

John Neer (d. 2011)

Our dear colleague, John Neer, passed away tragically and unexpectedly after a short illness in Port Elizabeth on Monday, 21 November 2011. John was well-loved and admired for his enduring commitment to work for justice; and his warm and courageous heart for supporting those who suffer. We are all united in our grief and our memories of his incredible spirit. John will not be forgotten.

The Nelson Mandela Bay Metro will honour John by laying him to rest in Hero's Acre in Papenkuils cemetery. The funeral service itself will be held at the War Memorial Hall (also known as Hoza Hall) in Avenue A, New Brighton, Port Elizabeth from 9am to 11am on Saturday, 3rd December 2011. Black Sashes should be worn at the funeral as a mark of respect.



A tribute from Nkosikhulule Nyembezi, Black Sash Advocacy Programme Manager

My homage is to John Neer, the paralegal and human rights activist, the person who has with wit and warmth dedicated his life to serving ordinary people. It is hard to believe that our gentle friend and mentor is no more.

On the surface, the position of a paralegal may not seem terribly demanding. However, by its very nature, being a paralegal entails an enormous challenge of facilitating access to justice, rights and services for vulnerable individuals and communities who are marginalised.

Among things John Neer will be remembered by is the way he carried out his work, as one of his defining characteristics has always been respect - respect for the individuals walking into our offices to seek advice, respect for the inquisitive and advisory process entrusted to his position, and respect for the law and human rights.

His contribution in the writing and revision of the paralegal guide on debt and credit, and other right-education material, brought with it a guarantee that the material would be clearly written, user-friendly, accurate, and insightful. He will be remembered by holding himself to extremely high standards and being faithful to those standards for many years of his service.

Also, there is an aspect of John Neer's life that cannot escape emphasis in a tribute; the magnitude of his contribution to making human rights real is so manifest, his peculiarity as a colleague so endearing, his friendship so warm, such that his example of integrity and humanity will continue to inspire us. Hamba kahle John Neer.



A tribute from Xolela May, Senior Black Sash Paralegal

To us as the organisation and his entire family, we will always remember his intelligent, soft people' skills, humble approach, down to earth person, who will never ever answer any statement or question without paraphrasing it. To Bhuti John,you have to repeat yourself irrespective of your emotions. He would say "I agree what Xolela is saying, while at the same time, I am trying to familiarise myself with what Vuyo is trying to say" but I am not saying that Vuyo is wrong". St Paul's once said death to us is victory. May his soul rest in peace.



A tribute from Elroy Paulus, Black Sash Advocacy Programme Manager



He was a peacebuilding activist - a rare combination of admirable attributes. What an inspiration he was - rest in peace my brother John - we will miss you.



A tribute from Black Sash Gauteng Provincial Director and staff

This is great loss to the family, immediate colleagues - PE Office staff, the organization and the community at large - all of which he served with grace and dignity. On behalf of the Gauteng team we wish to say the following:

To his family, who have lost a husband, father, brother, cousin, uncle you name it, our prayers and thoughts are with you. I would like to believe that he did not want to part with you but if you read 2 Corinthians 5, you are likely to find the answer to this tragedy.

To Alexa and your team, I could sense that John was a significant part of your team who you regarded as a father. I can only imagine how you guys are feeling. I wish to say that you remain strong for God is with you, he will guide and protect you. Isaiah 41:10-13 he commits to the fact that he will never leave or forsake us, in all instances. Do not be afraid or discourage. Let him be your shepherd Psalm 23:1-6.



A tribute from Black Sash National Director Marcella Naidoo



John has worked in the PE office for over a decade. He has been a pillar of strength. His integrity and sense of calmness undergirded by a deep commitment to justice will be missed in that office and in our organisation as a whole.

Advice seekers who brought their troubles to him will remember his doggedness in pursuing their matters. Just before he died, John reported that he had managed to resolve a client matter which had been going on for three years. I cannot begin to understand the loss to his family and our organisation.



A tribute from National Programme Director Jane Coombe

We are all walking around today with a deep sense of loss and disbelief. It is impossible to believe that John's sincerity, integrity, calm and dignity will no longer enrich our national meetings; that his experience, wisdom and kindness will not be available to all his colleagues, and that his commitment to human rights will not continue to drive his work for justice in the Eastern Cape and beyond. Our hearts goes out to his family who have suffered such loss over the last while. May they find peace and grace.

We are comforted by the thought of the Black Sash Eastern Cape team gathered together in East London over the next few days, with so many community advice office paralegals who will attend our course focusing on administrative justice. This group of men and women have know and worked with John Neer for many years, some for decades. Somehow it feels right that they should be together now to share their sadness and their memories; and to recommit to the work he held dear. John Walton said movingly last week that they would dedicate this course to John Neer. We are all working in his honour now.



A tribute from Black Sash KwaZulu Natal Provincial Director Evashnee Naidu and staff

We are reeling with this news and just reflecting on dear John and his humble presence at all of our National encounters. We consider him the 'true gentleman' of the organization. It is heartbreaking to lose one of our own and we pray for courage to all our colleagues so that we can help each other get through this tragic loss and also stand strong to support his family through this horrific year of loss.. God bless all.

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A tribute from Black Sash Trustee Jenny De Tolly

What a very sad loss. Please could you pass on my deepest sympathies to his family and thank them for the contribution that John made to the Black Sash and the people we serve. Also to the PE Black Sash office staff, who are like a family and will feel his death acutely. My thoughts and love are with you all.

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A tribute from Black Sash Trustee Di Oliver



I write to convey my very deepest sympathy to you all in the wake of dear John Neer's sudden death. He was such a valued colleague and wonderful friend to so many through his many years of work for the Sash.

Please know how much I hold you all in my heart and in my prayers at this very sad time.

May you have wonderful memories of this valued colleague to comfort you at this very sad time and to give you courage for the future. I thank God for all he meant to you in the PE office, in our regional work in the Eastern Cape and to the Sash as an organisation. How special that you dedicated today's workshop in East London to the memory of John.

May his dear soul rest in peace.