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Save South Africa's response to the 2017 State of the Nation Address

The 2017 State of the Nation Address was disgraceful: the worst ever, by the worst ever head of state in South Africa's democracy. That it came on the heels of an unprecedented show of force and aggression by the state only emphasizes the depths to which our democracy has sunk under President Jacob Zuma's so-called leadership.

At a time when South Africans are crying out for political leadership, our people were subjected to a lacklustre President outlining a meaningless set of new – typically undefined – promises of what he calls “radical” socio-economic change.

Given the high levels of inequality and the lack of progress in developing an inclusive economy, South Africa needed a President who could develop and articulate new, concrete measures to address that challenge – and to do so with urgency.

Zuma's previous attempts to do this have been mired in controversy and corruption, culminating in state capture. Consequently his new wish-list must be treated with the skepticism that it will once again be a vehicle to benefit his cronies. State resources amounting to R1,4 trillion are at stake.

Last night, the President failed to assure the nation that he is concerned about corruption, or to take any steps to deal with it – for example, by sorting out the rot at state-owned companies, or dealing with the predatory elite

Even though he has concerns about the Public Protector's recommendations about an inquiry into state capture, he could still have given a commitment to get to the bottom of the questions raised in the Public Protector's report. His failure to do so suggests he is trying to push the entire issue under the carpet.

His failure to acknowledge issues raised by the Public Protector meant he was unable to deal with concerns raised by opposition MPs about his legitimacy. Instead, he contributed to the crisis in Parliament.

Likewise, the refusal by the President, the Speaker of the National Assembly and the Chairperson of the NCOP to show leadership by acknowledging the deep pain caused by the deaths of the Esidimeni 94 exposed callous disregard by Government and Parliament.

As ANC Secretary-General Gwede Mantashe and others have now pointed out, it would have been correct to observe a moment of silence for the Esidimeni 94, who died so tragically at the hand of the state.

Yet when Zuma did take to the podium, it was as if nothing had happened – his trademark chuckle was confirmation of our assertion that he is cold, emotionless and cruel. It was business as usual: a tired, empty speech that typified his lame-duck Presidency.

Zuma is a national and international embarrassment.

We are stuck with him, and the associated problems of racism, sexism, social injustice and inequality, unless we act in unison to have him removed from office. Only then will we be able to break his corrupt grip on power, resources and patronage.

We deserve a better president who will confront and make right these problems we face.

It must now be clear to even the most ardent Zuma supporter that because of Zuma, there is no leadership. And it is increasingly damaging to his party and the country to prop him up as President.

We call on ANC MPs of conscience to recognize that last night was the last straw. Unless they act now to defend the Constitution, they will be forever tarred for defending and perpetuating a President whose actions and action are causing untold damage. Things are only going to get worse.

Intensified and united civil society action is essential now to fast-track Zuma's departure. We call on civil society organisations to join Save South Africa's efforts to bring about the downfall of Zuma and develop a united plan of action to rebuild our democracy. This man must go, before he causes even further damage.

We call on our supporters to join us in increasing our efforts to have Zuma removed. Organise people in your places of worship or community, school or workplace, to sign our People's Motion of No Confidence in Zuma online at www.thepeoplesmotion.org.za

We deserve a better President, to Save South Africa.