
Former President Motlanthe speaks the truth – to us, and to power

What Kgalema Motlanthe has to say

State corruption has reached new heights – or rather depths – with the criminal abuse of funds meant for those worst hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, South Africa's poorest and most vulnerable and those who risked their lives on the frontline. Decent people in our country are in disbelief and despair. President Cyril Ramaphosa has called in the Hawks and some individuals have been marched off in handcuffs. So what is the state of criminality and corruption now, and do we dare to hope?

New Agenda interviewed former President and the chairperson of the board of the Institute for African Alternatives (IFAA), Kgalema Motlanthe, who spoke of what should have been a very different ANC, one that operates deep within the community. He warned that factionalism within the party is preventing the ANC from being the organisation it was meant to be. In this frank interview he shares his regrets and doubts about the ruling party and the state it currently is in.

NEW AGENDA:

Is the ANC a criminal organisation?

KGALEMA MOTLANTHE:

Any organisation, including the ANC, is always more than the sum total of its members. That mitigates the question as to whether we can say it is a criminal organisation. No, it is not a criminal organisation. However, the conduct of members who have been given responsibilities, in all three spheres of government, have been found wanting because as public representatives they come into [contact with] certain information about planned projects and so on. If that information is used to advantage some people who then [take] kickbacks, that is corruption and that's part of the problem we are dealing with. That is part of the problem that gives the ANC a bad name. But the ANC itself as an organisation is not a criminal organisation, it doesn't desire to participate in organised acts

of criminal activity. Given its history, its mores and norms and its ethics acquired over decades, it has a standing above what the individual members do.

NEW AGENDA:

Has the ANC been captured, by elements within it?

KGALEMA MOTLANTHE:

The party seems to legitimise the existence of factions. Ordinarily factions and those kinds of tendencies are frowned upon and not countenanced in the organisation. Now every day we are confronted by views and actions which are tendentious. There is the recent example of certain groups from the Free State province who demonstrated outside Luthuli House [ANC headquarters] in support of the Secretary General [Ace Magashule] and then another group from the same province came to demonstrate, calling for the Secretary General to step aside.



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You have these polarised, factionalised actions and views expressed in public from time to time which communicates the message that the factions are given prominence and eminence in the ANC at this point in time. The constitution of the ANC doesn't allow for this kind of thing. That is not the mode of existence of the ANC if we follow how the ANC is structured. But, yes, we can say the ANC has been captured by factions within it.

NEW AGENDA:

Our President, in a letter to the party membership, metaphorically referred to the ANC as accused number 1 in the dock. Do you agree? Hypothetically, what then would be the charges, and what would the judge in such a case rule?

KGALEMA MOTLANTHE:

The standing and prestige of the ANC has been severely damaged by evidence adduced in courts of law as well as the Zondo Commission, and even in public spaces and general discourse many South Africans feel that the ANC has let them down. Those who expected the asbestos programmes to be addressed, those who are without potable water, and literally draw water from rivulets that are used by livestock

and other animals ... these concerns of a broad section of the population leave some feeling that the ANC has let them down because of the high levels of crime and corruption. I think that when the President in his letter stated that the ANC is accused number 1, the factions of course immediately repeated that and threw it back at the President in very strong terms. But in a manner of speaking I think there is a deep sense of betrayal of trust. Many people who trusted the ANC feel betrayed by their experience and the debate revolves around two broad issue, corruption on the one hand and poor service or complete absence of public service [on the other]. Hypothetically, I think in such a case we do definitely find the ANC guilty of betraying trust among voters and ordinary South Africans.

NEW AGENDA:

Can the ANC rebuild its lost integrity, as our late editor and director, Professor Ben Turok, once asked in this publication?

KGALEMA MOTLANTHE:

The ANC as an organisation in the early days of its history was regarded as the natural political home of those

who were oppressed under apartheid and those who value democracy and therefore opposed apartheid. Now, after the unbanning of the ANC, it is an organisation of card-carrying members, whereas in its history it had the broadest cross-section of South Africans identifying with its strategic goals. Now of course the ANC is exclusive to card-carrying members, and few are elected into any leadership structures. Your only opportunity to participate in the political life of the ANC is at branch level and when general members' meetings are convened, but those are rare and far apart. The majority of the ANC's members do not have the opportunity to participate in its political life. We have a situation where the elected leadership structures, which were meant to coordinate and lead the general membership, have now substituted themselves for the general membership.

This exclusivist approach means that the ANC is that much poorer. It is unable to benefit from the inputs and thinking of its own general membership and as such it is therefore increasingly isolated from the South African population because the branch, which is strategically located within a ward within the community, is not >>



functioning as it ought to. So the meetings are exclusively those of the leadership and they deal with matters esoterically, so to speak.

As to the integrity of the ANC, there is a structure called the Integrity Commission, but what we have observed is that the structure is burdened by issues that ought to be addressed by the elected leadership. Yet because it is factionalised it tends to refer those kinds of issues, which should be the purview of elected leadership, to the commission. The commission therefore is unable to deal with issues of integrity. For example, in the province of Limpopo when the government and the premier presented corrugated iron structures to people, in my book the integrity commission of the ANC should be addressing that kind of issue, not how much each structure cost or whatever. [It should] call its premier and the chair of the province and enquire where such a political attitude comes from. Is this how it views the citizens in Limpopo, is this what they deserve, and can the ANC only provide that kind of service? If they fail that test of integrity the commission should say you are not proper to hold leadership positions because your political attitude is flawed. Those leaders ought to be removed from the position of

leadership if that is their attitude and if that is how they view ordinary people. I am using this example to explain what I understand by the word integrity. That is an instance where the ANC acted without integrity.

And so to the question, can the ANC rebuild its lost integrity? Theoretically yes it can, if these kinds of actions are called out and those behind them suffer the consequences because the ANC exists to solve the problems of South Africans.

NEW AGENDA:

You say ordinary people are no longer involved in participation and decision making in the ANC. Do you think we should be returning to a structure like the [United Democratic Front] UDF where ordinary people did participate, on the ground, in their streets, in their communities? Was it a mistake to dismantle the UDF in 1991?

KGALEMA MOTLANTHE:

The decision to disband the UDF at that time was really informed by the desire to create a more unifying structure and the assumption was that the general members' meetings [would] be held on a regular basis and that the members of a branch in a ward would concern themselves with the wellbeing of the community. That is what the

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UDF used to do. Remember the UDF was a front of many non-governmental organisations. It brought together trade unions, civic and religious bodies, sporting bodies and all of that. I think the issue was that apartheid in its brutal form denied ordinary South Africans [the opportunity] to participate in the body politic of South Africa. I think once 1994 happened there was a mistaken view that this is it, now we are in a position to repeal all of the draconian laws and create an environment in which people can participate in the body politic and therefore the ANC is home to all those who associate with its principles. I am saying this was the assumption because the ANC at that point did not say that if we are to be [a] truly representative organisation then we must open up to all South Africans to come into the fold.

In the days of illegality and brutal apartheid only the daring could participate and therefore the majority of those who were not as daring as the others delegated their right of participation to those who were willing to risk life and limb. Now, after 1994, the ANC should have said that all along we have been saying that we waged the struggle in the name and on behalf of the people. Now, where are the



people? The people must have a say in how they want to be structured, what organisation they want to belong to and all [must] make a contribution towards the building of a new South Africa. The ANC did not pause to ask that question and so it remained an organisation which operated like a political party. Members must join. Not even COSATU or SACP members were regarded as ANC members. You had to join the ANC as individuals and this is what has robbed the ANC of its broad perspectives and views. That way it increasingly became a narrow-based organisation. Because it was locally based, with a national leadership, the UDF was a truly representative structure and therefore people had the opportunity to participate in the life of the UDF, but [in] the ANC's branches it's a struggle because the branch is not providing the kind of support and service to residents in the ward.

If somebody experiences violence in their home they have no way to report it except to the police. If the ANC branch was focusing on real community issues it would have a [phone] number that is available 24/7 and manned by five or so comrades who would take turns to listen to messages, to respond and so on. If a branch was really on top of issues it would know that this call, this distress call, comes from such a number down such a road and so when we receive this distress call the nearest comrades, trusted comrades, [would] go there and attend to the issue. This message would be relayed, response would be prompt. In my view that is the only way the ANC can restore and rebuild its integrity and standing in the eyes of ordinary South Africans.

In certain instances there will be an elderly couple who must still run errands. If there are young people in the branch of the ANC every day without fail one [must] go past and just check if there are any errands to run, if all is well, and if there is a problem the structure should be activated to respond to that problem.

That way you don't have to wait for the eve of elections and go door to door and distribute t-shirts and so on because I am afraid that in the near future people will simply say we have a pile of t-shirts but can't you do better than that? In other words, the interaction would be reduced to literally patronage, trading on the votes of the electorate rather than serving the residents, being at their service all of the time.

NEW AGENDA:

Does the ANC's constitution match our country's, and are there instances in which they create a conflict of interest for party members?

KGALEMA MOTLANTHE:

Rule 25 of the ANC constitution defines what constitutes misconduct or an offence in terms of the constitution. Now recently I have seen and read [the] ANC spokesperson saying the organisation is still going to develop policy on how internal campaigning to leadership positions should be conducted and the use of money in that context, and I think what are they talking about? The ANC constitutions, right up to the conference in 2012, had a rule, rule 25. 5, subsection u. I am trying to quote it verbatim – which says giving, collecting and raising funds for campaigning within the ANC with the aim of influencing outcomes of the conference or a meeting is misconduct which must set disciplinary procedures in motion. So the use of money for campaigning for political decisions was an offence in its constitution right up to 2012. Now between the 2012 conference and the [2017] Nasrec conference this rule was deleted from the constitution. It is not there now, as I speak to you. This was not amended by conference at all. It was just deleted at the point when the new constitution was sent to printers.

NEW AGENDA:

Was it a unilateral decision by some individuals?

KGALEMA MOTLANTHE:

Yes, because this was seen as a headache. This was to legitimise the use of money to buy people and votes and so on. That is now permissible. This speaks to how the ANC policies were manipulated. This rule was clearly seen as a headache and in order to create the space for vote buying it had to be deleted. It could not be presented to conference as a proposed amendment because then [conference] would want a motivation.

I have raised [this] with the President, said to him ... in your response to questions in parliament [you] admitted in writing once [that] Bosasa money was for your campaign for leadership so you have made that admission. It is going to hamper your efforts of fighting against corruption because each time you say to the NEC anyone who is facing corruption charges must step aside, they will throw this into your face. They will say to you, well and good but let's start with you. Read this constitution, this rule and the manner in which it was deleted and work out how you are going to provide leadership on this issue.

Ordinarily the constitution of the ANC [stipulates] that six months ahead of conference ad hoc committees must be established for receiving [and] collating proposals to amend the constitution because such proposals once collated must be circulated to general membership three months ahead of conference. That's what the constitution stipulates. This did not happen in respect of this rule. Because it did not happen ordinarily it would just take one member to say 'look comrades, there is something that happened to the constitution here which is unconstitutional and therefore it is a nullity and the rule is reinstated. Ordinarily you deal with it in that way. But in the factionalised environment others will respond by saying conference itself is a nullity. It is a difficult one, but leaders are elected to lead. **NA**