

POLITICAL OVERVIEW BY PRESIDENT CYRIL RAMAPHOSA

ANC NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING
7 DECEMBER 2020

National Chairperson Gwede Mantashe,
Deputy President David Mabuza,
Officials,
Members of the National Executive Committee,
Comrades,

This is the last scheduled meeting of the NEC for 2020.

It is an opportunity to reflect on the progress we have made over the last year in the implementation of our programme of fundamental social and economic transformation.

This year will forever be defined by the devastating coronavirus pandemic.

It has caused untold damage to the lives of billions of people around the world.

It has taken a huge toll on human health and cost the lives of more than 1.5 million people.

But it has also severely affected the livelihoods of far more people as economies have contracted, companies have closed, jobs have been lost and social support measures have been disrupted.

As a country, the pandemic has further deepened the economic and fiscal crisis we were facing at the beginning of the year.

The economy has experienced its greatest contraction in many decades and our unemployment rate is at its highest level ever.

The reality is that the COVID-19 pandemic is far from over.

Globally, new infections continue to rise, alongside hospital admissions and deaths.

As Cde Zweli Mkhize reported last night, we are in the midst of a resurgence in parts of the Eastern Cape and Western Cape.

As a result of these developments, Nelson Mandela Bay has been declared a coronavirus hotspot and we have had to impose additional restrictions on movement, gatherings and alcohol consumption there.

We are now looking at the situation in the Sarah Baartman and Garden Route districts, and will need to make a decision in the coming week on whether to declare them as hotspots.

The view of the experts, which is borne out by our experience since mid-August, is that the limited restrictions in place under Alert Level 1 alongside personal adherence to basic health protocols should be enough to avert a second wave of infections.

However, we are finding that people are not observing the regulations and not adhering to the basic practices such as wearing a mask and social distancing.

This is what explains the resurgence in parts of the Eastern Cape and Western Cape, and it is what is likely to drive a resurgence in other parts of the country.

We are now facing one of the greatest threats of this pandemic – that the activities that people engage in over the festive season will cause a second wave.

There is also a danger that, like many other countries, South Africa will experience a second peak that is greater than the first peak and will lead to more deaths.

If we do have a second wave, it will not only cost lives and potentially overwhelm our health system, it will also undermine our economic and social recovery efforts.

We need to look at what we need to do – as an organisation and as government – to avoid this.

For the first time since the start of the pandemic, there is now a prospect that it will come to an end thanks to the promising results from a number of vaccine trials.

Some countries have approved vaccines as safe and effective, and will start rolling them out.

South Africa is in the process of finalising its involvement in the COVAX facility, which is a resource sharing initiative which will give countries equitable access to several possible vaccines.

It is anticipated that we could have access to a suitable vaccine by the second quarter of 2021 and will initially receive quantities for at least 10% of the population.

While this gives us hope, the reality is that it will take some time before we can vaccinate enough South Africans to be assured of little to no transmission of the virus, and it will be a costly undertaking.

We need to prepare for this, and be ready to make the difficult decisions about where to find the money and when to deploy it.

Comrades,

Even though the COVID pandemic was an unforeseen and extreme crisis that severely disrupted our programme as the ANC and presented wholly new challenges, we should nevertheless measure our progress against the tasks we set for the movement in the January 8th Statement 2020.

In the January 8th Statement, we identified seven tasks for the movement. We said:

- One, we will mobilise all social partners to grow and transform the economy.
- Two, we will renew the ANC as the most effective force for social change.
- Three, we will build a movement united in action.
- Four, we will strengthen governance and tackle corruption.
- Five, we will work to end gender-based violence and femicide.
- Six, we will work for peace, integration and development in Africa.
- Seven, we will prepare for a decisive local government mandate.

It is important that we have these tasks in mind when we discuss the framework for the 2021 January 8th Statement.

On the first task, to mobilise all social partners to grow and transform the economy, we can say that – in the face of the disruption and devastation of COVID – we were able to work with our partners, particularly in business and labour, to counter the effects of the pandemic on jobs and livelihoods.

With the support of our social partners, we undertook a historic R500 billion social and economic relief package to give vital assistance to companies, workers and poor households to survive the economic impact of the pandemic.

This action saved countless firms from closure, saved many jobs and kept millions of South Africans above the poverty line.

Now, even as we continue to fight the pandemic, we have begun the process of economic reconstruction and recovery, which is based on the deliberations that we have had in the NEC and follows consultations with both our Alliance partners and broader social partners.

While we will go into more detail on the progress in the implementation of our recovery plan later in this meeting, it is necessary to underline the need for an undivided focus on implementation and urgency.

With very little available in the fiscus to stimulate economic activity, we are placing even greater reliance on the finalisation of key economic reforms, on our ability to mobilise funding from the private sector and other sources for infrastructure development and on restoring investor confidence.

We held our third South Africa Investment Conference last month, which was much reduced due to the pandemic.

It nevertheless demonstrated that there is a great deal of resilience in our economy, and still much enthusiasm for the opportunities that the economy presents to investors across a broad range of sectors.

While we hadn't thought it possible to raise many new investment commitments this year, we manage to secure commitments of some R110 billion, taking our cumulative total over the last three years to R774 billion.

This represents 64 percent of our five-year target of R1.2 trillion.

Even under these extremely difficult conditions, our economy has great potential – and we have the responsibility to ensure that this potential is realised.

We also have a responsibility to ensure that our response is inclusive and transformational.

We need to use our response to this crisis to transform the structure of our economy, to focus on local production and beneficiation, to make our economy more competitive, to create greater opportunities for SMMEs and the informal sector, and to involve women, young people and persons with disabilities in our recovery plan.

We cannot be satisfied with recovering the jobs that we lost in the pandemic – we need to create far more through exploring new areas of growth.

As we ready ourselves for 2021, this task – the growth and transformation of our economy – must take centre stage.

More than ever before, the lives, livelihoods and well-being of 58 million people depend on the progress we make in rebuilding and transforming our economy.

The second task we set for ourselves for 2020, was to renew the ANC as the most effective force for social change.

The COVID pandemic severely disrupted organisational activity this year, and we had to postpone many important meetings and conferences, and, of course, the National General Council.

It is only in the last few months that it has been possible for branches to meet, and even now there is a risk to holding gatherings of any size. While we may have been able to operate virtually at national and provincial levels, many lower structures do not have the resources to use communications technology.

In these conditions, it is therefore impressive that many of our structures, especially at a branch level, played an important role in mobilising community responses to COVID.

There were many local programmes, led by ANC structures, to raise awareness around prevention measures, to promote adherence to the restrictions and to provide social support to poor and vulnerable households.

It is these examples that we need to draw on as we build our branches as centres for community development. We must ensure that the energies of our branches are dedicated towards the challenges that communities face in the wake of the pandemic rather than being taken up by internal battles.

We must also commend the work of the OR Tambo School of Leadership, which has used the opportunities provided by communications technology to maintain a programme of cadre development and political debate even during the pandemic.

Our great challenge now is to strengthen processes of induction and political education at branch level to ensure that we have members who are able to take up the task of driving social change.

The third task we set for 2020, was to build a movement united in action.

Despite numerous resolutions and repeated pronouncements, unity within our movement remains elusive.

As has been the case for a long time, the divisions within our movement are most pronounced at a leadership level.

The period following the 54th National Conference was characterised by greater cohesion and unity of purpose within the organisation, but now divisions are becoming more apparent and factions are emerging once again.

These divisions are manifesting themselves not just in our structures, but in public demonstrations of dissent and discord.

In recent times, we have witnessed statements and actions that are alien to the practices, culture and values of our movement.

We increasingly appear like an organisation at war with itself.

We need to ask ourselves whether we are still committed to the mandate we were given by the conference to unite and renew the movement.

While COVID has disrupted our work to rebuild structures, leagues and other formations, as identified in our January 8th Statement, there are deeper organisational and political challenges that need to be addressed.

Unity of the ANC is paramount.

Unity is essential if we are to be effective in leading the radical transformation of our society and our economy.

It requires a revolutionary unity that is underpinned by the principles and values of the movement. We must unite around our historic mission and around the society that we are committed to build.

Unity is not about closing ranks; it is not about accommodating or condoning corruption, wrongdoing or ill-discipline.

Unity cannot be used as an excuse to turn a blind eye when some among us undermine and denigrate the revolutionary ideals of our struggle.

Many of the challenges we now face are due to the lack of a common and coherent approach to the measures we must take to address allegations of corruption and other serious crimes against leaders and cadres of our movement.

We have a direct instruction from the 54th National Conference to renew our organisation and clear resolutions on rebuilding the integrity and credibility of our movement.

At the NEC meeting of 28-30 August, we took firm and unequivocal decisions on the fight against corruption within our structures and across society.

These decisions were drawn directly from the decisions of the 54th National Conference.

We described our stance as 'a line in the sand', representing our collective determination not to give any ground in our fight against corruption.

Now, just 3 months later, there is growing concern within society and among our membership that this leadership is not committed to the decisions taken by the NEC and by our National Conference.

The challenge we face is not only about the implementation of Conference resolutions and NEC decisions.

There is a far deeper problem of revolutionary discipline and consciousness.

In the documentation for this NEC, we are provided with no fewer than five legal opinions on the implementation of our so-called 'stepping aside' resolution.

I am certain that there are none among of us who ever would have thought that the deliberations of the National Executive Committee would have come to this.

As members of a voluntary organisation, we are all bound by our Constitution, by the resolutions of our Conferences and by the decisions of our structures.

In addition, as revolutionaries, we are also bound by a political consciousness that is founded on our commitment to the cause of freedom for all the people of South Africa.

It is this consciousness that calls on us to be selfless, to make sacrifices in the service of our people, to always act with integrity and honesty, and to place the interests of the collective above narrow personal interests.

It is this consciousness that causes us to abide by the rules of our movement and to respect the decisions of its structures. As leaders, it should be what drives our actions and informs our decisions.

We have sought these legal opinions and they may assist us in clarifying what is not certain to some among us.

But if we are to reflect on the proud and glorious history of our movement over more than a century – on the great leaders who have guided it through the most difficult and perilous times – it is difficult not to see these five legal opinions as an indictment of the movement we have become.

Yet it need not be that way.

We are the leadership of the African National Congress.

We carry not only a clear and emphatic mandate of the membership of this movement to undertake a process of fundamental renewal and rebuilding, but we also bound by a historic mission to liberate our people from all forms of oppression.

This leadership has the means and the responsibility to restore this movement to one of integrity and credibility; a movement that is united in action, and which places the needs and the interest of the people above anything else.

Unity in the ANC needs to be rooted in our historic mission to unite society.

There is little value in having a united ANC if we do not unite society, and if we do not place the goal of a united South Africa at the centre of our efforts.

To do this, the ANC needs to be united with society. We need to narrow the distance between the masses of the people and our movement. We need to be rooted among our people and we need to derive our political legitimacy from their support for our movement.

We can start to do that by respecting our own decisions and exercising our revolutionary political consciousness.

The fourth task we set for the movement for 2020 was to strengthen governance and tackle corruption.

We have made important progress in rebuilding our public institutions and ensuring that the people who lead these institutions are competent, capable and act with integrity. These include government departments, agencies, SOEs and law enforcement entities.

We have done much to stabilise, strengthen and resource law enforcement agencies as part of the effort to prevent and detect corruption, to ensure that the law takes its course where corruption is alleged to have taken place, and that funds lost to corruption and wrongdoing are recovered.

We have had to respond decisively and with urgency to COVID-related corruption. This experience has provided important lessons on improving collaboration between law enforcement agencies and the value of partnerships with broader society.

It has also led to greater transparency in procurement. The National Treasury has published details of all COVID-related contracts across all public entities on its website, and is now looking at mechanisms to do this for all procurement going forward.

The Zondo Commission is nearing the end of its work, and should be presenting its report in the first half of next year.

Even as the 54th National Conference resolved to support the establishment of the Commission, we knew that it would cast a spotlight on the ANC, its government and its cadres.

We knew that it was likely to be a painful process and could lead to tensions within the movement and society, but the Conference considered it to be a necessary part of ending state capture and taking a clear stand against corruption.

We have always said that the Commission must be able to do its work, that it must do so without fear or favour, and that we have a responsibility – as ANC members and as citizens – to do whatever we can to assist the Commission in fulfilling its mandate.

In August, this NEC took a firm stand on corruption within the ranks of the movement and in public institutions and the private sector. It is now necessary to follow through on these decisions both to advance the renewal effort and to retain support and trust of society.

The fifth task we identified in January 2020 was to end gender-based violence and femicide.

Government has adopted the National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide, which was a joint undertaking between government and civil society. We now need to establish and resource the structures to give effect to the NSP, which will be jointly driven by government entities and representatives of broader society.

We must applaud the women of our country, and the ANC Women's League for having the led the charge and having raised awareness on this matter.

We have acted on many of the undertakings made last year to tackle GBVF, such as the introduction of important legislative amendments to Parliament, the resourcing police stations and training of law enforcement personnel, and improving care and support to survivors of gender-based violence.

While there is much more that government can do and needs to do, social mobilisation remains the most important and effective measure against GBVF. In effect, we need to change our society, end patriarchal attitudes and practices, and adopt a zero-tolerance towards GBV in communities and social institutions.

The ANC needs to play a leading role in this effort, firstly by intensifying its efforts to achieve gender equality within our ranks, and secondly by developing and implementing a mass campaign to end all forms of discrimination, oppression and violence against women.

We also need to pay attention to the economic empowerment of women – as a fundamental part of the achievement of gender equality, as a way of reducing the vulnerability of women to abuse and violence, and of ensuring that our economy and society benefits from the full realisation of its human potential.

The sixth task in the January 8th Statement was to work for peace, integration and development in Africa.

During the course of our chairship of the African Union, South Africa has played an important role in leading Africa's response to the pandemic.

We have worked with fellow Member States to develop and implement coordinated continental and regional responses, have successfully lobbied for debt relief and resources for African countries to combat, and recover from, the pandemic, and have established innovative mechanisms like the Africa Medical Supplies Platform to ensure that African countries can access vital supplies at an affordable price.

We have also represented Africa in international initiatives, like the World Health Organization's Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator, which has mobilised resources to ensure equitable access to diagnostic, therapeutics and ultimately an effective vaccine.

The collaboration and unity of purpose that we have seen in Africa's response to COVID-19 provides important lessons and opportunities for the future.

In the Year of the Silencing of the Guns in Africa, we have contributing to progress in promoting peace and stability, in countries like Libya, Sudan and South Sudan and with respect to tension of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam.

But, as we acknowledged during the AU Summit on Silencing the Guns, which was held on a virtual platform earlier today, the guns are not yet silent.

Several conflicts continue and new challenges have emerged. These include ongoing conflict in the Sahel region, the eastern DRC, the conflict in the Tigray region of Ethiopia and the activities of insurgents in Mozambique.

Yesterday, African leaders met – again virtually – in an Extraordinary Summit on the African Continental Free Trade Area. They finalised the legal instruments that will enable the operationalisation of the AfCFTA from the 1st of January 2021.

This is a historic achievement, which is possibly the most significant development in African integration and unity since the formation of the OAU itself.

South Africa played an important role in the detailed and complex work required to reach this point, and needs to continue to do everything it must to ensure the success of the AfCFTA and that as a country we make full use of the opportunities it presents.

During our term as AU chair, we have placed the issue of women's economic empowerment firmly on the African agenda, although we need to acknowledge that the COVID pandemic slowed the pace of this work. We need to continue to use our position on the continent to maintain the momentum of this effort beyond our AU chairship.

This month marks the end of South Africa's two year term as an elected non-permanent member of the UN Security Council. We have used our term on the Security Council to strengthen the relationship between the UN and the AU, and specifically between the UN Security Council and the AU Peace and Security Council.

We have used every available international platform – including in BRICS and the G20 – to promote multilateralism, to advance the democratic reform of international bodies, to argue for greater support to African countries at this time of crisis, for the lifting of sanctions against Zimbabwe and Sudan, and for support for the struggles of the people of Palestine and Western Sahara.

The seventh task we set for the movement in 2020 was to prepare for a decisive local government mandate.

One of the effects of the COVID pandemic was that several by-elections were postponed during the year and as a result several were held together on 11 November. Another set will be held on 9 December.

Generally, the ANC did well in these by-elections, gaining ground in several areas. This demonstrates the continued support for the ANC at local level and our continued capacity to campaign and organise.

We need to analyse more closely the reasons for our advances (including where there were setbacks) and take these lessons into next year's campaigns.

As we prepare for next year's local government elections, we need to develop a strategy and a message that demonstrates ANC's commitment and ability to deal with weaknesses in local government.

Much will depend on the selection of our candidates, and we must therefore welcome the work that has been done to ensure that we emerge with candidates that are capable, ethical and enjoy the support of communities.

We need to ensure that, in contrast to some previous elections, the process of candidate selection strengthens the ANC and doesn't deepen divisions or foster voter disillusionment.

In conclusion, the country has faced an extremely difficult year.

Our people have endured great hardship and had to sacrifice much in the fight against this pandemic. That struggle is not yet over, and we will need to intensify our efforts to ensure that we do not experience another – even more damaging – wave of infections and deaths.

Just as the pandemic has disrupted every aspect of public life, the ANC's programmes and activities have been affected, with the result that we have not made sufficient progress on most of the tasks that we set out in the January 8th Statement at the start of the year.

Beyond the pandemic, we have to acknowledge that we have not dealt decisively with the challenge of disunity and discord within our ranks.

There have been occasions when, as this NEC, we have risen to the challenge and provide leadership on critical issues, most notably the response to the pandemic and the economic recovery.

However, there are areas where we will admit that we have fallen short, including in giving effect to our decisions on corruption, in combating factionalism, and in restoring our credibility and standing in society.

As we approach a new year, we must acknowledge that the challenges before us are even greater and more difficult than those we faced at the beginning of 2020.

This will demand much of all of us.

As the leadership of this great movement, let us act as the membership of our movement expects us to.

Let us earn the confidence that they placed in us when they elected us at the 54th National Conference.

I thank you.