
Hands off our democracy

In a call to defend our democracy, the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation and the South Africa Communist Party released a strongly worded petition reaffirming their commitment to defending our democracy and confronting the state capture fightback. It also held a public rally at the Johannesburg City Hall, site of many past protests against apartheid and in defence of democracy. Here is the text of that petition.

Here, we will make it clear that on what would have been Nelson Mandela's 101st birthday, we reflect on the fight for an ethical and efficient constitutional democracy, that puts the interest of the people first.

We honour and celebrate the lifetime of struggle and dedication exemplified by the likes of Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Ahmed Kathrada and numerous others in fighting apartheid and establishing a democratic society.

At the same time, we recognise the efforts of ethical leaders, as well as ordinary South Africans, over the last few years to protect the very democracy established by our liberation stalwarts.

However, despite recent victories against state capture and corruption, we are well aware that this fight has not come to an end. Networks that propped up the shadow state remain active and continue to undermine our democracy.

Today, we face a concerted fightback

against the renewal of our society by many of those implicated in state capture, and their stooges. Theirs is an attempt to subvert the processes underway to rebuild efficient and ethical governance, so that they may remain unaccountable.

The state, Chapter 9 Institutions, the legislature, political parties and private entities continue being used to hamper efforts to clean-up our government and make it work in the interest of all South Africans – not just a coterie of well-connected thugs.

The foundation of our democracy, the future of our country, and plans to positively transform the lives of our people are at stake.

We are at a crossroads that can either see us rebuilding the country after a decade of capture, or being drawn backwards to an ethically bankrupt state.

We are calling for ever higher levels of vigilance and energy in the defence of our democracy.

South Africans should unite in confronting the 'fightback' and putting an end to state capture networks that continue to brazenly operate.

All who took up the cudgels, picked up their pens, and raised their voices before, should once again proclaim: **Hands off our democracy!**

In kicking off what we believe is long-term work in mobilising society against the fightback, we refuse to allow ministers, public officials, whistle blowers, activists and journalists who speak out against state capture, to be targeted, subdued and defamed by political bullies, individuals and entities who seek to undermine their efforts.

We will also challenge the peddling of fake, and often highly racialised narratives, that aim to characterise those who fight state capture as being anti-black and anti-radical economic

transformation. These falsehoods are aimed at diverting attention from the looting and malfeasance.

We find it extremely concerning that the discredited 'rogue unit' narrative is being perpetuated yet again. What is disturbing is that this effort is being driven premised on recent reports by the office of the Public Protector. Public money – going into the billions – has been diverted from state coffers over the last few years, but our Public Protector seems to be overly preoccupied with the old 'rogue unit' narrative that has been widely debunked. This narrative has been previously exposed as being a tool that was used to cripple SARS's effectiveness in fulfilling its mandate of bringing tax dodgers to book.

There have been attempts to convince us that state capture is either a figment of our imagination, or a concept used by covert agencies to persecute certain people.

These arguments surely have no currency with the public, who have really borne the brunt of the day-to-day consequences of a hollowed-out state. It is the public who have had to put up with Eskom's electricity cuts; with poor services because of failing municipalities; with infrastructure that is old and unreliable; and with gang wars, drug dealers and rampant crime because of a criminal justice system that has been systematically weakened. It is the Rands in our pockets, pension funds and investments that went tumbling down due outrageous Cabinet changes. It is the ordinary person who feels the pinch of a tightening economy.

Failure to acknowledge that billions have been lost in the last few years under the watch of those who think that they are victims of plots and conspiracies – is perhaps a bid to absolve themselves of any



accountability for the mess this country finds itself in.

The effects of state capture and corruption have been laid bare:

- Those who should have been paying millions of Rands in taxes were aided by unscrupulous elements within SARS and other institutions to deprive our country of valuable revenue.
- Our state-owned enterprises have been rendered bankrupt or incapable of optimally delivering critical services.
- Government has not been able to deliver basic services such as health, education, utilities and housing. It was repurposed to serve a rent-seeking political and corporate elite.
- Good, honest public representatives and civil servants, who refused to do the bidding of corrupt masters, were pushed out of their positions.
- The capacity of government to meet its fundamental role – meeting the needs of all South Africans – has been reduced, and our institutions hollowed out.

- Parliament was unable to fulfil its role in holding the executive to account regarding the Nkandla matter under former President Jacob Zuma’s administration.
- Our economy has stopped growing because we are unable to attract significant investment.
- Unemployment is rising and poverty and hunger is becoming commonplace.
- We face even further economic crises if rating agencies are not convinced that we will have a clean, efficient and capable government.
- The criminal justice system, particularly in areas of prosecution and crime intelligence, was systematically corroded and manipulated for political purposes.

Some of the successes in addressing issues include:

- Public pressure that resulted in ending a Presidency which saw South Africa stumble through nine largely detrimental years.
- The establishment of three commissions of inquiry all related to the abuse of state institutions and state capture. These include the Commission of Inquiry into Allegations of State Capture, the Commission of Inquiry into Tax Administration and Governance by SARS, and the Commission of Inquiry into Allegations of Impropriety at the Public Investment Corporation (PIC).
- We have also seen the re-appointment of the Governor of the South African Reserve Bank, a new temporary PIC Board appointed, the appointment of a new National Director of Public Prosecutions, as well as the firing of former SARS Commissioner, Tom Moyane.

In taking forward the fight against state capture, we:

- Affirm our support for the work of the Commission of Inquiry into

- Allegations of State Capture.
- Will continue voicing our dissatisfaction with compromised individuals holding official positions within government.
- Call on the National Prosecuting Authority to begin instating charges against individuals and entities, who, through credible evidence, have been implicated in state capture and corruption.
- Call on President Cyril Ramaphosa, and all political parties - irrespective of ideological or other differences - as well as the South African public, to defend and rally behind public representatives and civil servants who have stood up to corruption and who are tackling state capture.
- Call for cross party unity to have the National Assembly begin the process of reviewing Public Protector Advocate Busisiwe Mkhwebane’s fitness to hold office, based on various adverse court findings on several of her reports.
- Call on Parliament to institute and formalise sound processes for the appointment of key public servants within the state and in Chapter 9 Institutions.
- Demand transparency around political party funding.
- Open the debate around electoral reform.
- Call for a clean-up of the criminal justice system, where as a start processes are put in place to remove those with criminal records or poor competency levels.
- Call for the revival of networks which helped us achieve key victories in the fight against state capture. This must include the private sector playing a role in reviving our economy, civil society acting vigilantly against all acts of corruption and political parties taking a moral stance and committing to tackling state capture and corruption, even if perpetuated by their own members. **NA**