



For immediate release

15 February 2018

STATEMENT ON THE RESIGNATION OF JACOB ZUMA AS SOUTH AFRICA'S PRESIDENT

It is a great relief that Jacob Zuma has resigned as President of South Africa. Though one must distinguish between administrative incompetence and poor personal judgment on one hand and corrupt criminality on the other – and, indeed, as much as one may instinctively balk at anticipating the judgment of the courts as to Mr Zuma's guilt in the latter – the overwhelming evidence of the era that (hopefully) ended on the night of 14 February 2018 is one of nearly a decade of misrule. At the risk of Biblical parody: corruption and incompetence embraced, poor judgment and criminality kissed. And South Africa is the poorer – much poorer – for it.

In 1996 the historian Dan O'Meara published a book about the apartheid rule of the National Party. He called it *Forty Lost Years*. One day, perhaps, another historian may call Jacob Zuma's time in office 'Nine Lost Years'. For nine years, it seemed, the great South African project of nation-building – democracy, transparency, education and equality – got side-tracked into a morass of corruption, mismanagement of resources, cronyism and ultimately state capture. Ironically those most harmed by the process were the poor, who became poorer as a result of nepotistic appointments of incompetents, asset stripping and diversion of public money from where it was most needed to the bank accounts of politicians who all the while proclaimed their love for the poor.

Worst of all, a party that had stood for over a century as the voice of justice, equality and democracy almost lost its soul. Indeed, many of its strongest supporters must have wondered "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Matthew 16.26 KJV). They know who they are, those living and the honourable dead, and they are vindicated.

It is a great relief that Jacob Zuma has resigned as President of South Africa. But one must distinguish between the fall of an individual and the 'resurrection' of a country. Much as one is tempted to thank God and 'move on', though this might seem less painful than a full investigation into what has happened, court cases and criminal proceedings, it is imperative that we avoid this temptation to brush the past under the carpet. It is a time for justice. As the author of Ecclesiastes reminds us, "For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven" (3.1 NRSV). Justice must be done and be seen to be done. It is a time to "pay back the money" in full, because it is needed to renew South Africa, fix rotting infrastructure, feed the poor, and improve education. It is the common moral heritage of all faiths. For Catholics these are the priorities of Catholic Social Teaching and the vision of Pope Francis. For Christians it is nothing less than the Good News of Jesus Christ.

The Jesuit Institute commends all those who have resisted corruption and stood as beacons in our society to the original values and hopes of our founders. Civil society, faith-based organisations and the media have all had a role to play in fighting for our country and hence need to be commended. Let this work, to build the future we want, continue.

No party nor person is faultless in the new South Africa. The forgiveness and determination to reconcile that was so characteristic of the first democratic government of South Africa needs to be rekindled, along with a firm commitment to continue to work for peace, building a society firmly grounded in ethical values and justice for all who live in South Africa. The Jesuit Institute hopes that in this new moment, all South Africans might pause and reflect on their own complicity in corruption. This includes rejecting the rampant corruption in the corporate sector. Let us use this time to turn away from all actions and activities that might impugn our integrity.

The Jesuit Institute also echoes the call of the Bishops of Southern Africa for the “governing ANC to take careful note of the way in which this situation was allowed to develop over the last ten years, and we call on the ANC to commit itself to a thorough reassessment of its internal standards and mechanisms of accountability.”

The wounds of corruption must be debrided. Our new leadership must also see to it that steps are taken that we, to borrow from Nelson Mandela, “never, never and never again” return to the mess we’ve been in.

Our prayers are for the new President, Cyril Ramaphosa. We pray that God might give him and his team wisdom, understanding and a heart open to conversion.

ENDS

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