STATEMENT OF SACBC IN RESPONSE TO THE PRESIDENT'S IMPLEMENTATION PLAN ON STATE CAPTURE COMMISSION

We, the bishops of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference, have noted the President's implementation plan for the State Capture Report.

We welcome the broad reforms that the president has proposed to remedy the gaps in the country's system of governance, particularly the appointment process for the heads of law enforcement agencies and the boards of state-owned enterprises, the procurement reforms, whistle-blower protection, and the review of political party funding act to criminalise making donations with the expectation of procurement benefits. At the same time, we note that the proposed measures to strengthen good governance will not bear the intended results if the entrenched cadre deployment policy is not discontinued. We would therefore like to see a more decisive commitment from the ruling party to ending cadre deployment.

We have noted the proposed measures to strengthen the justice system to ensure the successful investigation and prosecution of those implicated in state capture and other forms of corruption. The decision to establish a specialised court roll for state capture cases and to place the Investigative Directorate (ID) as a permanent fixture in the National Prosecuting Authority is welcome. We are, however, concerned that the investigative Directorate, despite its permanent placement in the National Prosecuting Authority, will not be sufficiently independent of the executive as it can easily be closed down by a simple majority of parliament, as had happened with the case of the Scorpions. Therefore, we join the civil society in demanding that the government establishes an anti-corruption body as a new chapter 9 institution, with a mandate to investigate and prosecute serious corruption cases, which cannot, therefore, be closed down by a simple majority of parliament. As a chapter 9 institution, such an anti-corruption body would then report to the parliament instead of reporting to the executive.

We expected the President to come up with concrete and decisive action against the members of the national executive and cabinet ministers implicated in the Commission's report. Those involved in the state capture continue to serve in the cabinet, and the president is vague about what he will do to hold them to account. We are disappointed that the president has not been decisive on this matter and are concerned that once more, political expediency, particularly in relation to the upcoming ANC's elective conference, seems to prevail over the good of the nation. We ask the president to announce as soon as possible how he will hold to account the cabinet ministers implicated in the Commission's report.

We call for the attention of the president to the fact that the government's plan to implement the Zondo report will continue to lack credibility if it is only the middle-level government officials who are prosecuted and held to account while the senior-level politicians implicated in the state capture report and other allegations of corruption get off scot-free. We need assurance from the president that senior-level politicians and cabinet ministers will not be shielded from accountability.

We further note that the implementation of the Zondo report will continue to lack credibility if the president fails to take the country into his confidence regarding the alleged crimes of financial misconduct and defeating the ends of justice from his Phala Phala farm. We, therefore, call on the president and all relevant institutions to conclude the investigations and reports on the allegations of the president breaking the law as soon as possible.

It is good to see that the Parliament has begun assessing the president's implementation of the report. We expect that the parliament itself will publish its own implementation plan of the report detailing how it will address the Commission's complaint that the Parliament has consistently failed in its responsibility to hold the executive to account, with the ruling party often using its numbers in the Houses of Parliament to frustrate any attempts at holding the executive to account. The people of this country need assurance that the parliament will not continue to protect politically connected people when they are implicated in corruption allegations, including the recent claims of transgression against the law by the sitting president from his Phala Phala farm.

We continue to condemn the greed and the indifference displayed by the business and political elite in our country, which has generated high levels of public sector and private sector corruption, diverting resources that the country needs to recover from its legacies of economic inequalities and poverty. Our wish and prayer are that our people work together to adopt a new vision of politics and economy guided by the common good and the concerns of the most vulnerable in society, not the narrow interests of the business and political elite.

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