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Niko Bessinger passes away

CHRISTOF MALETSKY

A STALWART in the struggle for Independence, who also went on to become Namibia's first Minister of Tourism, Niko Bessinger (59), has passed away.

He died of a heart attack at his Khomasdal home in the early hours of yesterday.

Bessinger had been fighting cancer for the past couple of years and was in and out of hospital.

President Hifikepunye Pohamba described him as a tireless liberation fighter who was very involved in the reconstruction of the country.

The President joined a group of family and friends at Bessinger's home yesterday morning to pay homage to another fallen hero of the nation Bessinger is the third national leader to die in the space of two weeks after Congress of Democrats MP Kala Gertze passed away recently, followed by Local Government Minister John Pandeni, who was killed in a car accident last week.

Born on June 12 1948 at Walvis Bay, Bessinger joined Swapo in 1972 and became an active member four years later when he was appointed the treasurer of the Windhoek office and national treasurer one year later.

From 1981 to just before Independence, Bessinger was Swapo's internal secretary for foreign affairs and served together with the likes of Reverend Hendrik Witbooi, late Nathaniel Maxuilili and the late Daniel Tjongarero and was arrested by police in the former South West Africa several times for opposing South African rule.

At the country's Independence in 1990 former President Sam Nujoma appointed Bessinger as the first Minister of Wildlife, Conservation and Tourism.

In 1996 he resigned as Member of Parliament and was replaced by Marlene Mungunda.

He, however, remained a member of the Swapo Central Committee until last year's congress.

Bessinger, a qualified architect, attended school at St Bonifacius Roman Catholic Primary School, Augustineum Secondary School and

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matriculated at Athlone High School in Cape Town in 1966.

He studied for his profession at the University of Cape Town Architectural School before getting a Fulbright scholarship for studies at the University of Detroit in the United State of America.

When he left Parliament, Bessinger went back to his profession and was a full-time architect for the past years.

He is survived by his father, four sisters, three brothers and five children.

A service will be held in his honour at the St Mary's Church in Khomasdal at 19h00 today, but funeral details will be announced at a later stage.

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