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# Stop the rot!

By Rev Frank Chikane

A paragraph cannot do justice to the biography of the Reverend Frank Chikane who has played many roles in the struggle for democracy. Outspoken ANC stalwart known for speaking out against corruption in the party, he has served as Director General in the Office of the President under Thabo Mbeki, General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches, moderator in the World Council of Churches, international president of the Apostolic Faith Mission and until recently pastor of its Naledi church in Soweto. Chikane was prominent in the United Democratic Front and constantly harassed by the apartheid security establishment, which tried to poison him. The author of many books and winner of many awards and internal accolades, his name is synonymous with the struggle against Apartheid.

*Create a new people's movement of all the people of South Africa! That is the clarion call from UDF and ANC veteran Frank Chikane, who has spent years leading the fight for transformation. He warns that the corrupt and criminal within the ruling party appear set on bringing the whole country down with them should they fall.*

**T**here are among us those who are dead set on bringing down not only the ANC, but the whole country rather than face the consequences of their corrupt and fraudulent activities of the last decade and more. They plan to do the "Samson thing". Like Samson, who collapsed the pillars holding up the temple, and brought the entire structure crashing down in a pile of rubble, they wish to

bring down the ANC and the country together with it. This the people of South Africa must resist. This they must stop, now and not later.

Most of those who have such intentions are found within the governing party, the African National Conference (ANC). To bring it down you have to be strategically next to the central pillars of a structure that holds the building together.

They have looted the coffers of the state and raided the vaults of key strategic State-Owned Entities (SOEs), not only to enrich themselves, but to build a war-chest to ensure that they remain in power, or continue to control the levers of power in government to ensure they never go to jail. Some of the loot is used for patronage to secure their political support.

To make their rotten strategy look legitimate, they distort the "radical socio-economic transformation" policy of the ANC, which is about the people, into a policy, now dubbed 'radical economic transformation' (RET), for the enrichment of individuals, families, friends and their political factions. This

is done at the expense of the poorest of the poor in the country, who continue to live in abject poverty 26 years into a free non-racial democratic South Africa.

It is now a commonly known fact that the British-based Bell Pottinger public relations (PR) company was contracted to develop the strategy to achieve and implement this. According to leaked documents, the PR company was to develop a campaign with a "narrative that grabs the attention of the grassroots population who must identify with it, connect with it and feel united by it". One does not need to be a sophisticated analyst to see this for what it is – a pseudo-revolutionary militancy that is used to shield the worst cases of corruption and fraud which have brought the country's economy to its knees.

Today, South African Airways – the national airline that was once the pride of the country – is on the brink of collapse. We have many ailing SOEs that are draining the resources of the country to bail themselves out of bankruptcy, having failed to use these resources to radically change the lot of



the people of South Africa. This rot was aided by those who were (and some still are) at the highest levels of government, nationally, provincially and at local government levels. Their actions have contributed to weakening our national economy, relegating it to 'junk status' well before the coronavirus hit us and worsened the situation.

Politically, many have abandoned the strategic objectives of the national democratic revolution (NDR) which aimed to better the lives of those who were victims of apartheid. Instead, they now are engaged in a struggle for power at all costs to avoid going to jail. In Kwa-Zulu Natal (KZN) this has deteriorated into political assassinations, which would be seen as a major national crisis in any other country. Strangely enough South Africans seem not to be alarmed by it. With more than 20 municipal election candidates killed in 2016, results were announced without even a mention of this tragic development. There was not even an expression of condolence to the families who had lost their loved ones and children who were left parentless. Maybe the citizens of this country, particularly KZN, have become numbed to the violence. There are signs that this culture is beginning

to extend beyond the borders of KZN; if not checked, that will soon become the way of life in the country.

Socially, the COVID-19 pandemic has shown the fault lines of our post-1994 society by exposing the worst forms of poverty and inequalities that define themselves in racial terms. The deep racial divide has been brought to the surface for all to see. All of this is threatening the future of the country and its people. In the midst of this life and death crisis some saw an opportunity to enrich themselves through the generous state contracts intended for personal protective equipment (PPEs), even if it risked the lives of the frontline workers, patients and the country as a whole.

Such people engaged in these acts without thinking that they could be called to account. They also thought that by capturing the ANC and key strategic parts of the state, like the intelligence services, the leadership of the police and the national prosecuting authority, and with the war-chest they had built through corrupt means, they were untouchable and invincible.

Some of us had warned the leadership that "power does come to an end", and that whilst they have it they

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should "use it for the benefit of the people and not for your self-interests or the interest of your family, friends and factions". We warned that "they must not engage in criminal activities thinking that they would be in power for ever". But these warnings fell on deaf ears.

Now the Zondo Commission on state capture is closing in on those who were responsible for this rot. The state is succeeding in cleaning and strengthening the National Prosecuting Authority. The police service is able to act without fear or favour. Those who are in the line of sight of these charges are becoming more desperate. They appear dead set on destabilising the country and bringing it down with them. They want to hold the country hostage with threats that they will reveal all. We should dare them to do so. The country will be better off if all the criminals who are looting the coffers of the state paid back the money and went to jail.

This is where "we the people" come in! I have said before that the top six leaders of the governing party, the ANC, have the first and primary responsibility to stop this dangerous trend that is threatening not only the very existence of the ANC, but also the future of the >>

country. If they fail, then the National Executive Committee (NEC) of the ANC is the next line of defence. If it fails, the branches of the ANC, which form “the basic structure of the organisation” where members “exercise their basic democratic rights to discuss and formulate policy”, must be the last line of defence within the ANC.

My expectation was that the branches and members of the ANC would be the ones that would lead the march against the rot that is threatening the very existence of their organisation. I expected them to take to the streets and say, “no, not in our name”. I expected that even if they could not do it for themselves, they would do it to preserve the legacy of their organisation and its legendary leaders – Luthuli, Tambo, Mbeki, Sisulu, Kathrada, Ngoyi, Joseph, and all. This is beginning to emerge, but not enough yet to stop the suicidal brigade. If branches of the ANC and its members fail, it will mean that they are also captured and serve the interests of those who have deviated from the trajectory the ANC set to serve the interest of the people, particularly the poor.

The people of South Africa should not wait until the rot within the ANC brings us all down as it will be a huge challenge to rise up again. The people must prepare and position themselves to be the last line of defence for themselves and the country. This will require all of us to move beyond our own self-interest, group interest, and even party partisan positions and interests. We must focus on defending the country from the rotten few within the ANC and society in general. This will require us to unite to save the country and return it to the trajectory that was designed to create an equitable non-racial, non-sexist, democratic and prosperous society.

The South African Council of Churches (SACC) started on this journey as early as 2016 by establishing the “Unburdening Panel” when the

treasonable acts of state capture surfaced. The Panel was to allow those who had information to come forward under relatively safe conditions.

The outcomes were frightening, and interaction with the leadership of the ANC indicated that it was totally paralysed and could not stop these treasonable acts or deal with the rot.

Having resolved at its National Conference that the government was morally illegitimate – a radical position for a democratically elected government – the SACC convened a National Convention of South Africa which produced the “Civil Society Manifesto”, launched in March 2019. The Manifesto is premised on the “Post-Apartheid Promise” of “a just, reconciled, peaceful, equitable and sustainable society, free of racism, tribalism, xenophobia and gender prejudices; free of corruption and deprivation; with food and shelter for every citizen, and where every child born can grow to its God-given potential”.

In the words of the General Secretary of the SACC, “The SACC and the Nation will not stand idly by and watch a reversal of our country’s good gains”.<sup>1</sup>

That is why the SACC declared September 2020 a month to campaign against COVID-19 corruption with a clarion call that “Corruption is not our Heritage” and must be stopped! It mobilised other faith communities and civil society entities to work together on this campaign. Civil society groups, including Veterans and Stalwarts of the ANC, engaged in similar campaigns by mobilising all sectors of society to resist the capture of the state, which was at its height between 2016 and 2017.

To stop this rot, we the people of South Africa must unite in action. We must come together notwithstanding our differences and irrespective of colour or political affiliation or persuasion.

The call for ‘unity in action’ reminds us of the January 8, 1983 Statement of the ANC, which was amplified by OR Tambo, then President of the ANC, in the party’s



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journal, *Sechaba*, and on Radio Freedom. Then the crisis in the country had reached a critical stage. The Apartheid regime was becoming desperate as power was slipping from its hands. It required the unity of all the people of South Africa to save the country – blacks and whites, from all political expressions and structures in our society, the labour movement and the business sector, and all community based organisations countrywide, including all religious formations and expressions.

This resulted in the formation of the United Democratic Front (UDF) in 1983. Within a short time the UDF had grown – no part of the country was left untouched. Even the notorious security police and intelligence services could not cope with it. Maybe this might be the time to establish something that resembles it.

To achieve the objective of mobilising the country from the bottom up, the SACC adopted the local (ward) based form of ecumenism. This was embodied in its strategy to minister effectively to all the people of South Africa in a collaborative and inclusive way. All churches in South Africa are expected to work together with communities wherever they find themselves. The vision is to organise churches and community organisations and developmental entities to work together, ward-to-ward, and empower



the communities to take charge of their lives, starting with early childhood development (ECD), and embracing schools and health facilities. The targets are basic services and poverty alleviation by working together to monitor local government audits (Auditor General Reports). During the COVID-19 pandemic this Pastoral Strategy became useful in the form of Local Ecumenical Action Networks (LEANs). Similar efforts of this nature are “Cape Town Together” Community Action Networks (CANs) and “Gauteng Together” CANs.

The inclination of those who occupy public positions to enrich themselves is

widespread. If not vigorously combated, it is destined to be the biggest threat to South Africa’s revolutionary change.”<sup>2</sup>

It seems to me that this is the time for *Ke Nako*, to work together as the people of South Africa to create a people’s movement of all the people of South Africa. It is the time to stop the rot. It is time to stop the corrupt and rotten from pulling down the pillars on which South Africa is built, to bring the country down with them.

*KE NAKO!*Aluta Continua.

### REFERENCES

National Convention of South Africa #ConveningSA ‘SACC and the nation will not stand idly by and watch a reversal of our country’s good gains’ by Bishop Malusi Mpumlwana, General Secretary, SACC. Civil Society Manifesto Published Statement *City Press*,<sup>2</sup> February 2020. Available at <<https://mailchi.mp/bocc8f956f30/conveningsa-civil-society-manifesto-published-statement-city-press-2-february-2020>>.

### ENDNOTES

1. <https://mailchi.mp/bocc8f956f30/conveningsa-civil-society-manifesto-published-statement-city-press-2-february-2020>
2. (Para 39, *Umrabulo* Special Edition, draft 12112020.pdf) < Available at <https://www.ortamboschool.org.za/umrabulo-journal-downloads/> > **NA**