

Press statement

16 February 2018

Action must follow a great speech

The Ahmed Kathrada Foundation welcomes the general tone and content of President Ramaphosa's maiden State of the Nation Address (SONA).

"Earlier this month, the Foundation, as part of the Future South Africa coalition, called on Mr Ramaphosa to ensure that this year's SONA address restores the 'dignity and decorum of the House'. We believe that he has delivered on this," said the Foundation's Executive Director, Neeshan Balton.

"It has been a refreshing change to have a SONA without walkouts, without security personnel removing members, without signal jamming and most importantly, without a president whose words, especially about tackling corruption, rang hollow," he said.

Balton praised President Ramaphosa's commitment to "ethical behaviour and ethical leadership". "This must be followed up with decisive action at all tiers of government against officials, politicians, business people, individuals and families who are corrupt and embroiled in the state capture project.

"The Zondo commission of inquiry into state capture provides the starting point in revealing the details about the establishment of the 'shadow state'. At the same time, we acknowledge the President's reassurance that law enforcement agencies will continue their work simultaneously. In this regard the Kathrada Foundation is elated that action against the Gupta syndicate has commenced and we hope to see Ajay Gupta and others in Court and hopefully in jail shortly thereafter.

"We welcome the President's emphasis on the fact that law enforcement agencies should be free from outside interference and should pursue those implicated in corruption without fear or favour," he stated.

Balton added that the Foundation particularly commended the President on his intent to establish a commission that will restore the credibility of SARS.

"After ten years of 'misgovernance' under the Jacob Zuma administration, the country currently faces crippling poverty, unemployment and inequality, an upsurge in racial and ethnic tensions, entrenched patriarchy, crime, dysfunctional state owned entities, problems in the healthcare and education sector, a water crisis and poor service delivery. These issues were raised by the President in the SONA and require urgent attention," Balton said.

"We are mindful though, that dealing with the myriad challenges is not an overnight process. Destroying institutions is quick and easy, but rebuilding takes a long time. However, we believe with the appointment of competent and ethical individuals at the helm of key ministries and SOE's, there can be a turnaround. We would therefore urge President Ramaphosa to ensure that skilled and honest people are part of his Cabinet and that those who are ineffective or implicated in state capture are axed and brought to book.

“We acknowledge President Ramaphosa’s commitment to improving the public service and government administration, but note this requires programmes that enable civil servants to refuse to comply with orders from any of their superiors which are illegal, unconstitutional or unethical,” he said. “Had this been in place, we would not have had the Life Esidemeni saga.”

President Ramaphosa was the first chairperson of the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation Board, which he served on from 2008 to 2014. “We are confident, that having been part of the Foundation, which aims to build a truly non-racial society, President Ramaphosa’s work will be guided by this principle in a fundamental way. His speech today highlighted that systematic racial inequality still exists and must be tackled, and that transformation be prioritised. He also emphasised the need to unite South Africans across all barriers around a common vision and build a sense of nationhood, while at the same time celebrating our diversity,” Balton said.

“President Ramaphosa’s appointment could come to symbolise government’s commitment to reversing the damage done under the Zuma years if the actions required to stamp out the erosion of good governance are taken with speed. The mood of optimism must not be allowed to dim again.

“We applaud President Ramaphosa for setting out a vision for change and renewal, and we wish him the courage, tenacity and decisiveness to take the decisions needed to move the country forward.”

Issued on behalf of the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation

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