

KCB | Branch Network

232<sup>nd</sup>  
BRANCH!

EXPANDING OUR  
BRANCH NETWORK TO  
GET CLOSER TO YOU!



Experience great service at  
our new Branch at Mbita Plaza  
in Mbita Town.

We are open from 8:30am to 4pm  
Weekdays  
and 8:30am to 12 pm on Saturdays.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

0732 187000 / 0711 087000 / 020 228 7000 | contactcentre@kcb.co.ke | kcbbankgroup | @kcbgroup

www.kcbbankgroup.com

KCB Making the Difference

TRIBUTE | Legacy of the first Nandi woman MP lives on

# The girl who fought 'men wars' at varsity, against Kenyatta rule

The passing of Chelagat marks end of an era of an inspirational woman leader

BY DOROTHY KWEYU  
dkweyu@ke.nationmedia.com

My memories of Philomena Chelagat Mutai date back to the early 1970s when I was an undergraduate at the University of Nairobi.

Sitting on a concrete slab overlooking the 'Box'—the nickname in those days of the sole women's hall of residence, we would instinctively avoid eye-contact with the tough lady, who was also the editor of the student newspaper, *The Anvil*.

In those early post-independence days, when passivity was second nature to women students who found it more natural for James Orendo to be the students union boss, it was natural that Miss Mutai should be regarded by fellow 'Boxers' as more of a curiosity than your average student.

One of her razor-sharp captions in *The Anvil* is still etched on my mind: "Mark your enemy No. 1 - Oswald!" The picture captured the then Central Police Station boss J. M. Oswald, who—in typical style—had unleashed his 'mboys' to teargas us as we protested the leadership of Prof F. Jorgensen at the architecture department for consistently failing African students.

#### Indefinite closure

That was in February 1974, and what followed was the indefinite closure of the university.

We were, therefore, not surprised when two years later, Miss Mutai became the youngest MP and first woman Nandi MP to become a member of Kenya's Third Parliament on September 8, 1974.

With her was Mrs Grace Akinyi Onyango, the first woman MP in post-independence Kenya.

Joining Parliament at the tender age of 24, Miss Mutai captured the nation's imagination, and Kenya women especially, for whom she was an inspiration of what an educated girl is capable of. Women can be forgiven for reading patriarchal mischief in the speed with which she fell from top legislator to a hounded jailbird.

Could she be the reason why



FILE | NATION  
Former Prime Minister Raila Odinga (right) accompanied by Mr. James Orendo and Mr Fred Gumo escort Ms Chelagat Mutai to a spinal injury hospital in Hurlingham, Nairobi, in June 2011.

Kalenjin women have dominated Kenyan politics?

Firebrand to the core, Miss Mutai was among the Seven Bearded Sisters, so nicknamed by then Attorney-General Charles Njonjo, who included her contemporary at the University of Nairobi and current Siaya Senator James Orendo.

For one so young and with the whole future lying ahead of her, Miss Mutai's political life and tenure in Parliament was, to say the least, short-lived. Her first brush with the law

was in September 1975—just a year into the Third Parliament—when she was accused of inciting people to violence at Ziwa Farm in Eldoret.

She lost her seat in June 1976 following her commitment to jail on March 10 of the same year.

Although she made a comeback in the Fourth Parliament after serving her jail term, she was to flee the country in October 1981 into self-exile in Tanzania after jumping bail on charges of forged mileage claims.

The Tanzanian government thwarted Kenya's efforts to repatriate her to face trial on criminal charges. When she came back in 1984, her political ambitions were technically over. She took up a job in the bank, which she later lost.

The last time Miss Mutai prominently featured in the news was in June 2011, when the then Prime Minister Raila Odinga responded to her SoS and took her to the Nairobi Spinal Injury Hospital, following an earlier road accident.

Her departure marks the end of an era of an inspirational woman leader, whose fall has been attributed first and foremost to the single-party intolerance of the Kenyatta and Moi regimes.

Her left-leaning views would never have endeared her to the capitalistic regimes.

#### BIOGRAPHY

### Key dates in ex-MP's life

- **October 1974:** Miss Mutai joins Parliament as the youngest MP aged 24 years
- **March 1976** - She is jailed for 30 months for inciting people to violence at an Eldoret farm.
- **1981:** She bounces back to the House in a by-election.
- **October 1981** - She flees into self-exile in Tanzania after jumping Sh50,000 bond.
- **April 1984** - She returns from self-exile.