

26 February 2021

Statement

From the desk of the General Secretary, Bishop Malusi Mpumlwana

SACC STATEMENT OF THE DESTABILISATION OF THE COUNTRY

The heads of churches of the South African Council of Churches (SACC) met on Thursday, 25 February 2021, and expressed alarm and concern at the manner in which a certain sector of our society appears to sit lightly on the South African constitutional order. They respect the constitution only on terms favourable to their immediate interests. We wish to reaffirm that the law of the land, the pinnacle of which is the Constitution, should always claim its place of honour, and not be swayed by defiance and prevarication which seek to replace the rule of law.

As we read the signs of the times (Matthew 16:3), we see indications across the body politic, that there are some who stand for their short-term individual and personal interests, at the express expense of the South African nation and the institutions designed to equitably serve the interests of all South Africans over time.

We wish to make it known to all who would undermine and destabilise the South African constitutional order that this is not acceptable and will not be tolerated. Nobody, but nobody is, and will be treated as above the other 60 million South Africans in the application of the law. The rule of law must be predictable and it must be even-handed and equitable. Anyone with a just cause concerning the unjust application of the law must do so within the law and not to spite the law, and thereby destabilise society.

Recently the SACC expressed “deep concern about the possible implications of the declared decision by former President Jacob Zuma not to cooperate with, and to turn his back on the processes of the Zondo Commission.” We also sounded the alarm on Mr. Zuma’s language of referring to the South African law, as “their law”, presumably referring to those with whom he disagrees. We warned that this was laying a foundation for a movement of people who support Mr. Zuma outside the walls of the law of the land, and that this might lead to people being killed. As it now stands, Mr. Zuma’s actions of refusing to come before the Zondo Commission have given other individuals license to do the same.

In his capacity with the official title of Former President, and all the regulatory provisions and responsibilities that go with that title, Mr. Zuma is a constitutional being. As we said at the time, referencing his constitutional status as former president, “In this regard alone, Mr. Zuma cannot be outside the law and make it ‘their law’; for nobody is above the law of the land.”

Therefore, even for Mr. Zuma, and maybe precisely because it is him – a former president and a constitutional being, he cannot do anything that points the direction outside the rule of law. For example, to encourage the posting outside his home, of a para-military guard that has no legal status and is not regulated anywhere in the law of the land is in itself treading in the domain of lawlessness. Might there also be arms caches that relate to paramilitary units, maybe in different parts of the country even? Might there be people receiving illegal military-style training that society should worry about? The word of Prophet Zechariah persuades differently, “These are the things that you shall do: Speak the truth to one another, render in your gates judgments that are true and make for peace, do not devise evil in your hearts against one another, and love no false oath; for all these are things that I hate, says the Lord.” (Zechariah 8:16-17)

In a recent article on this incipient lawlessness, Prof. William Gumede of Wits University warned that South Africa is headed the Mexico way “where the criminal underworld, cartels and gangs have terrifying power and have brazenly created no-go zones, defied laws and violently attacked police forces without being brought to book...The country is on the verge of a terrifying plunge into full-scale, Mexico-like lawlessness, chaos and social breakdown, with political, security and criminal cartels running large parts of the government, communities and civil society.”

The leaders of the member churches of the South African Council of Churches are concerned that the tendency to undermine the rule of law is brewing in the very party with the constitutional responsibility to uphold and protect the law as government, the African National Congress. It is in the governing party that we have seen the makings of the cartels that Gumede points to; with excesses of corruption and impunity; and it is in the governing party that we see elements that seem to champion lawlessness and destabilisation, including threats of a *coup d'etat* or insurrection.

The preamble to the Constitution ends with the words: “May God protect our people”. It is indeed the constitutional imperative for the church to rise to protect the people of South Africa in the name of God, for “we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us” (2 Cor. 5:20a). It is an imperative that we seek to share with all who call upon the name of the Lord, for tomorrow is not in our hands, and may be too late. As the Book of James says, “Anyone who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, commits sin” (James 4:17).

Let it be set on record that in November 2020, the SACC offered to meet Mr. Zuma “to explore issues related to the impasse on the Zondo Commission.” There was no response to this request. In our February 2021 statement we, yet again, offered the opportunity to engage with Mr. Zuma on any possible options to meet the requirements of the Commission to testify and not defy. Things have now reached a stage where we are duty bound to call his action and that of his supporters for what it is, an option for the destabilisation of the country. This appears to be part of a broader trend that is playing out in internal ANC politics where justifications for this behaviour have to be politically sustained.

We stand to warn the governing party that South Africans will not stand for and tolerate destabilisation and chaos from any quarter, and certainly not from the ranks of a party charged by the Constitution with the responsibility for public order. The trust of South Africans given at elections is sacred, and we need the African National Congress in government to reassure South Africa that as a party they wholeheartedly support and defend the Constitution and its institutions, including the judiciary that has repeatedly been attacked publicly without evidence of wrongdoing adduced. These are the makings of institutional destabilisation.

Any party that is presently leading Government at local or provincial or national level should not use its privilege of influence in a way that leads the country into chaos and disarray. Specifically, disagreements within the ANC must not be managed at the expense of the country and its 60 million citizens. We call on the ANC as the leading party, to pronounce openly about the tendency in its ranks, and act decisively on what appears set to destabilise the South African constitutional order.

The SACC heads of churches yearn to hear from South Africans, a loud “NO to Destabilisation!”

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About SACC

The South African Council of Churches (SACC) is an ecumenical association of affiliated Christian Churches, and blocks of churches such as The Evangelical Alliance and the Council of African Independent Churches, and the International Federation of Christian Churches, share in the mandate to lead common Christian action that works for moral witness in South Africa. SACC does not exist for the propagation and the advancement of its doctrinal position, but is the place where our diverse interpretations of our faith come together in action for **social justice**. It therefore seeks to achieve a visible, just socio-economic and ecological impact, enabled through engaged churches-in-community for a reconciled South Africa and our sub-continent.

