raila Odinga](#), NDP leader addressing mourners "His leadership qualities should be emulated by the younger generation of Politicians, to make the Kenya we want."--- Jeremiah Nyagah, Former Cabinet Minister and old friend reading the Eulogy. "Hon. Khasakhala emphasized that we should not let transient political associations divide the great Luhya nation."--- Hon. Kijana Wamalwa, Ford Kenya leader addressing mourners. "His astute leadership, is one that will be greatly missed not only in this region but the entire nation as a whole."--- Hon. Musalia Mudavadi. Minister for Information, Transport and Communications addressing mourners. "I owe my being in Parliament to him(Khasakhala), and would like to note that he initiated many projects in Emuhaya one of which has outlived him."-- Hon. Sheldon Muchilwa , MP for Emuhaya Asst Min for Foreign Affairs. "This is a man who transcended humble origins to become a political giant in his own right."--- Prof. Reuben Olembu, Former Deputy Director UNEP, in the Eulogy.

This profile was kindly submitted by Thomas Kweyu, of Maryland, USA

Source: <http://kenya740.tripod.com/khasakhala.html>