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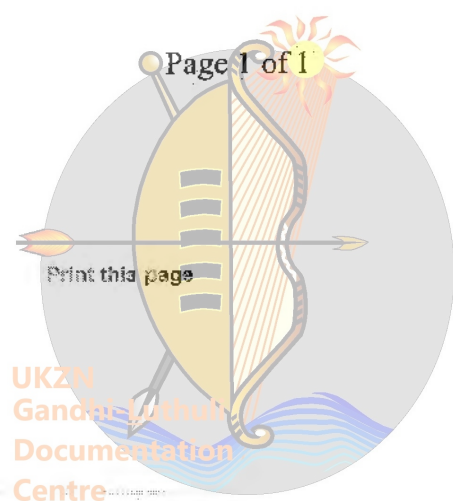
INYUVESI  
YAKWAZULU-NATALI

News Articles

DEPARTMENT: Death of Vimbeni Shembe

SUBJECT: EBuhleini Nazareth Baptist  
Church Leader  
(VIMBENI SHEMBE)

SHEMBE



## Followers mourn leader's death

March 29 2011 at 10:21am  
By Nompumelelo Magwaza

The Ebuhleni faction of the Nazareth Baptist Church is in mourning following the death of its leader, Vimbeni Shembe, at his home in Ebuhleni village in Inanda on Monday.

Church members, who could not contain their grief, knelt on streets and sobbed for their leader as his body was removed from his home.

In scenes reminiscent of the church's annual pilgrimage to a holy mountain, thousands of followers clad in white descended on Shembe's home, where they comforted the family and sang hymns.

President Jacob Zuma said he had learned with sadness of the passing of Shembe.

"He played a key role in the history and development of African independent churches in the country, and the growth and promotion of indigenous culture and traditions," he said.

Shembe's death aged 78 came after a long illness which had prevented him from completing this year's pilgrimage to Nhlangagazi mountain at Ndwedwe. The church holds the mountain as sacred as it is believed to be the spot where church founder Prophet Isaiah Shembe received his calling.

The church has split into four factions, with three in KZN and one in Gauteng. Vimbeni Shembe was leader of the biggest faction, with over four million members.

On Monday, church elders would not comment on the cause of his death, saying it was a sensitive matter.

But Jabulani Ntombela said Shembe had been sick for a long time. "His sickness was not made public. It has been a very hard time for the church, and his family, too."

Ntombela said: "We heard that he died around six o'clock in the morning. We understand that doctors had come to check on him in the past and he was also hospitalised at some stage."

Ntombela said even church members had been barred from seeing him.

"We only heard about his sickness; we never saw him, according to instructions."

Shembe's replacement would be appointed after his funeral, the date of which would only be announced after church elders had met.

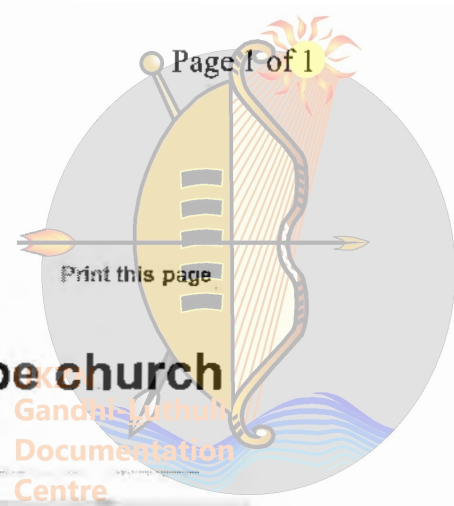
The hearse carrying Shembe's body to a Greyville mortuary was followed by a convoy of mourners' vehicles, causing a stir along Inanda Road. People ran beside the hearse crying: "Why do you leave us, baba (father)? What are we going to do?"

Those who could not catch up with the hearse knelt at the roadside and prayed.

Shembe, the leader of the Ebuhleni faction since 1995, is survived by one of his three wives and children.  
- The Mercury



Followers of the Nazareth Baptist Church (Shembe church) kneel and sob at the side of the road as a hearse carrying the body of their leader, Vimbeni Shembe, passes by at Inanda. Picture: Doctor Ngcobo



## Buthelezi offers condolences to Shembe church

March 28 2011 at 11:55pm

Johannesburg - The president of the Inkatha Freedom Party - Mangosuthu Buthelezi - expressed his condolences on Monday on the death of Shembe Baptist Church leader Vimbeni Shembe.

"Reverend Vimbeni Shembe was a man of deep faith; a great man. He was a man with firm beliefs, who was not afraid to take a stand," said Buthelezi.

"In the time allotted to him, Reverend Vimbeni Shembe lived a full life.

"He was passionately dedicated to doing God's work on Earth.

"He worked to assert the glory of the Lord in the hearts and minds of all South Africans by preaching love, hope, peace and goodwill to all his followers," Buthelezi said.



IFP chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi has offered his condolences to the Shembe Baptist Church after the passing of one of its veteran leaders.

Shembe was in his late 70s and headed one of four factions of the church. - Sapa

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# Zuma sends condolences to Shembe

Mar 28, 2011 7:59 PM | By

UKZN  
Gandhi Luthuli  
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**President Jacob Zuma expressed his condolences on the death of Shembe Baptist Church leader, Vimbeni Shembe.**



A memorial service for slain musician, Lucky Dube, was held at Bassline in Newtown, Johannesburg. The service was attended by thousands of people. Here members of The Shembe Church pray in Dube's honour. Pic: Alon Skuy. 24/10/2007. The Times  
*Photograph by:*

"We have learned with great sadness of the passing of Inkosi Shembe. He played a key role in the history and development of the African independent churches in the country, and the growth and promotion of indigenous culture and traditions," said Zuma.

"We also acknowledge Inkosi Shembe's contribution to the promotion of self-reliance and social responsibility amongst his followers and the community at large."

Shembe was in his late 70s and headed one of four factions of the church.

According to the church's blog, he led the church since 1933. His branch of the church has over one million followers, most of whom are Zulus.

The church has four factions all claiming to be the legitimate leaders of the Shembe Church.

The war for control of the charismatic church, founded in 1910, has raged for decades. According to a story on [www.timeslive.co.za](http://www.timeslive.co.za), the church is estimated to be worth R100 million.

The four factions took each other to court over who is the legitimate heir to church founder Prophet Isaiah Shembe.

Turmoil was sparked by the death of Isaiah Shembe's successor, Bishop Galilee Shembe, in 1976. Two

factions surfaced, led by the bishop's brother Amos Shembe and the bishop's son Londa Shembe.

The church is now split into four groups: Ebuhleni, which was led by Amos's son Vimbeni Shembe, who is regarded as the wealthiest and most powerful; Ekuphakameni led by Londa's son Vukile Shembe; Ginyezinye, led by Sizwe Shembe, the bishop's grandson; and a Gauteng faction led by another of the bishop's grandsons, Phakama Shembe.

Vimbeni Shembe's spokesman Chance Sibisi declined to comment on the leader's death.

UKZN  
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# Shembe leader was to visit country in May

By Fanyana Mabuza

30 March, 2011 11:06:00

UKZN  
Gandhi Luthuli  
Centre

THE late Shembe Nazareth Baptist Church leader Mbusi Vimbeni Shembe, who died on Monday, was expected to visit the country towards the end of May this year.

This was disclosed by the leader of the local branch of the church, Reverend Johannes Dlamini when interviewed at his home at Mehlwabovu towards Mankayane yesterday.

Reverend Dlamini said the revered church leader, who was 77 years old, always visited the country after a year and was last here in May 2009.

He noted that the demise of their leader had thrown their arrangements into disarray, adding that they were still waiting for a confirmation when Shembe was struck ill.

"While we held our breaths, hoping for his recovery the hand of death struck. We are at a loss for words and are only comforted by the Biblical lore that the Lord giveth, the Lord Taketh," he said.

He noted that whenever the leader was in the country, he would stay for two week.

"The two week period is marked by fervent revivals at the local Shembe shrine near Bethany, where the close to 20 000 local members of the church converge to pray," he said.

He then stated that he would, later during the day, leave for Eludzidzini to report the said developments to Her Majesty the Indlovukazi and later report to His Majesty the King.

He noted that the church leader held royalty close to his heart, adding that the church was also grateful to the authorities after they gave them the land near Bethany for the church to build its local headquarters.

"We will then send a delegation to Inanda KwaZulu Natal, where the Swazi church will pass its condolences, and later members of the church will depart for Buhleni, in the Inanda District for the funeral whose date is still to be set," he said.

The death of the charismatic leader of one of the most recognized traditional churches in Southern Africa was announced by South African State President Jacob Zuma, who said he had played a key role in the development of the African independent churches in the country, and the growth and promotion of indigenous culture and traditions.

"The Shembe Church is at the centre of the lives of thousands of people of this country, and our hearts go out to them on this major loss," he said in a statement to the South African media.

Mangosuthu Buthelezi of Inkatha Freedom Party also expressed his "shock and sadness" at Vimbeni Shembe's death.

In every Easter pilgrimages to the Somhlolo National Stadium, the Shembe faithful regularly stand out from the rest of the worshippers with their starchy white ceremonial gowns and mystical chanting accompanied by music blown from long horns and drums.

There are 15 Shembe denominations in the country comprising of close to 20 000 followers.

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# Shembe church leader Vimbeni dies

29 Mar 2011 | Mhlaba Memela

**THE leader of the Nazareth Baptist Church, Inkosi Mbusi Vimbeni Shembe, died yesterday after a long illness.**



Shembe had headed one of the four factions of the church since 1933.

Church leaders and family members did not reveal what Shembe had suffered from as his illness had been kept under wraps.

As his body was removed from the church's headquarters in Ebuhleni, Durban, to the mortuary, throngs of worshippers and the general public of Inanda, north of Durban, broke down and wept.

Despite rivalry between the church's Ebuhleni faction and the eKuphakameni faction under the leadership of Inkosi Vukile Shembe, Vukile's spokesperson Edward Ximba expressed sadness.

"We hope that church members will be able to handle the situation and seek God's divinity as they mourn the death of their leader," Ximba said.

According to the spokesperson, Vukile had also sent his condolences to worshippers at Ebuhleni.

"Yes, we have differences but were not enemies," Ximba added.

Vimbeni Shembe's faction of the church has more than one million followers, most of whom are Zulus.

The church has four factions, all claiming to be the legitimate leaders of the Shembe church.

The charismatic church, founded in 1910, is estimated to have assets of over R100million.

The four factions have taken each other to court over who is the legitimate heir to church founder prophet Isaiah Shembe.

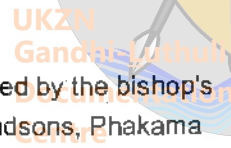
Turmoil was sparked by the death of the prophet's successor, Bishop Galilee Shembe, in 1976.

Two factions surfaced - led by the bishop's brother Amos Shembe and the bishop's son Londa Shembe.

The church is now split into the Ebuhleni faction, which was led by Amos's son Vimbeni Shembe, regarded as the wealthiest and most powerful.

The others are the Ekuphakameni, led by Londa's son Vukile Shembe; Ginyezinye, led by the bishop's grandson Sizwe Shembe; and a Gauteng faction, led by another of the bishop's grandsons, Phakama Shembe.

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# The politics of choosing a messiah's heir

**Oct 13 1995 00:00**

Ann Eveleth

Only the wind stirred in Ebu-hleni when Rogers Ngcobo took the podium last Sunday. Tens of thousands of white-robed Nazarites, who had gathered in the tree-cloaked shantytown to mourn the death of their spiritual leader Bishop Amos Shembe, listened in stunned silence to his message.

Ngcobo, a local bottle-store owner and non-Nazarite, told them that Shembe had entrusted him to reveal his heir, the new "black messiah", the prophet, healer and father confessor to all the faithful. He said Shembe's son Vimbeni was designated to take over the leadership of the two-million-strong, mainly Zulu, Nazareth Baptist Church, one of the largest churches in the country and a powerful force in KwaZulu-Natal.

Inkatha Freedom Party-aligned chief Nkanyisa Biyela rose to second Ngcobo's motion, saying that Shembe had come to him in a "vision" to tell him that Ngcobo would reveal the new leader.

Shembe had not yet been buried, but thousands of barefoot worshippers rose to leave the service, some shocked that their leader could send "an outsider" with such a controversial decree and others angry at what they believed was a hidden hand behind the announcement that promised to split the church anew.

Moments earlier, President Nelson Mandela had warned the congregation that "it would be tragic if the enemies of peace were to take advantage of this time of stress to create wedges in your leadership. Let us close ranks against anyone who would try to sow division."

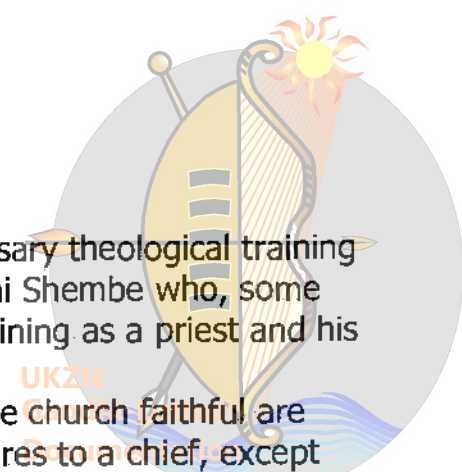
Political divisions between African National Congress and IFP supporters, which have plagued KwaZulu-Natal, have long been enmeshed in the church, and Mandela's message was pointed. Church sources say speculation about Ngcobo's "premature" announcement began days earlier, when Ngcobo's brother, IFP-aligned chief Mzonjani Ngcobo, was heard "reminding" parishioners that Ebu-hleni was "his" land.

Chief Ngcobo had given the land to Shembe more than 15 years earlier, when a first split rocked the church and Shembe and his followers fled the church's Ekuphakameni headquarters down the Inanda township road. Now he wants them to support Vimbeni Shembe's ascension to the powerful -- and wealthy -- Shembe throne.

Church leaders earlier said they would announce the successor only after examining Shembe's will at a meeting due on Thursday. If no successor was named, a group of seven priests would pray for guidance before announcing a decision.

Sources say Ngcobo's announcement led groups of "concerned members" to hold a flurry of meetings this week to propose an alternative candidate, believing that the church would disintegrate further under Vimbeni Shembe's leadership.

"If Vimbeni is imposed on the church, there will definitely be a split," warned Mini Shembe, son of Johannes, the last Shembe to lead the church when it was still united.



"The problem is that there are few candidates who possess the necessary theological training and leadership skills and could be acceptable to everyone," added Mini Shembe who, some sources suggest, is a possible contender for the position, given his training as a priest and his former work for the South African Council of Churches.

Succession, however, is a delicate matter among the "Shembes" as the church faithful are commonly known. Steeped in African traditionalism, the leader compares to a chief, except that "his power begins and ends with the church" and succession has thus far been patrilineal. When church founder Isaiah Shembe died, his son Johannes took over. But Johannes' death in 1976 heralded a new era of uncertainty.

Johannes' brother Amos became regent while the future leader was being sought. But as Amos Shembe refused to relinquish power, squabbles between him and Johannes Shembe's family led to Johannes' son Londa staging a quiet coup which split the church in 1979, driving Amos and his followers out of Ekhuphakameni, to which he would never return.

Housing deep contradictions between its traditionalist roots and and its urban location, the church was not immune to the violence which rocked KwaZulu- Natal in the 1980s.

In 1989, Londa Shembe died in a hail of bullets at the hands of perpetrators who remain unnamed. More than a dozen church leaders died in the ensuing conflict and Ekhuphakameni has since remained leaderless. Rumours of third force involvement in Londa Shembe's death abound, but his brother Mini says Londa had played "both sides of the fence".

The ANC-aligned Londa had provided a refuge for United Democratic Front activists, but was "close friends with Mangosuthu Buthelezi, via chief Simon Gumede, the KwaZulu Minister of Public Works", Mini said.

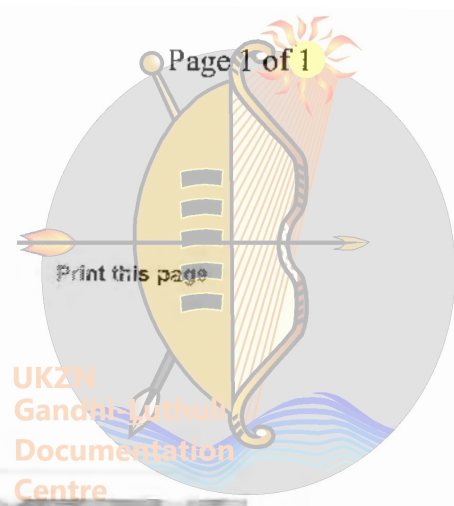
In Ebuhleni, Amos Shembe's ministers, who promoted the IFP to the congregation, sparked rebellion among the UDF-aligned youths, further splintering the erstwhile tightly-knit communities.

Prior to the April 1994 election, rumours that IFP supporters from KwaMashu's volatile men's hostel had set up base in Ekhuphakameni accompanied sporadic incidents of violence, while ANC returnees to a neighbouring section of Inanda began to mix with residents of Ebuhleni, changing the political texture of the former IFP stronghold.

The solemn lowering of Amos Shembe's ox-hide-clad body into the ground at Ebuhleni last Sunday etched the Shembes' divisions forever into the earth. Unable to be buried at the church headquarters in Ekuphakameni, Amos Shembe's grave will be a constant reminder that the "new covenant" which Isaiah brought down from Nhlankakazi mountain some 80 years ago, had been broken.

**Source: Mail & Guardian Online**

**Web Address: <http://www.mg.co.za/article/1995-10-13-the-politics-of-choosing-a-messiahs-heir>**



## Shembe church leader dies

March 28 2011 at 02:56pm

Shembe Baptist Church leader Vimbeni Shembe died on Monday morning, a church spokesman said.

"I can confirm that Mbusi Vimbeni Shembe has passed away. This happened this morning (Monday) after he was gravely ill," said Pat Dooms, spokesperson for Phakama Shembe, who leads the breakaway Gauteng branch.

Shembe was in his late 70s and headed one of four factions of the church.

According to the church's blog, he led the church since 1933.

His branch of the church has over one million followers, most of whom are Zulus.

The church has four factions all claiming to be the legitimate leaders of the Shembe Church.

The war for control of the charismatic church, founded in 1910, has raged for decades.

According to a story on [www.timeslive.co.za](http://www.timeslive.co.za), the church is estimated to worth R100-million.

The four factions took each other to court over who is the legitimate heir to church founder Prophet Isaiah Shembe.

Turmoil was sparked by the death of Isaiah Shembe's successor, Bishop Galilee Shembe, in 1976.

Two factions surfaced, led by the bishop's brother Amos Shembe and the bishop's son Londa Shembe.

The church is now split into four groups: Ebuhleni, which was led by Amos's son Vimbeni Shembe, who is regarded as the wealthiest and most powerful; Ekuphakameni led by Londa's son Vukile Shembe; Ginyezinye, led by Sizwe Shembe, the bishop's grandson; and a Gauteng faction led by another of the bishop's grandsons, Phakama Shembe.

Vimbeni Shembe's spokesperson Chance Sibisi refused to comment on the leader's death and did not want to confirm if he had passed away. -

Sapa



Shembe Baptist Church leader Vimbeni Shembe has died. Photo: Reuters

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# Leader of major, divided South African church dies

By Donna Bryson. The Associated Press - 1 day ago

JOHANNESBURG — Vimbeni Shembe, a leader of a major but divided South African church, died Monday. He was 77.

President Jacob Zuma, who announced Shembe's death, did not say what caused it.

"He played a key role in the history and development of the African independent churches in the country, and the growth and promotion of indigenous culture and traditions," Zuma said in a statement. "The Shembe Church is at the centre of the lives of thousands of people of this country, and our hearts go out to them on this major loss."

Shembe led one of four factions of the Shembe Nazareth Baptist Church, founded in 1910 by Isaiah Shembe in what is now KwaZulu-Natal province, the homeland of South Africa's largest tribe, the Zulu. Church teachings combine Christian beliefs and Zulu traditions.

The church has been divided since the 1970s in a family dispute — at times violent, and strained by rival political allegiances — over succession. All the factions were led by descendants of the founder, and Vimbeni Shembe's is believed to be the most powerful of the four.

Mangosuthu Buthelezi, whose Inkatha Freedom Party is the main rival in KwaZulu-Natal to Zuma's African National Congress, expressed "shock and sadness" at Vimbeni Shembe's death.

"I believe it was Rev. Vimbeni Shembe's greatest desire to see the reconciliation of the church during his lifetime, and it is a great tragedy that he did not live to see such reconciliation," Buthelezi said. "It is my hope that Rev. Vimbeni Shembe's passing will inspire members of the church to set aside their difference once and for all."

Every year, thousands of white-robed Shembe church followers set out barefoot on an 80-kilometre (50-mile) pilgrimage through the hills of the Zulu heartland to their holy mountain, Nhlankakazi.

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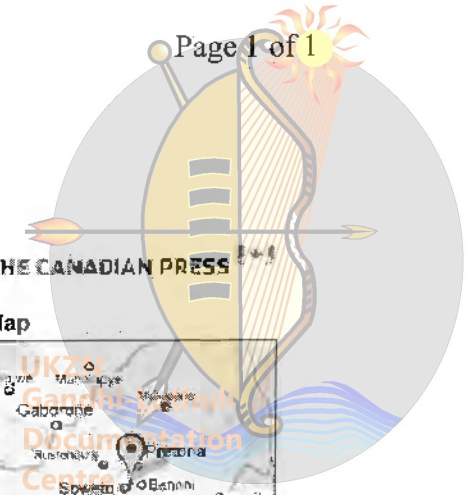
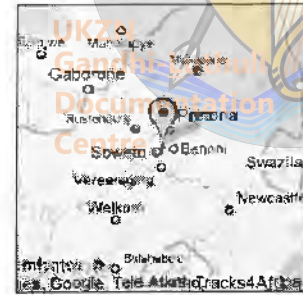
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**MEDIA STATEMENT BY THE  
INKATHA FREEDOM PARTY**

## **IFP Youth Brigade Pays Tribute to Inkosi Vimbeni Shembe**

29 March 2011

The sudden passing of Inkosi Vimbeni Shembe, of the Baptist Nazareth Church, came as a great shock to all South Africans.

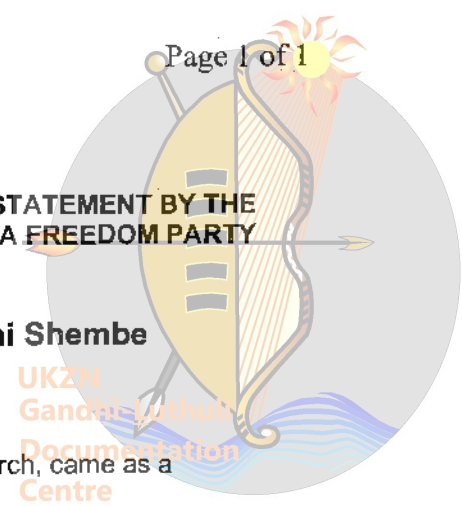
Today the National Chairperson of the IFP Youth Brigade Mkhuleko Hlengwa said: "On behalf of the IFP Youth Brigade I wish to convey our most heartfelt and sincere condolences to the Shembe family, and the entire brethren of the Nazareth Baptist Church. His passing is a great loss, which has left a gaping void in the continuous struggle of fully instilling genuine morals in us young people, and our common pursuit as South Africans of leading Godly lives without negating our African sense.

"Inkosi Shembe's passing comes at a time when South Africa is in desperate need for more leaders of honour and integrity; of which he was. His ascension to higher service has robbed us of an active moral compass. We shall be forever indebted to God Almighty for borrowing us a people's leader, such as Inkosi Vimbeni, who rose above earthly politics and embraced all people with warmth and equality. He was indeed a great son of the African soil," Hlengwa said

In conclusion, Hlengwa said: "We pray and hope that the Shembe Church will honour Inkosi Vimbeni's memory and distinguished spiritual legacy by seeking unity and reconciliation within the Church, for this was one of Inkosi's greatest wishes and prayers. May he rest in peace."

For further information, kindly contact:  
Mkhuleko Hlengwa  
IFP Youth Brigade National Chairperson  
on 083 871 2711

  
BACK



# SHEMBE LEADER DIES

By Kwanele Dhladhla

29 March, 2011 10:36:00



DEAD: Mbusi Vimbeni Shembe

**THE Shembe Baptist Church leader, Mbusi Vimbeni Shembe, is dead. Shembe succumbed to death yesterday morning after being sick for over two months.**

Contacted for comment, staunch Shembe member and Matsanjani South Member of Parliament Qedusizi Ndlovu confirmed the report.

“I have been called by the officials from the church’s headquarters in Nanda, South Africa, but I have not been able to communicate with the Bishop,” said Ndlovu. Reports sourced from various media also confirmed the death of Shembe.

The Sowetan quoted the Bishop’s spokesperson who, was however, economic with the details on the death of Shembe but confirmed the report.

“I can confirm that Mbusi Vimbeni Shembe has passed away. This happened this morning (yesterday) after he was gravely ill,” said Pat Dooms, spokesmau for Phakama Shembe, who leads the breakaway Gauteng branch.

Shembe was in his late 70s and headed one of four factions of the church. According to the church’s blog, he led the church since 1933. His branch of the church has over one million followers, most of whom are Zulus.

The church has four factions all claiming to be the legitimate leaders of the Shembe Church. The war for control of the charismatic church, founded in 1910, has raged for decades.

legitimate

According to a story on Timeslive.co.za, the church is estimated to be worth E100 million.

The four factions took each other to court over who is the legitimate heir to church founder Prophet Isaiah Shembe. Turmoil was sparked by the death of Isaiah Shembe’s successor, Bishop Galilee Shembe, in 1976.

Two factions surfaced, led by the bishop’s brother Amos Shembe and the bishop’s son Londa. The church is now split into four groups: Ebuhleni, which was led by Amos’ son, Vimbeni, who is regarded as the wealthiest and most powerful; Ekuphakameni led by Londa’s son, Vukile, Ginyezinye, led by Sizwe, the bishop’s grandson; and a Gauteng faction led by another of the bishop’s grandsons, Phakama Shembe.

Vimbeni Shembe’s spokesman Chance Sibisi refused to comment on the leader’s death and did not want to confirm if he had passed away.

## **We are spiritually hurt- MP Qedusizi**

MATSANJENI South Member of Parliament, Qedusizi Ndlovu mourned the death of the Shembe Baptist leader.

When called for comment yesterday, Ndlovu, a staunch Shembe Christian, said the death of Shembe was spiritually hurting to them as a church. "We are hurt spiritually by the news of the death of Shembe, we had hoped he would recover from the illness since he had been admitted for over two months, but unfortunately he has answered the Lord's call," said Ndlovu. In his lifetime, the leader has visited the country three times, in 1987, 2001 and finally in 2009.

## **About the Shembe Baptist Church**

The amaNazarites of Isaiah Shembe are the oldest African Independent/Indigenous Church in South Africa. The church divided into two main sections in 1976 following the death of its leader Bishop Johannes Galilee Shembe [1904-1976]. The largest group was led by Bishop Amos Shembe [1907-1996], the other, smaller group, by the Rt. Rev. Londa Shembe [1944-1989]. The following texts represent both branches of the church and were produced with the encouragement of the Bishop Amos Shembe, and the Rt. Rev. Londa Shembe respectively. By reproducing them here we remain neutral with regard to the division in the church which is a theological and administrative matter that only members of the amaNazarites can decide upon. Our only concern is to publicise the work of the founder, the "prophet" Isaiah Shembe. In Swaziland the Church has over 15 denominations across all for regions of the country and has over 20 000 followers.

## News & Weather

### Leader of major S.African church dies

Tuesday, 29 March 2011 09:38

Brian Matambo | Posted in Africa.



Vimbeni Shembe

Vimbeni Shembe, a leader of a major but divided South African church, died Monday. He was 77.

President Jacob Zuma, who announced Shembe's death, did not say what caused it.

"He played a key role in the history and development of the African independent churches in the country, and the growth and promotion of indigenous culture and traditions," Zuma said in a statement. "The Shembe Church is at the center of the lives of thousands of people of this country, and our hearts go out to them on this

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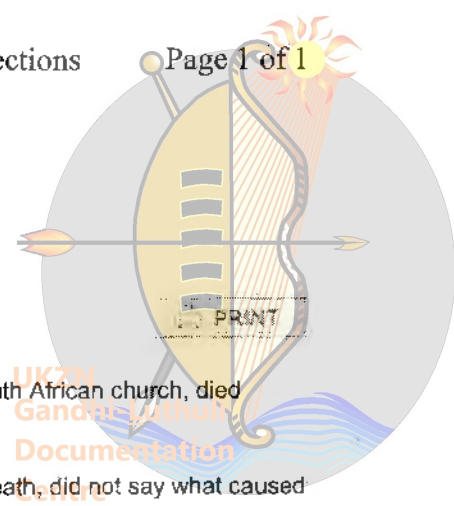
Shembe led one of four factions of the Shembe Nazareth Baptist Church, founded in 1910 by Isaiah Shembe in what is now KwaZulu-Natal province, the homeland of South Africa's largest tribe, the Zulu. Church teachings combine Christian beliefs and Zulu traditions.

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"I believe it was Rev. Vimbeni Shembe's greatest desire to see the reconciliation of the church during his lifetime, and it is a great tragedy that he did not live to see such reconciliation," Buthelezi said. "It is my hope that Rev. Vimbeni Shembe's passing will inspire members of the church to set aside their difference once and for all."

Every year, thousands of white-robed Shembe church followers set out barefoot on an 80-kilometer (50-mile) pilgrimage through the hills of the Zulu heartland to their holy mountain, Nhlankazi.

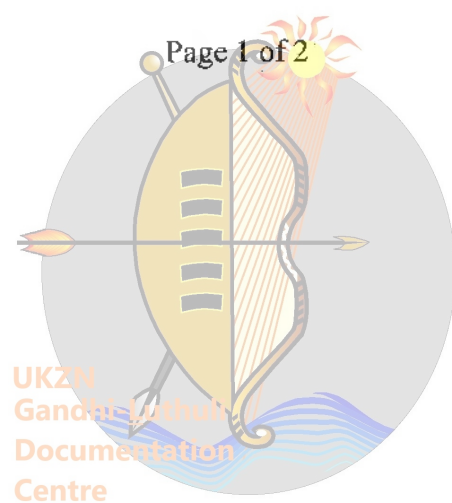




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## Fifth Shembe break-away?

Apr 7, 2011 3:32 PM | By



**The fallout caused by who should succeed the late leader of the Nazareth Baptist (Shembe) Church may have led to the formation of a fifth faction.**



Shembe followers piled into the back of a bakkie  
*Photograph by: JACKIE CLAUSEN*

"We will be in Umthwalume on Saturday where the church proceedings will be led by Vela Shembe," Mafika Shembe told the media in Durban on Thursday afternoon.

Vela was chosen by late Vimbeni Shembe to succeed him but the senior leaders of the church chose the late leader's son, Mduduzi Shembe to be the successor.

Mduduzi Shembe is expected to lead church proceedings in Inanda on Saturday.

There was confusion during Vimbeni's funeral on Sunday when names of two people were announced as the next leaders.

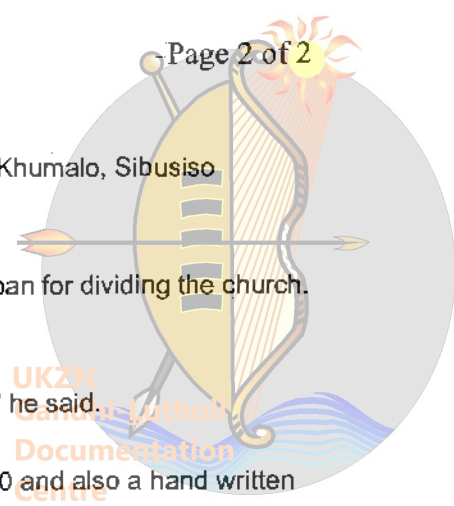
During the funeral, Zwelabantu Buthelezi, the church's lawyer, read a will left by the late Shembe naming Vela Shembe as his successor.

"We have decided not to leave him (Vela). That is why we are going to Umthwalume with him on Saturday. If you talk about the will they tell you that you should leave," said Mafika.

Before Vimbeni's death, the church had four factions - three in KwaZulu-Natal and a fourth in Gauteng. Vimbeni led the biggest with about five million followers.

The Nazareth Baptist Church was founded by Isaiah Shembe in 1910.

The church has been divided since the 1970s in a family dispute over succession which at times became violent.



The media briefing on Thursday was also attended by church leaders, Sinethemba Khumalo, Sibusiso Shembe and Mandla Cebekhulu.

Sibusiso Shembe blamed Mqoqi Ngcobo, a traditional leader in Inanda outside Durban for dividing the church. It was Ngcobo who announced Mduduzi Shembe as a new leader on Sunday.

"He (Ngcobo) is dividing the church. He is the one who chose to go against the will," he said.

Sapa is in possession of a copy of the will the late leader signed in February 11 2000 and also a hand written letter allegedly authored by Shembe on March 16 to Buthelezi reminding him about the will.

Written in isiZulu, the letter read: "Dear Sir. I am not feeling well. I thought I should remind you about the name of the boy I gave you in case I die."

The letter also instructed Buthelezi to announce Vela's name during the funeral.

Sibusiso said Ngcobo had pushed for Mduduzi's name because he did not like Vela.

"We are not happy with what he (Ngcobo) has done and we have approached King Goodwill Zwelithini to deal with him," he said.

Sibusiso said Ngcobo interfered in the church because his clan had provided land to one of the leaders of the church.

Ngcobo was not immediately available to respond to the accusations against him.

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# No access to dad Inkosi Shembe

Mar 31, 2011 | Mhlaba Memela

**THE children of the late Nazareth Baptist Church leader Inkosi Mbusi Vimbeni Shembe say it is "painful and saddening" that they never spent enough time with their father because of his commitment to the church.**

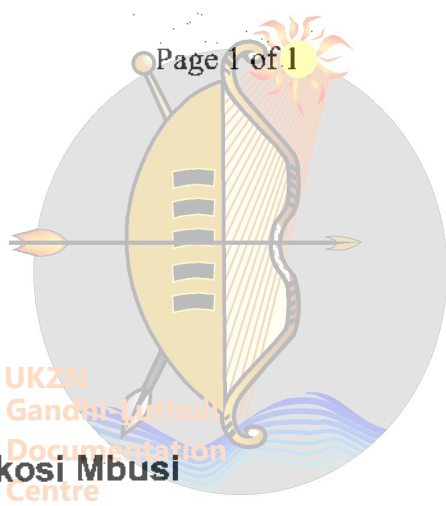
Shembe, 78, died on Monday after a long illness.

His eldest son Nhlanhla said they never spent enough time with their father as he was surrounded by people who made sure they had little access to him.

"He was very committed to church work and he only wanted to be of service to the nation. But the most saddening thing is that our father was surrounded by people who made sure that we had little access to him," he said.

Nhlanhla said on occasions when they found time to see their father, he would stop what he was doing just to give them the much-needed attention.

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Shembe members journey to Inanda for funeral  
Mar 31,2011 00:00 by BANELE DLAMINI

**LOBAMBA - Local Nazareth Shembe Baptist Church members are expected to journey to Inanda tomorrow to attend the funeral of their leader, Vimbeni Shembe.**

It is anticipated that the locals will join possibly thousands of mourners, including South African President Jacob Zuma, for the deceased's funeral.

One of the most recognised members of the church in the country, Matsenjani South MP Qedusizi Ndlovu, said the funeral is scheduled to take place on Sunday.

He said it will be held at the church's headquarters at Ebuhleni in Inanda, north of Durban.

Ndlovu, who was in a sombre mood, said arrangements were being made locally to assist congregants who wish to accompany Shembe's body to his final resting place.

While he is not the one spearheading the preparations, the MP said it would be important to first establish how many people were interested in attending the funeral, in order to secure transport to Durban.

"Elders of the church have met for discussions about the funeral and have called to inform us that he will be buried on Sunday. We need to know the number of people who wish to attend the funeral so that we can prepare transport," he said in an interview at Parliament yesterday.

Ndlovu said the death of Shembe is a big loss, adding "I wonder if there will ever again be a man of his calibre?"

Shembe, who was in his late 70s, passed away on Monday after an illness.

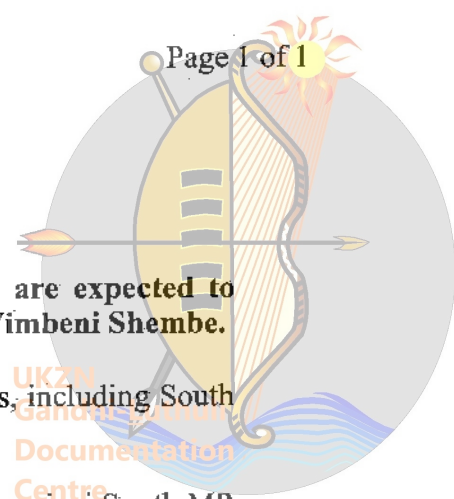
The South African online publication New Age reported that on Tuesday family members and church elders were at Ebuhleni making funeral arrangements.

"Scores of church members also arrived to pay homage to their late spiritual head. Family sources said Vimbeni would be laid to rest next to the grave of his father Absolom, who died in 1995," reported the publication.

It added, "It is not clear who will succeed him as the leader of the Ebuhleni faction of the Shembe Church. The new leader is likely to be anointed shortly after the funeral."

New Age stated that the funeral service is expected to attract thousands of mourners and high profile South African personalities, including Inkhatha Freedom Party leader Prince Mangosuthu Buthelezi, Premier Zweli Mkhize and Police Commissioner, Bheki Cele.

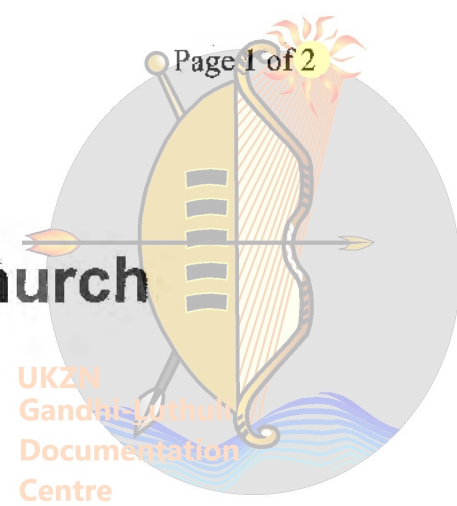
Furthermore, it quoted a family representative as saying, "President Jacob Zuma has indicated that he'll attend."



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# Obituaries: Vimbeni Shembe: Church leader

Apr 3, 2011 12:34 AM | By



**Vimbeni Shembe, who has died in Ebuhleni outside Durban at the age of 77, was a factory manager who became the leader of one of the biggest churches in Southern Africa.**



COMMANDING: Vimbeni Shembe Picture: JACKIE CLAUSEN

*Photograph by:*

The grandson of Isaiah Shembe, who founded the Nazareth Baptist Church (more commonly known as the Shembe Church) in 1910 after receiving what he believed was a command from God, Vimbeni was revered by some 4.5 million followers in the region, including Mozambique, Swaziland and Zimbabwe.

Although his official residence was in Ebuhleni, he spent most of the year on the road visiting his far-flung congregation. The church regarded him as its property and extracted its pound of flesh: his family complained that they hardly ever saw him.

He was the friend of kings and presidents. Former president Nelson Mandela and President Jacob Zuma visited him at his home, as did King Goodwill Zwelithini and Mangosuthu Buthelezi. Vimbeni was related to the Zulu king and to the Inkatha Freedom Party leader through his aunt, Queen Zondi Shembe, who was married to King Solomon, King Goodwill's grandfather and Buthelezi's great-uncle.

Vimbeni was born in Ebuhleni on April 27 1933. He qualified as a teacher before getting work at a factory in Hammarsdale which prepared and packaged chickens.

In the '80s he left his job to manage farms and livestock belonging to his ageing father, Amos.

Amos, a son of the founder, had taken over the leadership of the Shembe Church from his brother, Bishop

Johannes Galilee, who had died in 1976, in highly controversial circumstances.

Amos was only supposed to be regent while a future leader was sought, but he refused to relinquish power.

The man many followers believed should have become leader, Bishop Galilee's son Londa, staged a coup which split the church in 1979.

As a result, Amos and his followers left the church's headquarters in Ekuphakameni and moved to Ebuhleni.

The dispute between the two leaders was reinforced by political differences: Londa was aligned to the ANC, while Amos was closer to Inkatha.

In 1989 Londa was assassinated. He had provided a refuge for activists of the ANC-supporting United Democratic Front, and there were rumours of Third-Force involvement in his death. Nobody was ever convicted.

Londa's murder triggered further conflict in the church, in which a dozen or so leaders died.

Back in Ebuhleni, Amos's ministers were seen to be promoting the IFP, and this provoked a rebellion among younger members of the church who supported the UDF. As a result, there was yet another split.

Vimbeni succeeded on his father's death in 1995 - but his elevation was not unanimous by any means.

Some felt it was imposed by a powerful IFP-supporting chief who announced that Vimbeni would be the new leader before proper agreement had been reached.

By the time the dust had settled, there were four different factions of the Shembe Church, each led by a Shembe family member.

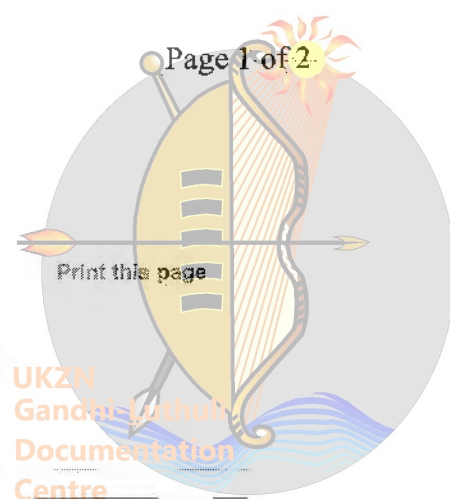
There was more than just pride and ego at stake: the church's assets - farms, buildings, livestock and land - were said to be worth more than R100-million.

The issue of the legitimate heir to founder Isaiah has been contested in court several times, but remains unresolved.

The Shembe Church combines aspects of Christianity with Zulu culture, following the teachings of Christ and practising baptism and holy communion. The most important event in the church's calendar is the annual January pilgrimage to the top of the holy mountain of Nhlangakazi at Ndwedwe, north of Durban, where Isaiah is believed to have received his calling from God.

This year, Vimbeni was too ill to make the journey.

He is survived by his third wife and eight children.



## Shembe succession could lead to split

April 7 2011 at 10:15am

### Nompumelelo Magwaza and Sinegugu Ndlovu

The announcements of two leaders in the Baptist Nazareth Church at Ebuhleni faction has caused deep divisions within the church, with fears that another faction might be created.

As Sabbath day (Saturday) approaches, church members will have to decide which leader, Vela Shembe or Mduduzi Shembe, to follow after their names were announced at the funeral of Vimbeni Shembe on Sunday.

Mduduzi, Vimbeni's son, was first announced by the Ngcobo clan leader, inkosi Mqoqi Ngcobo, as successor to Vimbeni.



Moments later, Vimbeni's attorney, Zwelabantu Buthelezi, announced Vela as the lawful successor, while showing a handwritten letter by Vimbeni where he nominated Vela as the next leader.

Vela is the son of Johannes Galliee (JG) Shembe, son of the late Isaiah Shembe, who founded the church and is revered as a prophet by his followers.



Vimbeni's father, Amos, was Johannes's brother.

A prominent member of the Ebuhleni faction, Enoch Mthembu, spoke out about the divisions in the church for the first time yesterday. "The announcement of the two successors has caused chaos and anxiety in the church."

Mthembu said Ngcobo had been wrong to announce the leader without instructions from Vimbeni. "He had no authority to announce the next leader. He acted in an irresponsible way."

He also blamed the lawyer for consulting with the family and senior members of the church before making an announcement to the congregation.

"He was strictly instructed to deliver the message to everyone before the burial of ubaba (father) and not consult with anyone."

Mthembu said the allegiances of a number of chiefs, pastors, preachers and evangelists had been divided between Vela, who worships at Mthwalume on the South Coast, and Mduduzi, who worships at Ebuhleni in Inanda.

"This coming Sabbath, people might have to choose who to follow. This will be mean that some may choose to go with Vela, others with Mduduzi."

He also pleaded for tolerance among church members to let people decide how this "mess is going to be sorted out".

"The spirit of Shembe will lead the one who will be leading us," he added.

The Mercury also spoke to Ngcobo, who said he did not speak for the church. However, he believed that upon a father's death, his son must assume leadership. 8P10

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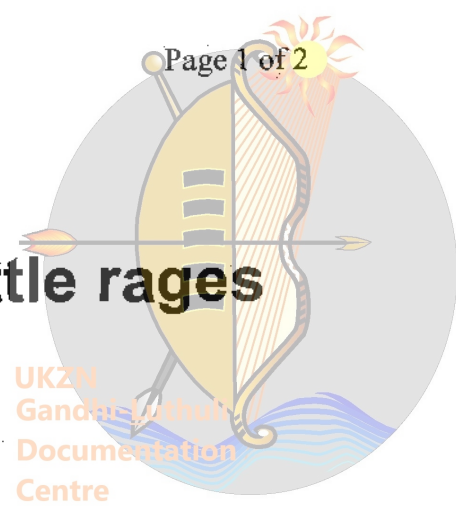


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# Nazareth Church succession battle rages on



Apr 13, 2011 | Mhlaba Memela

## **KEY witnesses in the Nazareth Baptist Church (Shembe) leadership debacle are in hiding after their lives were allegedly threatened.**

It is alleged that church secretary Chancy Sibisi could not stay until the end of the burial service of the late inkosi Vimbeni Mbusi Shembe of Ebuhleni after he was accused of being part of a plot that wanted to appoint Vela Shembe as successor.

Sowetan has learnt that Sibisi, who had been the right-hand man of the late leader, received anonymous death threats and was in hiding.

"We know that evangelist Mandlenkosi Zwane and Sibisi were for a long time aware of who the late leader had appointed to succeed him.

"Both Sibisi and Zwane are in hiding. This is no longer about religion," said a senior leader.

"Our father's (Vimbeni) wishes were spoilt by inkosi Mqoqi Ngcobo who, without a mandate from the leader, announced Mduduzi as the successor.

"Ngcobo did not have any instruction from the late leader," he said.

Enoch Mthembu, a church spokesperson, expressed "disappointment and pain" about what was happening in the church.

Mthembu said the congregation was "shocked" by Ngcobo's announcement of a successor when he had no mandate to do that.

"The church leader had done his work properly. He had appointed his own successor to lead the church when he passed on.

"It hurts to see our church being in the newspapers for the wrong reasons because of Ngcobo's actions," he said.

Mthembu said Ngcobo had abused his powers and was "confusing and stressing many ordinary members".

Sibisi and Zwane refused to comment on the issue. They said it was not the right time for them to talk to the media.

Meanwhile, church executive committee chairperson Mbongwa Nzama has allegedly instructed lawyer Simirithi Sharma to apply for a court order to freeze all church accounts.

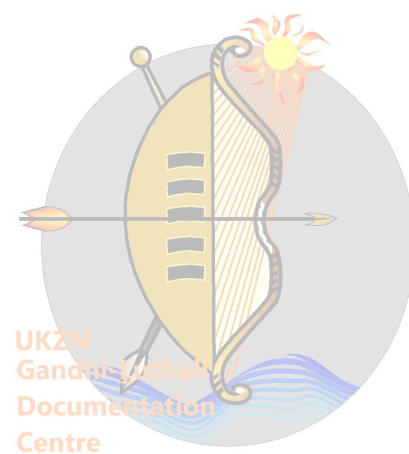
The Durban high court granted the order on Friday.

Vela's attorney Trevor Nkosi confirmed that they had been also served with papers freezing the church accounts.

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## Shembe leadership battle continues

April 11 2011 at 10:00am  
By Nompumelelo Magwaza

**An inventory of the Nazareth Baptist Church's assets including more than eight properties and several farms would be made known this week after a Durban High Court order to freeze the church's bank accounts was granted on Friday.**

**This is the latest move in the church's leadership battle which was triggered by the death of its leader Vimbeni Shembe last month.**

**The controversy over who will lead the Shembe church came after two leaders, Mduduzi Shembe and Vela Shembe, were announced as successors.**



The Durban High Court has granted an order freezing the Nazareth Baptist Church's assets, pending the resolution of a succession dispute following the death of its leader Vimbeni Shembe.

**In an urgent application before Judge Sharmaine Balton in the Durban High Court on Friday, the church and its executive committee chairman, Mbongwa Nzama, asked for an order to freeze the church's bank accounts.**

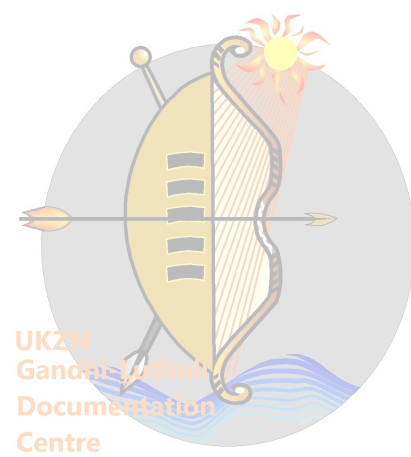
**In an affidavit, Nzama said the church and the Church of Nazareth Ecclesiastical Endowment Trust were large organisations with an annual income of several million rand. Nzama said it was imperative that an order "freezing" the relevant accounts be obtained, pending the resolution of the disputed succession.**

**"Money in its accounts is not private but are contributed by relatively poor members of the public who subscribe to the tenets of the church."**

**The church's attorney Simrithi Sharma said an order to freeze all account had been granted. "I do not have a figure of how much the church is worth. I will be working on the inventory of all the assets and also try to obtain all the bank statements."**

**Last week, Vela made an urgent application to the Durban High Court requesting that he be appointed as a sole trustee of the Church of the Nazareth Ecclesiastical**

**Endowment Trust and Titular head of the Nazareth Baptist Church. The matter has been adjourned to April 21. - The Mercury**



# Shembe leadership feud now in court

Apr 8, 2011 | Mhlaba Memela | 76 comments

## AS expected, the dispute over the rightful leader of the Nazareth Baptist Church (Shembe) is now in court.

Speculation has been rife that the matter will end up in court since Sunday when two cousins were separately pronounced as rightful heirs.

Yesterday Nkosi Trevor Attorneys, who represent Vela Shembe, applied to the Durban high court for an interdict to stop Mduduzi Shembe from ascending to the church throne.

The late Inkosi Mbusi Vimbeni Shembe allegedly signed an affidavit just before his death declaring Vela Shembe the new leader. The interdict also seeks to stop Inkosi Mqoqi Ngcobo from involvement in the affair.

Mduduzi is Vimbeni's son and Vela is his nephew. Mduduzi has already started performing duties as leader. Vela is challenging Mduduzi's position.

Trevor Nkosi of Nkosi Trevor Attorneys said they had applied for an urgent court interdict to enforce Vimbeni's wishes.

"We went to court on the grounds of the late leader's instructions, and the matter was adjourned to April 21 by consent of all," said Nkosi.

While lawyers were battling it out in court, the faction which believes that Vela is the rightful leader announced that they were officially "severing ties with the eBuhleni faction and will now continue God's work" in uMthwalume.

Speaking on behalf of Vela, Mafika Shembe said they had decided to leave eBuhleni after they were denied entry.

"We were told during the funeral to leave with Vela because eBuhleni is the house of the late Inkosi Vimbeni and his family. We know that Vela is the rightful leader as he was nominated by Vimbeni to be his successor," he said.

Mafika said they would introduce Vela to church members at Thembezinye temple at Mithwalume tomorrow. Vimbeni's lawyer, Zwelabantu Buthelezi, is expected to be a witness.

