

SACC Congratulates President Cyril Ramaphosa, and warns not to leave the Watch Tower over the Nation

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The South African Council of Churches extends hearty congratulations to President Cyril Ramaphosa, saying “A Warm Welcome to your new job Mr President! The State of the Nation Address was a breath of fresh air, and a promising beginning to President Ramaphosa’s short stop gap tenure ahead of the 2019 elections when he will seek a fresh mandate. He hit the bull’s eye on a number of points. He has signalled without equivocation, his commitment to exorcise the spirit of corruption and the culture of pillaging the public purse that has taken root in government and the SOEs. We applaud also, the twin focus on consolidating the economy, AND focus on the integration into the economy, the entrepreneurship and business mentorship of young people and rural economies with support for agricultural production and agribusiness pursuits by disadvantaged communities.

The President has addressed some of the immediate concerns that the churches had raised:

- To deal decisively with the cancer of corruption and State Capture that has exasperated South African citizens;
- To promote a government with the transparency and accountability of a servant ANC in government, in accordance with the prescripts of Section 41 of the Constitution.
- To make for a professional rather than politicized and corrupted civil service;
- To consider freeing up resources by reducing the weight of the Executive that currently absorbs more than 70 MPs with 35 ministers and 37 deputies, with all the attendant costs.
- To signal a path to stimulate the economy to reverse the country from the junk precipice, so that living conditions can improve; addressing poverty in general, and the gross youth exclusion from the economy.
- To raise the place, quality and significance of education as a social good and an antidote for poverty and inequality, and for social and economic decay.
- And to signal through the economic upliftment of black communities, the direction to heal the social and economic divisions of our society on race, and wealth.

As we congratulate President Ramaphosa, we also call on our congregations to intensify the prayers that we offer every week for the Office and Person of the President. The churches make this serious commitment in the light of all that is expected of the new president. Sadly:

- We live with physical, emotional and spiritual hunger, manifest in poverty, domestic violence and the breakdown of family life, drug and alcohol abuse, hopelessness, religious gullibility, low self-esteem, mistrust and despair.
- We live with social distress, racist flareups, xenophobia, ethnic retreating, and perpetual anger and violence that has become a running thread in our society.
- We live with the vulnerability of our institutional democracy - the woundedness of our constitutional democracy that plays itself out in the serious breakdown of public trust in public institutions; the depth of the mafia-style corruption and State Capture; political, racial and ethnic polarisation, inequality (highest in the world); and this together with a poor economic performance, high levels of debt, low business confidence and high unemployment, and general apathy.
- We live with church ministers who seem to have their bellies stuffed with reasons to mortgage their moral space and stand in accommodation and defence of corruption and moral decay. Jesus warned that “many false prophets will appear and lead many astray”. (Matt 24:11)

Against this background, the National Executive Committee of the SACC meeting on the day that President Zuma resigned, noted that the departure of President Zuma does not fundamentally change the deep-seated culture of corruption.

Surrounding all three tiers of Government is a gaping poisonous moat that chokes the upright in government and enfeebles the institutions of State. Dug over the years by the architects of gross corruption, it has to be drenched dry in order for the good service of government to come out to society. Initially the President has to build the necessary bridges over this moat, for trust to flow between the people and the government and its institutions.

- The cleanup campaign in the SOEs is laudable and has to continue to intensify.
- The commitment to identify and crack down on corporates found smoking in the corruption den of iniquity needs a follow through with some and their boards brought before courts for corrupt deals.
- We wish to add that the President could institute a practice of random lifestyle audits for members of the Executive and senior officials, to deter the practice of illicit incomes.
- The extension of the hand of the President to civil society, labour, business, academe and opposition prayer in Parliament is key to building those trust bridges.

The SACC National Executive Committee suggests that a very low hanging fruit for President Ramaphosa is to set the tone for ethical and accountable leadership in the government by setting a public standard of probity for the selection and appointment of cabinet ministers, senior officials and ambassadors representing government. Removing tainted officials and politicians and ringing changes at these levels will send a clear message that the moat will be drenched dry!

Last June the SACC National Conference red-carded the government as morally illegitimate - just shy of constitutional illegitimacy. The next session of the SACC National Executive and the National Church Leaders Forum in April will have the opportunity to review this position, based on what we shall have seen of the new administration. A positive outlook will encourage a greater collaboration with the legitimacy of government in the campaign for positive public values and standards through the SACC initiated National Convention of South Africa. And with the rest of our nation as it lives in the precincts of our congregations we might join in singing Masekela's prophetic call: **Thuma Mina! Send me!**

On our part we want the President Ramaphosa to know that the SACC will not leave the watch tower - looking over the nation. We continue to extend our blessings with a reminder of the message of the scriptures, for, as we've said before: God "makes nations great, and destroys them; he enlarges nations, and disperses them". (Job 12:23) And again we say with St Peter:

"Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock." (1 Peter 5:2-3)

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