

# A tower of strength

Someone once said change is pain. One person who knows this very well is Professor Philda Nzimande, DENOSA's President. Her determination to see the nurses of this country united and speaking with one voice has seen her travelling in South Africa and abroad. BHUNGANI KA MZOLO spoke to her. NEIL KIRBY took the photographs.

In June this year, Professor Philda Nzimande was elected onto one of the highest international nursing bodies, the International Council Nurses (ICN), Board of Directors. The ICN is considered the world parliament of nurses and the board its cabinet.

"It was an honour not only for me, but also for South African nurses and all nurses in Africa," she says.

On her return from ICN Congress, Nzimande addressed nurses at the Johannesburg International Airport who had come to welcome the leadership from ICN Congress. Nzimande was accompanied by DENOSA's Executive Director, Thembeke Gwagwa, members of the national board and staff of DENOSA, who had also attended the congress.

Nzimande is credited with bringing together various nursing organisations in South Africa into the formidable DENOSA.

This included the former South African Nursing Association, Concerned Nurses of SA, the Democratic Association of SA Nurses, and many which belonged to the former homelands like Boputhatswana, Ciskei, Gazankulu, KwaZulu, Leboa, Transkei and Venda.

Under her leadership, DENOSA has been re-admitted into the ICN and joined the Commonwealth Nurses Federation, Public Services International and Congress of SA Trade Unions (COSATU). Ties have also been forged with the Canadian Nurses Association, the Danish Nursing Organisation and

many others.

The widely travelled Nzimande has been to countries like the UK, US, Denmark, Canada, Zimbabwe and many others.

But who is Professor Nzimande and from where does she hail?

"I was born in Natal (now KwaZulu-Natal) at Ntukuso Village of Camperdown Magisterial District. My family later moved to Mpumalanga Township at Hammersdale."

She is one of 12 children from the late Albert and Catherine Ndlovu. Sadly, many of her siblings have passed away and she has only two sisters left.

*Sis Dudu*, as she is affectionately known, attended Ntukuso and Table Mountain Junior and Senior Primary Schools respectively, Hammersdale and Ashdown Secondary Schools, and studied Matric through private correspondence, after which she completed her nursing training at McCord Zulu Hospital.

Nzimande received her D. Litt et Phil in Nursing Science from Unisa in 1984. She started her academic career as a lecturer at the Nursing Science Department at the University of Zululand in 1981 and became a senior lecturer four years later. She was appointed professor in the department in 1987, and in 1995 became the head of Umlazi Campus Nursing Science Department.

Nzimande was elected First President of the KwaZulu Nurses' Organisation, which later dissolved in favour of joining DENOSA. Other professional organisations she belongs to include the American Public Health Association, the International Bicultural Nurse Scientist and the chairperson of the Editorial Board of *Curationis*, to mention only a few.

She has published various books, which include *Community Diseases in the African Continent* (1992), *Preventive and Promotive Health Care Digest* (1992) and *Preventive and Promotive Health Care Digest in a Changing Africa* (1996).

She has three adult children (two girls) – Nomusa is an Advocate in the Supreme Court; Bongwiwe is an Accounts Manager at ICT-Nampak, and her only son, S'thembiso, is Managing Director of his own business, Ikhwezi Staffing Solutions, one of the biggest recruitment agencies in SA. Her youngest daughter, Nolwazi, is 13 and is at Westville High School. She also has three grandchildren and one on the way. Nomusa has one child, Bongwiwe and her husband, Allan, are expecting their first child in September, and S'thembiso and his wife, S'bonisile, have two children.



Sis Dudu is married to Professor Siphindoda Nzimande, a qualified social worker and sociologist, who was Head of the Social Work Department at the University of Zululand. He since gone into business. He is the Chairman of the Provincial Nature Conservation Service (Wildlife KZN), Deputy Chairman of the Provincial Gambling Board in KZN and Chairman of Valley Trust, a socio-economic, health-related project.

"Together, my husband and I own Alberts Publishers, the School Textbook and Stationery shop, Alberts Nomandla Consultancy and Business College, Mpilo Enhle (Pty) Ltd, and Mpilo Enhle Africa, an NGO focusing on HIV/AIDS and Home-based care education," says Nzimande.

Did she always want to be a nurse?

"No, initially I wanted to be a medical doctor. When my parents prevented me from taking a sponsorship to be one of the first students at the Natal Medical School, I decided to go into nursing, which was my second choice. I have, however, not regretted this decision. I have enjoyed being a nurse every day of my life. Therefore, I believe God directed me properly."

Turning to her election onto the ICN Board of Directors, the President of DENOSA had this to say: "I am obviously very excited about this election, since it means not only representing the entire African Continent, but also the international nursing community at large.

"The ICN Board of Directors represents world views and is the global hat of nursing. Currently, there are 124 member countries and South Africa is one of them."

There are 19 member countries from the African continent.

She adds: "To me, it is a great achievement, not only personally, but also for DENOSA and South Africa. We have only been members of the ICN for four years after an isolation of more than 20 years. I believe that we should be proud of this."

There will be annual board meetings in Geneva, which Nzimande will attend. Then there are other meetings and congresses at which she will represent Africa, including the Council of National Representatives (CNR), which meets in Morocco in 2003, and the ICN Congress and CNR, which meets in Taiwan in 2005.

Nzimande says membership to these international organisations is important because it means that the voices of ordinary nurses are heard directly at these organisations.

For the ICN, this means that African nurses can take one position on an agenda item of the CNR in the same way as the Nordic countries do.

"We can share ideas within the Continent in line with the new African Union, as set up and enhanced by our own President Thabo Mbeki, in the same way as the European Union has come together. Nurses around the world can speak with one voice and support each other."

The benefits for belonging to the International Nurses' Federation are that nurses within the Commonwealth countries can be linked directly with their Governments through the Health Ministers and

World Health Assembly.

Does she think her election onto the ICN Board of Directors will help boost South Africa's chances in the bid to host the 2009 ICN Congress?

"No. While it is the ICN Board of Directors that actually takes the final decision, the criteria is already set and I believe they will be followed."

So what were the highlights of the Copenhagen Congress?

"The ICN elected a new President, Christine Hancock, and a black South African nurse (me!) was elected onto the Board of Directors to represent Africa for the first time.

"Secondly, the Era in Action was accepted by CNR, which will allow for dialogue within our countries with other nurses," says Nzimande.

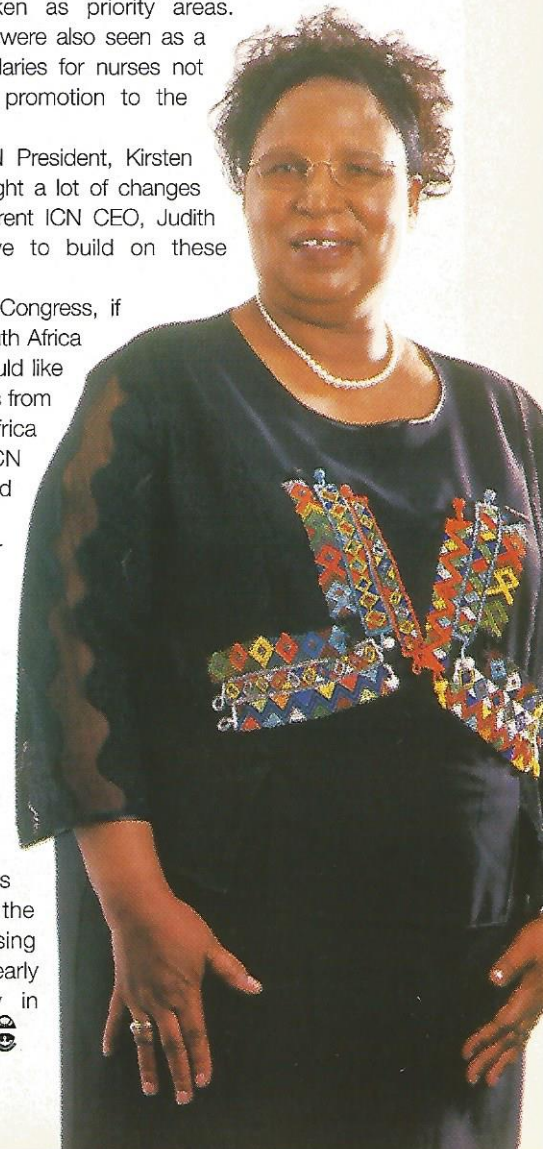
"But without a doubt, the migration of nurses from developing to developed countries, together with HIV/AIDS pandemic, were taken as priority areas. Conditions of service were also seen as a burning issue, eg: salaries for nurses not acceptable and the promotion to the higher ranks limited.

"The outgoing ICN President, Kirsten Stallknecht, has brought a lot of changes together with the current ICN CEO, Judith Oulton. We will have to build on these changes.

"As for the 2009 Congress, if the ICN comes to South Africa for the first time, I would like to see as many nurses from South Africa and Africa attending this ICN meeting and Congress."

Any final word for the nurses in South Africa?

"I would like to thank the membership of DENOSA and all South African nurses for their support. However, at the end of my term of office, I would like to see South African nurses collaborating on the country's nursing positions and to clearly see the real 'Unity in Diversity'," she says. ☺



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