

AN OPEN LETTER TO 'PRESIDENT-IN-WAITING' CYRIL RAMAPHOSA

Dear Cyril,

I hope you don't mind me addressing you thus, but I have watched you since you were a youth in the Student Christian Movement, visiting Soweto families bereaved in the June 16 police shootings. I observed you working with people at IMSSA¹ as you became a superb negotiator and I saw you shape a struggling band of mineworkers into a militant labour union feared by the *apartheid* regime.

To you and a small handful of others we owe our Constitution. You architected a magnificent document that stands tall among the great declarations of human dignity and liberty. For that we are forever in your debt. Your election as 'president-in-waiting' means that soon you will be sworn-in as the chief defender of that same Constitution.

When you were frozen out for all those years, you took your 'deployment' to business seriously and made a lot of money. For me your wealth is the least important thing about you, but the experience will be useful as you try and repair the damage your comrades have done. Your bad mis-step prior to the Marikana tragedy will surely remind you always to take special care not to misuse wealth, privilege or position.

The point I'm making, Cyril, is that you are a uniquely gifted person, remarkably qualified and prepared to lead our country. But all of these gifts and skills will be useless unless you demonstrate that you have something else that we South Africans have missed for too many years now: I speak of *moral courage*.

Thanks to your predecessor, the very words *morality* and *integrity* have lost meaning in South Africa. Everyone knows that Jacob Zuma's years of venality, his readiness to parley the highest office in the land for self-enrichment, his ruthless using and discarding of comrades to cover his misdeeds and his sheer contempt for the Constitution, have brought us to the edge of economic disaster. Economics is not my field Cyril, but it is yours and I have no doubt that you will begin immediately to undo the reckless, criminal harm wrought by this thoroughly bad man, putting us back on the right fiscal path.

But there's something more troubling than our economic woes: Jacob Zuma's most damning legacy is that we are *morally bankrupt*. Quite simply, his presidency gave people permission to be bad. So my concern, Cyril, is not whether you have the skill to lead us back to prosperity, but if you will have the moral strength to lead us back to *decency*.

I understand you are an ANC loyalist and there's nothing wrong with that – unless you allow loyalty to your party to trump your duty to all South Africans, whatever our party. I read recently that you called the ANC 'the Parliament of the People.' That's not a good start. There is only one Parliament and the ANC is accountable to all the people represented there. I'm sure you know that your party's performance in failing to hold President Zuma accountable has been deplorable. Time and again when *moral guts* was called for, ANC members of Parliament behaved like servile pawns of his patronage,

¹ Independent Mediation Services of SA

conveniently mislaying their consciences to please him. Someone will have to teach them all over again what *integrity* means.

I hope you can do it, Cyril? At times your performance has worried me. I watched you stumble through 'Deputy President's Questions' just before the conference that elected you and I groaned inside. Granted you were trying not to alienate the support you would need at the conference, but I wonder if, looking back on that day, you feel you gave us moral leadership?

Now you have been elected, may I suggest there is no reason to mince words any more: you either *lead* or you shouldn't have stood in the first place. I, and I believe millions of others, will be looking not only for your skills but for signs of that virtue of *moral courage*.

Here are some of the signs I believe will help convince us that change has come:

- We will watch carefully what you do with Jacob Zuma. He has hurt us all – but especially the poor and he needs to stand trial for his alleged crimes. If, for the sake of peace in your party, you strike a deal with him you will have placed your party above justice and you will send everyone a message that, 'it's ok to be a crook.' That will be a moral failure and millions will remember it at the next general election;
- We will also be concerned about how you handle the two rogues elected on either side of you. From everything we know both are morally compromised, untrustworthy people. One ran his province for years in the Zuma style, with strong links to the Gupta family. The other used extreme storm-trooper tactics to browbeat his province into collaborating with his naked presidential ambitions. I believe that neither deserves our respect. I'm not sure how you handle this burden Cyril, but their presence up there with you unfortunately gives the lie to claims that the ANC is being *morally and ethically* renewed. So, if either behaves according to his past form I hope that you will have the courage to act against them.
- We will want to hear you ban any more undermining of our Judiciary, thanking them instead for literally saving our democracy from a crooked president and some sinister and stupid ministers. Please tell your future Cabinet that the best way to avoid tangling with judges and wasting millions of taxpayers' Rands, is to read the Constitution and stay within its boundaries;
- We will watch cabinet and other crucial appointments like hawks. We want to know whether we are in for more of the same – pliant, mediocre cronies, more expert at lying to us than running their departments – or whether you will appoint ministers and directors of *moral and intellectual stature* who know the difference between right and wrong - to every department, but especially to places like Treasury and the Prosecuting Authority.
- We want to see you put an end to the growing worship of ethnicity and 'culture.' This country was cursed for centuries by the arrogance of its white tribe with its cultural hegemony, but the ANC's great strength was its modernity and its eschewing of any kind tribalism, white or black. To those who are stirring up division for the sake of votes please make it clear that South Africa

is determined to be a modern state, where every citizen, woman or man, child or adult, rural or urban, is protected by one and the same rule of law under one Constitution.

- We will hope to see an end to the 'Blue Light' convoys that have turned politicians elected to serve us into silly, arrogant show-offs. This may seem a trivial concern, but ridding us of such ostentation will be a powerful symbol of a new 'servant spirit' among your colleagues. Nor am I convinced that you and they need anything like the security battalions we see these days. Madiba used only a handful and amazingly, even when we had a really hated regime – that of PW Botha - you could almost knock on his door at the Union Buildings. Surely a democratic government living close to its people need not be so paranoid?
- We hope that you, not Jacob Zuma, will offer the next State of the Nation Address. If you do, *in God's name inspire us!* Watching our country reduced to a bankrupt shadow of Madiba's proud new nation has wearied and discouraged us; it has wiped the smile off the face of South Africa. We need hope. So please toss out the boring self-congratulatory statistic-speak Jacob Zuma's party apparatchiks came up with year after year and give us some *moral leadership* instead. Tell us what it means to be good people and proud South Africans again, denounce divisive identity politics and put the multi-coloured rainbow back into the sky so that all of us of whatever hue can once again know we belong. Mention the ANC less and fellow South Africans more, and invite us all back into working for a truly fair and decent nation, where honesty and hard work, compassion and neighbour-care, self-respect and integrity are rewarded and where above all, in the words of the New Testament, 'the poor are hearing good news.' An *Ubuntu* South Africa.

If you do these things Cyril, we will begin to believe that you could be the difference our nation needs to find healing. You have an enormous task and you will need the help of God. By that I don't mean that you trot off like so many politicians these days for a photo-op with some tame priests laying hands on your head, but that you dig deep into the resources of your faith and principles, where God's good Spirit will keep your heart humble and your moral compass fixed to true North.

I wish you well Cyril. The well-being of millions now depends on you.

Rev Prof Peter Storey

[Former President, South African Council of Churches and Bishop, Methodist Church of Southern Africa]

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