



Photo by Gisèle Wulfsohn

SPECIAL OFFICIAL FUNERAL SERVICE FOR

*Advocate George Bizos*

15 November 1927 – 9 September 2020

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**Funeral Service:** Thursday, 17 September 2020



REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



# *Programme*

## **SPECIAL OFFICIAL FUNERAL SERVICE FOR ADV GEORGE BIZOS**

Thursday, 17 September 2020

### **PART ONE**

#### **Greek Orthodox Service**

Cathedral of Saints Constantine and Helen  
74 Wolmarans Street  
Johannesburg

- 10:00** Greek Orthodox Service  
**10:55** Cortège departs for the Hellenic Cultural Centre

### **PART TWO**

#### **Special Official Funeral Service at the Hellenic Cultural Centre**

**Programme Director: Minister Naledi Pandor**

- 11:00** National Anthem  
**11:05** Opening Prayer by **His Eminence Archbishop of Johannesburg and Pretoria Damaskinos**  
**11:10** Welcoming remarks by the Premier of Gauteng: **Mr David Makhura**  
**11:15** Reading of the obituary: **Mr Alexi Bizos**  
**11:20** Tribute by the Ambassador of Hellenic Republic of Greece: **HE Mr Roussos Koundouros**  
**11:25** Tribute on behalf of the Grandchildren: **Mr Nicholas Bizos**  
**11:30** Tribute by Family Representative: **Mr Alexi Bizos**  
**11:35** Tribute by **Former Deputy Chief Justice Dikgang Moseneke**

- 11:40** Eulogy by His Excellency President of the Republic of South Africa, **Mr Cyril Ramaphosa**  
**12:00** Sermon by **Chaplain-General Monwabisi Jamangile**  
**12:10** SANDF Ceremonial  
**12:15** Cortège departs for the West Park Cemetery

### **PART THREE**

#### **At the cemetery**

- 12:35** Family and President Ramaphosa seated  
**12:45** Removal of the National Flag from the coffin by the SANDF and handing over to the family  
Last Post and Reveille sounded  
SANDF bearers and Ceremonial Guard of Honour withdraw

### *Bearers*

Hearse to Cathedral: Family  
Cathedral to funeral venue: SANDF  
Funeral venue to hearse: SANDF  
Hearse to cemetery: SANDF

MWO LT Viljoen  
MWO TM Radebe  
MWO JZ Mnisi  
MWO JP Botha  
MWO J Majoko  
MWO MC Ngema  
MWO RS Rabotapi  
MWO TJ Dube

**Warrant Officer in charge of the bearer party**  
CWO KJ Papole

# *Obituary of Advocate George Bizos*

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## **Introduction**

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Advocate George Bizos lived for 92 eventful and hugely productive years. This obituary is a summary of his numerous and remarkable achievements. As a family, we are incredibly proud of his courage, dedication and unflinching commitment to justice, which was grounded in passion, wit and empathetic humanity. We celebrate his life, lived so well, and with boundless energy, optimism and selflessness. He served so many in the course of justice. We will always remember him and are very grateful for the many kind messages from the individuals and communities that his life and work embraced.

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## **Early life and education in Greece**

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Adv Bizos was born to Antonios (affectionately called Andoni) and Anastasia Bizos (née Tomara) on 15 November 1927 in the village of Vasilitsi, south of Koroni and Kalamata in Messinia, Greece. He was the first of four children. For some years his father deliberately suggested that Adv Bizos was a little younger to try to protect him from the risk of conscription into the war. Mr Bizos (a mayor of the village for a period) and his wife farmed olives.

Adv Bizos attended primary school in Vasilitsi and Koroni, and secondary school in Kalamata.

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## **Escape from Greece and arrival in South Africa**

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However, his schooling in Kalamata ended when Italy declared war on Greece in October 1940. In May 1941, at the age of 13, Adv Bizos, his father and others from the village, helped seven New Zealand soldiers who were hiding in the hills outside the village, to escape from Nazi-occupied Greece. They bought a rowing boat in the nearby port town of Koroni and attempted to row to Crete, 135 nautical miles away.

They were adrift for three days before managing to attract the attention of a British destroyer, the HMS Kimberley. As Crete had by then fallen under control of the German invaders, they were taken to a refugee camp in Alexandria. Adv Bizos attended the Kaniskero School of the Patriarchy of the Greek Orthodox Church for a few months. When it appeared that Egypt would fall to General Ervil Rommel's forces, his father decided to evacuate to South Africa. They travelled through the Suez Canal and down the East Coast of Africa, and survived potential attacks from German submarines.

They disembarked in Durban and travelled with other refugees by train to Johannesburg. They were taken to Braamfontein railway station because it was feared that the pro-Nazi Ossewa Brandwag would be demonstrating at Johannesburg Central Station. The Ossewa Brandwag blamed Jan Smuts for bringing the "vuilgoed" (rubbish) of Europe to South Africa. The local Greek community helped integrate the Bizos family.

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## **Education in South Africa**

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An attempt to enrol Adv Bizos in school, initially at Pretoria Boys High School, was unsuccessful because he was unable to speak English or Afrikaans. He then worked for board and lodging as a shop assistant at a Greek convenience corner shop in Johannesburg, until a teacher from a local school, Ms Cecilia Feinstein, recognised him as the refugee whose story and photograph had appeared in a local newspaper. She scolded the shop owner and insisted that Adv Bizos attend school the next day; starting at Malvern Junior High and later Athlone Boys High School where he matriculated in 1947, a few years older than his classmates.

His father wanted him to study medicine, but he decided to do law instead. In 1948, the year that the National Party was voted into power in South Africa, he was accepted to study for a Bachelor of Arts degree at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) and later studied for his Bachelor of Laws degree. It was at Wits that he became politically active and he served on the Wits Students' Representative Council.

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## Personal life

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After graduating, Adv Bizos married Arethe Ekaterini Daflos, a Johannesburg-born art student who passed away on 1 September 2017, after over 60 years of marriage. The couple had three sons and seven grandchildren. Their sons are Kimon, an Emergency Medicine Consultant based in England; Damon, a Professor of Surgery at Wits University, and Alexi, an engineer with a lighting business.

Adv Bizos had helped his siblings to join him in South Africa. His brother Stavros, who died in 1994, ran a successful catering company in Johannesburg, his sister Vaso worked for a period in Johannesburg but returned to the village for retirement and passed away the day after Adv Bizos in September 2020, and John, who studied at Wits and who passed away in August 2020.

When his mother visited Johannesburg in the 1960s for about three years, she established a substantial vegetable garden in his yard, which inspired Adv Bizos to become a devoted vegetable gardener for many years. Many people benefited from his vegetables, including his clients in prison.

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## Legal career

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Adv Bizos joined the Johannesburg Bar in 1954. As a personal friend of Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo, he acted as an advocate for their law firm long before Tambo escaped into exile and Mandela went on trial. During the 1950s and 1960s, he was Counsel to a wide range of well-known people, including Father Trevor Huddleston of Sophiatown. He defended small communities, particularly in the then western and eastern Transvaal (now North West and Mpumalanga respectively), who were affected by apartheid laws that had been legislated and implemented by the Nationalist government. Notably, he acted for activists in Zeerust who protested against the extension of Pass Laws to women.

At the Rivonia Trial of 1963-64, he and Arthur Chaskalson were junior members of the team, instructed by Joel Joffe and led by Bram Fischer and Vernon

Berrangé, that defended Mandela and others. The accused were sentenced to life imprisonment but spared the death penalty. Adv Bizos is credited with advising Mandela to add the words “if needs be” before he said that he was prepared to die.

He defended Mac Maharaj in the “Little Rivonia Trial” later in 1964. In 1966, Adv Bizos was led by Sydney Kentridge in defence of Fischer, who had been a significant personal and professional influence in Adv Bizos’s life.

In 1967, he defended Andimba Toivo ya Toivo and others who had been charged by South African authorities in connection with their activities in support of Namibian independence.

In 1976, he acted for the accused in the National Union of South African Students’ trial, which ended with the acquittal of all accused. Adv Bizos was Counsel for the families at numerous inquests into the deaths of people in detention, including for Ahmed Timol (who died in 1971), Steve Biko (who died in 1977) and Neil Aggett (who died in 1982). Adv Bizos’s book, *No One to Blame? In Pursuit of Justice in South Africa*, describes how these cases were a miscarriage of justice, which was borne out at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). At the insistence of the Timol family, in 2018 the inquest into Timol’s death was reopened and it was found that the security police were responsible and one of the surviving policemen, Joao Rodrigues, has now been charged with his murder.

Adv Bizos took silk in 1978 and became Senior Counsel at the Johannesburg Bar. He helped found the National Council of Lawyers for Human Rights in 1979. In 1982 he defended Rob Adam, who had been charged with membership of the African National Congress (ANC).

From the mid-1980s, Mandela asked Adv Bizos to be his emissary for discussions about the transition to a post-apartheid South Africa with the exiled leadership of the ANC.

At the Delmas Treason Trial, from 1985 to 1989, he represented Mosiuoa Patrick “Terror” Lekota and Popo Molefe. He represented Winnie Madikizela-Mandela on more than 20 occasions from the late-50s to 1992.

He also defended Albertina Sisulu and Barbara Hogan. Adv Bizos served as a judge on Botswana’s Court of Appeal from 1985 to 1993.

Although he never joined the ANC, he acted for Mandela and others pro Deo on many occasions. In 1990, he became a member of the ANC’s Legal and Constitutional Committee, and at the Convention for a Democratic South Africa between 1991 and 1993, he served as adviser to the negotiating teams and participated in drawing up the Interim Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. He was involved in drafting legislation, particularly the Truth and Reconciliation Bill and amendments to the Criminal Procedure Act of 1977, to bring it into line with Chapter 3 of the Constitution, guaranteeing fundamental human rights to all citizens of South Africa.

He officially joined the Legal Resources Centre (LRC) in 1991, at the request of his long-time colleague and friend, then Chief Justice Chaskalson. He continued to work as Senior Counsel from the LRC, supporting the work of its Constitutional Litigation Unit, mentoring junior lawyers inside and outside the LRC, some of whom became senior in the profession and in the judiciary.

At the TRC hearings, he was the leader of the team that opposed applications for amnesty on behalf of the Biko, Hani, Goniwe, Calata, Mkonto, Mhlauli, Slovo and Schoon families.

President Mandela appointed him to the Judicial Services Commission which, in terms of the Constitution, recommends candidates for appointment as judges and proposes reforms to the judicial system to enable it to transcend its apartheid past. Adv Bizos was a lifelong campaigner against the use of the death penalty. He led the team for the South African Government which successfully argued that the death penalty was unconstitutional. He led the legal team for government which ensured the adoption of the Constitution by the Constitutional Court.

In 2003/04, he defended Zimbabwean opposition politician Morgan Tsvangirai, who was charged with high treason by the Zimbabwean Government. Tsvangirai was acquitted in October 2004.

In 2005, he was legal adviser to Mandela in a legal dispute with Madiba’s former lawyer, Ismail Ayob. As an immigrant to the country with personal experience of his own struggle against prejudice, Adv Bizos represented the Chinese Association of South Africa in a case that ended in 2008 when Chinese South Africans were granted “previously disadvantaged” status, thus qualifying them for Black Economic Empowerment benefits.

Adv Bizos also led the LRC’s legal interventions on behalf of the families of those slain at Marikana; initiating the independent forensic work that exposed the horrors of the massacre and playing a significant role in placing evidence before the Farlam Commission of Inquiry into the killings.

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### **SAHETI School**

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Adv Bizos supported inclusive education and Hellenism, and worked for many years to establish SAHETI School in Johannesburg in 1974. When asked why he worked to support SAHETI School after it was too late for his own sons to attend, he said his grandchildren would go there, and indeed three of them did. The Johannesburg Hellenic community had tried for many years to establish sustainable schools in various parts of Johannesburg and its environs. After acquiring a 72-acre farm in Senderwood, Bedfordview, Adv Bizos was chairperson of the board of SAHETI and he worked with the committee to raise substantial funds from Hellenes throughout South Africa. The children of the assassinated political leader Chris Hani, attended the school on Adv Bizos’s advice. A scholarship fund has been established in his name.

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### **Parthenon sculptures**

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Adv Bizos was an avid member of the Committees for the Reunification of the Parthenon Marbles, both in South Africa and the United Kingdom.

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## George Bizos Human Rights Award

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In 2018 the LRC inaugurated the annual George Bizos Human Rights Award, which seeks to recognise those making a remarkable contribution towards protecting, upholding and advancing a culture of human rights in South Africa. It is hoped that this award will inspire human rights lawyers and all those who work tirelessly in the public interest.

The award also celebrates the life of “Uncle George”, as he was affectionately known by his friends and colleagues, and his dedication to the country’s journey to freedom. The recipient of this award in 2019 was Former Deputy Chief Justice Dikgang Moseneke.

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## Selected awards

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- Order for Meritorious Service Class II Medal, from President Mandela in 1999.
- Commander of the Order of the Phoenix, appointed by the President of Greece for contribution to Hellenism and the teaching of Greek.
- International Trial Lawyer Prize of the Year, International Academy of Trial Lawyers in 2001.
- Bernard Simons Memorial Award, International Bar Association in 2004 (nominated by President Mandela and others).
- Sir Sydney and Lady Felicia Kentridge Award for Service to Law in Southern

Africa, from the General Council of the Bar in 2004.

- Duma Nokwe Human Rights and Democracy Award in 2004.
- LLD (Honoris Causa) (Natal).
- LLD (Honoris Causa) (Wits).
- LLD (Honoris Causa) (Port Elizabeth).
- Further Honorary doctorates from the University of Cape Town, University of Pretoria, Rhodes University, University of Cyprus and then Vaal Triangle Technikon (now Vaal University of Technology).
- Johannesburg Bar, Honorary Life Member, October in 2004.
- Freedom of the City of London.
- Freedom of the City of Johannesburg.
- Freedom of the City of Athens.
- Honorary President of Hands Off Cain, an international body advocating the abolition of the death penalty.
- Appointed Ambassador for Hellenism by the Prefect of Attica and Athens in 2006.
- Appointed Honorary member of the Athens Bar in 1994.

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## Publications

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- *No One to Blame? In Pursuit of Justice in South Africa*, 1998
- *Odyssey to Freedom*, 2007
- *65 Years of Friendship*, 2017.

***Well done, Rest in Peace, Dad, Papou, Uncle George!***