Fair Trade Tourism pays Tribute to Paul Miedema

It was with disbelief and enormous sadness that we received the news of Calabash Tours owner Paul Miedema’s tragic death last week. Paul was not just one of Fair Trade Tourism’s oldest certified clients but a close friend and one of FTT’s most ardent supporters. He was revered as one of the most dedicated and respected leaders in responsible tourism in South Africa.
Condolence messages from our stakeholders all over the world have poured in giving tribute to Paul as a pioneer and leader in championing the cause of social justice. Over the years Paul spoke on many local and global platforms, never tiring in his quest to champion human rights, child protection, gender equality and other social causes, in support of Fair Trade Tourism and South Africa’s tourism industry, but most importantly for his home community in Port Elizabeth. His voice has been silenced but we at Fair Trade Tourism and his other peers in responsible tourism need to ensure that his ideals continue to be championed in the years to come.

Calabash Tours, which Paul founded in 1997, was at the forefront of responsible tourism locally and globally, winning many awards. It was named the joint overall winner at the first Responsible Tourism Awards held at World Travel Market in London in 2014, where it also won the category for poverty reduction. In 2013 Calabash won Best Social Involvement Programme and Best Practice Economic Impact at the Imvelo Responsible Tourism Awards, and it was often held up as a case study in successful pro-poor tourism. Paul also founded the Calabash Trust, a developmental NGO focusing on education and using travel philanthropy as a means of funding, which did much to improve people’s lives in townships around Port Elizabeth. He was just 45-years old at the time of his death.

Paul was passionate about transforming the tourism industry into one that truly creates “better places for people to live in and visit” and he worked tirelessly to promote this. Fair Trade Tourism will be a lesser organisation without his dedication and support but we are determined to ensure that his name and legacy will forever be tied to our goals.

Our deepest condolences go out to Paul’s family and closest friends whose grief we can only begin to comprehend.