

TRIBUTES

2025

MR MWAMBU WANENDEYA

(-2025)



Mr Mwambu Wanendeya worked as Public Affairs Officer in the Communications Division of the Commonwealth Secretariat from 1995 – 2006. During his tenure, he coordinated publicity opportunities with external media for the Secretary-General and other members of senior management.

- *I am sorry to inform that ex-ComSec staff member Mwambu Wanendeya passed away a couple of days ago after a long illness. He joined ComSec in 1995 I think and was chiefly responsible for radio, film and broadcasting matters, as well as the dissemination of Commonwealth news and public affairs duties. Mwambu died in his home country, Uganda, and I attach here information on his funeral arrangements. **Cheryl Dorall***

- *I was shocked and saddened to hear of Mwambu's passing. At Comsec he was in the same division as you and me but the Library was in the basement of Marlborough House and he was on the ground floor of Quadrant House across the road. However, he had a studio in the basement of Marlborough House and we occasionally saw him working there. We worked together a couple of times but not for long periods.*

*He was a lively person, highly intelligent and always ready to explore new ways of getting the Commonwealth better known. He had a number of high powered jobs after leaving Comsec, as shown on his LinkedIn page, where he describes his time at Comsec. He was an intensive user of X, formerly Twitter. **David Blake***

- *I am very sorry to hear of Mwambu's death. He was a consummate professional - hardworking, creative, bright but soft-spoken and engaging, with a good sense of humour. It was a pleasure to work with him on many projects over the years, and my heart goes out to his family. **Stuart Mole***
- *It was for me and I'm sure others, a deep sadness, to have heard of Mwambo's passing after a long illness. Mwambu Wanendeya was the perfect public affairs officer in the*

Secretariat when I arrived in April 2000. He very soon ensured I met all there was to meet across the key London media people who showed interest in the Commonwealth. He was the consummate professional who knew his trade intimately, could throw a press release together on his phone and ensured it landed well. Nothing was too much even in the weekends to ensure that I or the Commonwealth responded in an efficient manner. I was sorry when he left Comsec in 2006 but was pleased to see he went onto more greater and successful challenges. The fondest of good wishes and sympathy go out to his family who will always be proud of his achievements, from Clare and myself. Don McKinnon (Sir Don McKinnon, Commonwealth Secretary-General, 2000-2008)

- *I wanted to add my deep sadness at Mwambu's passing. For me as I joined COMSEC trying to navigate my way, he was a smiling light of happiness and can-do-ness. I can mainly see him scheming a press release, speech or media strategy over Mischa's desk readying something for the SG and then darting off to do something else totally necessary to make the Commonwealth come across as well as it could in any circumstance. And better. I am really sad at his passing - as a bright light in the world leaves us. Michele Law*
- *I too am sorry to read of Mwambu's death and of his long illness. Although not working for Comsec then I remember his contribution in broadcasting. Like Stuart I am thinking of his family now. Richard Bourne*

Selected links:

[Ugandans shining abroad: Mwambu is flying Uganda's flag in telecom business | Monitor](#)

[Tribute to Mwambu Wanendeya](#)

[Bing Videos](#)

ALISTAIR NIVEN
1944-1925



Colleagues will be sad to learn of the unexpected death last Wednesday March 26 of Dr Alastair Niven OBE LVO at the age of 81. a person devoted to the Commonwealth and active on its behalf, particularly in the areas of education and literature. It is understood that he tragically failed to survive a critical heart operation which, though major, had been fully expected to have a successful outcome.

Many CA colleagues will have encountered Alastair in his role from 2001 to 2013 as Principal of Cumberland Lodge where many major gatherings addressing key Commonwealth issues took place during his tenure. Or they may have encountered him earlier during his tenure as one-time Director General of the Africa Centre, or in his capacities as Director of Literature for the British Council or for the Royal Society of Arts.

Alastair was a Commonwealth Scholar at the University of Ghana in the 1960s and nearly 20 years later in the 1980s worked with Anastasios Christodoulou and Professor Tom Symons from Canada in launching a very success funding appeal for ACU's 75th anniversary. That is when I myself (then at ComSec) first became acquainted with him. For the past 15 years he has been first member, and for the past dozen years Chair, of the Support Group for the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan, during most of which time I was its Secretary. In that capacity he has organised and chaired the successful series of annual seminars and parliamentary receptions for Commonwealth Scholars in the Houses of Parliament. He performed this role for the Council for Education in the Commonwealth on whose Council he served for over a dozen years and with which he was still very active right until the day before his death his last week.

Alastair earlier served on the Executive of the Association of Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (ACLALS). He was at one time Chair of the Panel of Judges for the Commonwealth Literature Prize and served as Judge for the Booker Prize. He was personally acquainted with several of the giants of African and Commonwealth literature: I believe he was

asked to speak at Chinua Achebe's funeral in Nigeria.

We have lost a devoted friend of the Commonwealth, a distinguished scholar, a warm and generous man who had exceptional skills in bringing people together and creating consensus.

I understand the funeral will be a private family one but that there will later be a Memorial event. Alastair is survived by his wife Dr Helen Niven, whose address I can share with anyone who may wish to write to her, if they contact me by email.

Peter Williams

I remember him when he was a fellow at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies in the mid 80s. He has a long Who's Who entry:

Lecturer in English: Univ. of Ghana, 1968–69; Univ. of Leeds, 1969–70; Lectr in English Studies, Univ. of Stirling, 1970–78; Dir Gen., Africa Centre, London, 1978–84; Chapman Fellow 1984–85, Hon. Fellow 1985, Inst. of Commonwealth Studies; Special Asst to Sec. Gen., ACU, 1985–87; Lit. Dir, Arts Council of GB, then of England, 1987–97; Dir of Literature, British Council, 1997–2001; Principal, King George VI and Queen Elizabeth Foundn of St Catharine's, Cumberland Lodge, 2001–13. Visiting Professor: Univ. of Aarhus, 1975–76; Sheffield Hallam Univ., 1998–2002; Vis. Fellow, Aust. Studies Centre, Univ. of London, 1985; Hon. Lectr, SOAS, 1979–85; Hon. Fellow: Univ. of Warwick, 1988; Harris Manchester Coll., Oxford, 2012–. Editor, JI of Commonwealth Literature, 1979–92. Chairman: Public Schools Debating Assoc. of Eng. and Wales, 1961–62; Literature Panel, GLAA, 1981–84; Welfare Policy Cttee, 1983–87, Exec. Cttee, 1987–92, UK Council for Overseas Student Affairs; Southern Africa Book Develt Educn Trust, 1997–2003; Soc. of Bookmen, 2003–04; Bd, Border Crossings, 2013–21; Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan Support Gp, 2013–; Sec. and Treas., Assoc. for Commonwealth Lit. and Lang. Studies, 1986–89; Member: Public Affairs Cttee, Royal Commonwealth Soc., 1979–99; Laurence Olivier Awards Theatre Panel, 1989–91; British Library Adv. Cttee for the Centre for the Book, 1990–97; Home Office Standing Cttee on Arts in Prisons, 1995–97. Trustee: Millennium Liby Trust, 1998–2008; Council for Educn in the Commonwealth, 2013–21; Stephen Spender Trust, 2019–. President: Windsor WEA, 2003–13; English PEN, 2003–07. Judge: Booker Prize, 1994, Man Booker Prize, 2014; Forward Poetry Prizes, 1996; David Cohen British Literature Prize, 2000 (deviser of Prize, 1992); The Independent Foreign Fiction Prize, 2001; DSC Prize for South Asian Literature, 2012 (Mem., Mgt Cttee, 2012–14); Chairman of Judges: Eurasia Reg., 1994, 1995, Adv. Cttee, 1996–2006, Commonwealth Writers' Prize; Stakis Prize for Scottish Writer of Year, 1998; ESU Marsh Prize for Biography, 1999–2011; Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize for Arabic Literary Translation, 2017; Mem. Council, Caine Prize for African Writing, 2000–24 (Trustee and Chm., 2019–24). Chm. of Govs, Royal Sch., Windsor, 2004–08. Mem. Editorial Bd, Annual Register, 1988– (Chm., 2013–). Hon. FRSL 2021 (Benson Medal, 2021)

David Blake