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Burkina commemorates slain leader

Burkina Faso is paying tribute to its late revolutionary leader, Thomas Sankara, on the 20th anniversary of his assassination.



Thomas Sankara was overthrown by the current president

Known as Africa's Che Guevara, Captain Sankara was hailed by admirers as a charismatic and revolutionary leader.

But he was killed when his former comrade and current President Blaise Compaore seized power in a coup.

Crowds greeted Sankara's widow, Mariam, as she arrived in the capital from exile in France for the commemorations.

Rival events are reported to be being held.

The government has organised a conference on democracy and development before holding a concert on 20 October, whilst Sankara supporters are holding their own gathering and concert to remember him.

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A group of Sankara supporters from as far away as Mexico have arrived in Ouagadougou to pay tribute to him.

Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva arrived in the country on Monday at the start of his seventh trip to Africa since taking office in 2003. He is scheduled to hold talks with Mr Compaore.

Sankara himself seized power in a coup in 1983 masterminded by Blaise Compaore.

He gained plaudits for strongly promoting health and women's rights but antagonised many vested interests in the country.

He also had a knack for publicity, and famously replaced government Mercedes Benz cars with small Renaults.

Your memories and comments:

Many African leaders now in power lack true patriotism for their countries only fighting to remain in power for their own benefits. On the 14th October Tanzania commemorated eight years since the founding father of Tanzania Mwalimu Julius Nyerere passed away. Look at how Nyerere was angered by corruption and how he respected the rule of law but now Tanzania is sinking even deeper into poverty because of greedy leaders. I wish Blaise Compaore, Mwalimu Nyerere and Nkwame Nkrumah could live forever. They are true African leaders.

Basil Mbakile, Morogoro, Tanzania

Thomas Sankara, like his mentor and friend, Jerry Rawlings of Ghana, was a true hero of Burkina Faso. He took power from corrupt politicians to right the wronged in the society. He was truly a visionary leader who would have catapulted Burkina Faso from medieval into modern. In Africa, heroes don't last long. What a continental tragedy!

Malik, Toronto, Canada

He is a true African leader. We will remember him all the days.

Chediel Kodema, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

Sankara was such a bright leader with vision and purpose for Burkinabes and Africa as a whole when he came on board as the president of his country. Unfortunately, Africans do not realise the value of what they have until they destroy them. It is high time now to know that we Africans are the enemies of ourselves. Sankara shall continue to be vindicated. May his gentle soul continue resting in peace.

Adesina Oladokun, London, United Kingdom

Thomas Sankara reflected the yearnings and aspirations of young Africans like me. He exemplified the life of personal sacrifice needed from African leaders in order to pull the continent out of the current abyss. Unfortunately, he was cut down in his prime. Like a demented hen, Africa has been sucking its finest eggs for too long. Adieu Sankara.

Majek Adeg, Toronto, Canada

It is difficult to comprehend why visionary people like the late Thomas Sankara are out of the scene during their prime, not by natural cause but by the wicked

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hands of man. Sankara deserved to be honoured for the little he managed to achieve during a short rule. That rule brought tremendous changes in his motherland, for which, people cannot forget after 20 years of his demise. This is a lesson for other African leaders to always strive to do what is best for their people. This way they too would be remembered after they are violently killed in coups, by rebels or through democratic elections like in Liberia, Ghana and Sierra Leone. Long live Africa's visionary leaders.

Elise A Zoker, Monrovia, Liberia

I love Sankara. In my military training I was registered in a Sankara regiment Please convey on my behalf the message of sympathy and love to Mariam Sankara. Let her visit our country, Rwanda and see how many people love her.

Charles, Kigali

Sankara represented the new dream of African leadership that is designed to cater to the concerns and sufferings of the underprivileged - the poor, women and children. The coup that halted is match to socio-economic progress in one of Africa's poorest countries represents the vested interest of the class of exploiters. Until Africa embraces a rise of a new era that produce leaders like Thomas Sankara, the continent will continue to play host to poverty, disease, ignorance and human suffering.

Kai G Wleh, Washington, DC

Sankara likened as Che Guevara is not a mistake. It will not be an overstatement to say he was and will be one of Africa's most admired and cherished leaders who had his fellow citizens at heart. He made Africa proud in his leadership in not tolerating corruption by himself driving a very modest car.

Nsangou Yenkong, Manchester, England

Thomas Sankara was a leader we couldn't really have - futuristic and too revolutionary for his own good. I remember the day he visited Owen Falls Dam in Jinja, Uganda before it was changed to local name after he asked the sense of naming such an iconic place after a white man. I vividly recall that we hotly also debated when he changed the country's name from Upper Volta to Burkina Faso. How inspiring and promising it all was. There will never be another you Sankara and we miss you dearly.

John Inkirane, London, UK

It was during one of those normal days back in 1987 that the death of Thomas Sankara was announced over the state radio in the Gambia. I could still remember that day. As for me he was a pioneer and a great statesman. His political ambitions was tragically shorten by the military coup. One of Thomas Sankara's sayings that inspired everyone in Africa is "A SOLIDER WITHOUT POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE IS VIRTUAL CRIMINAL". Here he was trying to point out that many soldiers that lunch coup d'etat have no political knowledge and therefore must go back to school before any attempt of lunching a coup. May his soul rest in peace.

Tijan Nimaga, New York, US

Thomas Sankara was brother to Africa, he set an example on who and military rule can sometime better than democratic governments.

Amadou Busso, US

Sankara gave his people - PRIDE - the Burkinabe always considered the poor underdogs by the rest of West Africa, during his rule, held their heads high in the knowledge that they had a great leader a future "world" league political player.

Cheryl Reed, Ivory Coast/US

When Africa (sub-Saharan) gets close to good... it turns to a mirage! Sankara was 'wasted'. In my own Nigeria, we had a brilliant Chief Obafemi Awolowo denied leadership of Nigeria. He was premier in the west and he is still famous today (more than Azikiwe or the Sarduana) for his progressive politics and people cantered practices. It might not be exact but it seems we end up with the present crop of 'hopeless' leaders we have today who... I'll stop so I don't 'convulse'!

Olalekan, London

The only fond memories, I have about this great son of Africa, could be summarised by the song - US (Underground System) dedicated to him by the great Fela Kuti. May his ghost continue to haunt all reactionary forces in Africa, who are holding us down from reaching our potentials.

Olanrewaju Abimbola, Abuja, Nigeria

He was a man of strong conviction and courage. His death was a setback in Africa's struggle for complete emancipation. Africa lost a great son due to (Blaise) one man's greed and ambition. May his soul rest in peace.

Osric Johnson, Freetown, Sierra Leone

Sankara is Africa's great, his legacy will live on.

Perry Ehis, Abuja, Nigeria

Good things don't last, but bad things tend to stay very long. Some events in some African states are typical examples. Thomas is a true African and all positive, and if he comes back 20 times we will always stand by him as a true African.

John Ene, Lagos, Nigeria

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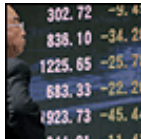
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