

# The world mourns a visionary leader

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**Botswana is mourning the passing of its former President, Dr Festus Gontebanye Mogae, with tributes pouring in from across Botswana and beyond, honouring a leader widely regarded as a steady and rallying force during a key period in the nation's democratic development.**

Botswana's President Duma Boko on Friday, May 8, 2026 announced the death of his predecessor Festus Mogae aged 86.

Mogae, who had been ill, led Botswana as its third president between 1998 and 2008.



"Today Botswana mourns a distinguished statesman and patriot whose life was devoted to the service of his country," Boko said in an address to the nation.

Mogae was reported to have been admitted in a hospital in the capital Gaborone in recent months, however, there were no official statements about the nature of his illness.

To honour him, flags flew at half-mast across Botswana for three days.

Mogae's administration was roundly praised both locally and internationally for stabilising Botswana's economy through pragmatic fiscal policies which saw rapid growth.

A former vice president and finance minister, Mogae is also praised for causing a dent in his country's HIV/AIDS rate which was one of the worst globally after a comprehensive antiretroviral treatment programme.

His campaign for free antiretroviral therapy continued following his retirement which earned him the Mo Ibrahim Prize for Achievement in African Leadership, recognising his sterling role in advancing the cause of good governance not only in Botswana but elsewhere across Africa.

Born in 1939, in Serowe, Mogae trained as an economist at Oxford and Sussex.

In mourning his passing, Club de Madrid Members, Advisors, described him as a distinguished statesman and valued Member of Club de Madrid. They noted that late President Mogae dedicated his life to democratic governance, responsible leadership, and public service.

"As President of Botswana from 1998 to 2008, he helped strengthen the country's democratic institutions, economic stability, and inclusive development, earning international respect for his

integrity, wisdom, and commitment to good governance.

He was widely recognised for his courageous leadership in addressing the HIV/AIDS crisis in Botswana, promoting access to treatment and reducing stigma at a critical time.

As an active Member of Club de Madrid, President Mogae contributed to global dialogue on democracy, sustainable development, climate action, and multilateral cooperation. He participated in numerous initiatives and international forums, including the Imperial Springs International Forum 2019, always advocating for inclusive, resilient, and sustainable societies.

President Mogae's calm leadership, generosity, and dedication to dialogue left a lasting impact on colleagues and partners around the world. His legacy as a principled democrat and champion of Africa's development will continue to inspire future generations."

Club de Madrid extended its deepest condolences to his family, friends, and the people of Botswana while noting that he will be greatly missed.

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In a deeply emotional message, his successor reflected on Dr Mogae's legacy as more than just a former Head of State, describing him as "a guiding light, a trusted counsellor and a custodian of wisdom."

As Botswana reflects on his legacy, tributes continue to highlight a leader who governed with calm conviction and left behind a lasting imprint of stability, dignity, and service.

In her tribute to the late president, as seen on her LinkedIn page, Dr Athalia Molokomme, B, Lawyer & Former Ambassador and the first female attorney general of Botswana until 2017, in her tribute as seen on her LinkedIn page wrote; Tribute to Dr Festus Gontebanye Mogae: A visionary president and gender equality champion

"I learnt of the passing of our former and third President, His Excellency Dr Festus Festus Gontebanye Mogae with much sadness. Moments like this provide us the opportunity to reflect on how fortunate we have been as a nation to have had a leader like former President Dr Mogae.

"Allow me to share my personal reflections of my professional experience with our iconic and exemplary leader.

"Many tributes from Botswana, Africa and globally have spoken of his impressive achievements as a brilliant economist, Bank of Botswana Governor, Vice President, Finance Minister and head of state.

“I must add to this list by stating that Dr Mogae was what I would call a “gender equality practitioner”.

“For during his term, he appointed many women to senior positions of leadership in the public service. This he did not out of tokenism, but because he genuinely believed that with similar qualifications and experience, women can deliver the same results as men; and yes, they did.

“I had the honor and privilege to be appointed by President Mogae as a judge of the high court, and subsequently as Botswana’s first female Attorney General from 2005 to 2016. In his usual modesty, he told me in his office that this was his honor and privilege, not mine!

“It was during the time I served as Attorney General that I had first-hand experience of the visionary leader that he was. He had a brilliant, inquiring mind; was deeply respectful of professions other than his; a patient listener; sharply reflective; and consulted meaningfully.

“Yet Dr Mogae was frank, engaging and ready to share his views, differ or debate issues without fear or favour. In the final analysis, common sense and the public interest always prevailed; for Dr Mogae was a great believer in the rule of law, due process and fairness. He was therefore simply a pleasure to advise!

“I learnt a lot from Dr Mogae and will remember him for his modest and unassuming character, despite his many achievements.

“He leaves indelible footprints and a proud legacy of exemplary leadership that will endure for generations to come.

In these images, I share the 2005 cabinet poster, and only some of the senior positions of responsibility he appointed women to: BOB Govenor (the late) Linah Mohohlo; DPP Leatile Dambe (now Court of Appeal Judge); and High Court Judge Unity Dow (Later cabinet Minister and now MP).

“As First Lady then, his dear wife, Mme Mmanametso would often accompany him on his travels, and it was always a pleasure to interact with her. I send condolences to her, the entire Mogae family, as well as the nation. May they be comforted by our deep gratitude, thoughts and prayers.

And may Dr Festus Gentebanye’s soul find eternal rest”.

Dr Athalia Molokomme

Festus Mogae and Daily Trust

Festus Mogae (1939–2026), the former President of Botswana, had a longstanding relationship with Media Trust, publishers of Daily Trust newspapers and owners of Trust Television and Trust Radio. He served as the chairman of the selection committee for the Daily Trust African of the

Year Award taking over in 2016, succeeding Salim Ahmed Salim. Under his leadership, the committee selected recipients for the annual award, which recognised extraordinary contributions to human development in Africa.

Salim, while handing over to his successor said former President Mogae is one of the most outstanding African leaders who never tried to tinker with the constitutions of their countries to remain in office.

In his then remarks after taking-over, President Mogae said he considered it a great honour to be invited to Chair the Prize committee and to succeed Dr. Salim whom he described as a quintessential African statesman.

He reaffirmed his commitment to the primary motive of the award which is to recognise and reward ordinary Africans who are doing extraordinary good works in any part of the continent.

He said such awardees, who are selected from all fields of human endeavour, would inspire other Africans to undertake selfless humanitarian works for humanity.

Former President Mogae then said there was nothing wrong in equally recognising extraordinary Africans who are doing exemplary works to motivate other people.

He chaired the 10th Daily Trust African of the Year Award dialogue in Abuja in 2013 Dr Mogae noted that despite the numerous challenges confronting Nigeria in its quest for nationhood, it may not necessarily have to look elsewhere for the solution to its problems as Nigeria had the capacity to resolve its issues by itself.

Former President of Botswana Mr Mogae said Nigeria is blessed with a mass of educated people that could successfully work out the solutions to the problems confronting the country. He said the quality of the discussions at the dialogue showed clearly that Nigerians know exactly where their problems lie and what to do about them. He added that he may not have anything new to say to Nigerians that has not been said before. He also said seeking the assistance of other nations like China as some have suggested, may not guarantee the kind of commitment that will drive the bid to build a virile nation as the commitment of the foreigners would be restricted to only areas where their interests are protected. He said the real problems, however lie in whether Nigerians are prepared to do something about those problems they have identified. The former president said the challenges of ethnic differences, unemployment and lack of physical infrastructure which dog efforts to deepen democracy in Nigeria, if addressed, would serve to point the way forward to other countries on the African continent which share similar challenges. "Anything I can say to you in Nigeria, many other people in Nigeria have said it. But when something like democracy is involved it bears restating because we have not achieved what we want." he said.

Those words are relevant today as then when he made them.

The Media Trust Group joins the world in mourning the death of one of Africa's remarkable leaders.

May his soul rest in peace.