

Mourners gather to bid farewell to Zambia's Kenneth Kaunda

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A coffin draped in the Zambian flag was driven on a gun carriage into Lusaka's National Heroes Stadium [Moses Mwape/AP Photo]

Lusaka, July 2 (RHC)-- Mourners in Zambia's capital, Lusaka, have gathered at a stadium for a state memorial service for Kenneth Kaunda, the nation's founding president and supporter of African nationalism. A number of leaders from across the continent also attended Friday's service for Zambia's former president, who died last month aged 97.

A coffin draped in the Zambian flag was driven on a gun carriage into the 60,000-capacity National Heroes Stadium and placed under a white marquee. Complying with COVID-19 social distancing rules, attendees waved white handkerchiefs as they stood on the terraces, dancing to dirges and solemn music played by a military band.

A hero of the struggle against white rule in southern Africa, Kaunda died on June 17th at a military hospital where he had been admitted with pneumonia. He always carried a white handkerchief – an item that he said symbolised love and peace, and which he started carrying while imprisoned during the struggle for independence.

Joining incumbent Zambian President Edgar Lungu, foreign dignitaries in Lusaka paying their respects included South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, Zimbabwe's Emmerson Mnangagwa, Kenya's Uhuru Kenyatta and Ghana's Nana Akufo-Addo, as well as Britain's Africa minister James Duddridge, representing Zambia's former colonial ruler.

Kaunda, popularly known by his initials of KK, was president of Zambia for 27 years, taking the helm after the country gained independence in October 1964. He headed the main nationalist group, the left-of-centre United National Independence Party and hosted many of the movements fighting for independence or Black equality in other countries around the continent – sometimes at a heavy cost.

Zambia declared a period of mourning after his death, with flags flown at half-mast, while his body was taken around the country for the public to pay their respects. He will be buried next Wednesday at the country's presidential burial site situated opposite the cabinet office in Lusaka.

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