

Newsletter from the desk of the President – Monday 17 January 2022

Dear Fellow South African,

As South Africa entered the new year, we were confronted by two profound events that reminded us, in different ways, of what brings us together as a people.

On the first day of 2022, the nation gathered in spirit to bid farewell to Archbishop Desmond Tutu at St George's Cathedral in Cape Town. It was a moment of great sadness as we recalled the life and contribution of a beloved compatriot who was, in many ways, the moral conscience of our nation. At the same time, his funeral was a celebration of the values he stood for. It was a celebration of the great unity and diversity of our people, and a reminder of the sacrifices made by so many to achieve our democracy.

On the second day of 2022, the country watched on in horror as a huge fire engulfed our Parliament, just a hundred metres from where we had gathered the day before to pay our last respects to Archbishop Tutu.

The fire, which spread quickly through the buildings that house both the National Assembly and the National Council of Provinces, took days to fully extinguish. We are relieved that there was no loss of life and that no-one was injured in the fire. We are extremely grateful to the firefighters who battled the blaze and finally extinguished it.

The investigations into the cause of the fire are now underway. We need to ensure that these investigations are thorough and concluded without delay. The country needs to know what happened.

Arrangements are being made to ensure that the work of Parliament can continue even if the buildings cannot be used. It is vital that Parliament continues to consider and pass laws that will transform society and continues to provide oversight and ensure accountability as government works to implement the mandate it received from the people.

Apart from the close proximity of St George's Cathedral and Parliament, what connects these two events is that each reminds us of what brings us together as South Africans: our democracy.

We mourn Desmond Tutu because he was the spiritual father of our democracy. We despair at the devastation of our Parliamentary buildings because they are the seat of our democracy. They are the place where our new democratic Constitution was adopted just over 25 years ago, and where hundreds of transformative laws have been passed.

We may not always recognise it, but the fire at Parliament demonstrated how strongly South Africans feel about their democracy. It is a reminder also of how important it is that we work to strengthen and defend that democracy.

While the Parliamentary buildings have been damaged beyond use, the institution of Parliament continues its work in the service of the people. This is an important reminder that our democratic

institutions are not defined by the buildings that house them, but by the work they do and by the confidence that the people have in them.

This is true of all the institutions of our democracy.

Just as the fire in Parliament was finally being extinguished, Acting Chief Justice Raymond Zondo submitted the first part of the report of the Commission of Inquiry into State Capture. This part of the report details how several public institutions were infiltrated, looted and severely damaged. These include state owned enterprises like South African Airways, the Government Communication and Information System and the South African Revenue Service.

This part of the report paints a deeply disturbing picture of how key institutions of our democracy were compromised and undermined with criminal intent. Not only were significant amounts of money stolen, but these institutions were not able to properly fulfil the functions for which they were established.

The findings and recommendations of the Zondo Commission will help the country to rebuild these institutions and to hold those responsible to account. We must ensure that we use them to safeguard these institutions into the future so that they may never be captured again.

The things that we have read in the Zondo Commission report should strengthen our resolve to defend the institutions of our democracy, all the entities of our state and, indeed, our democratic constitutional order.

We must safeguard against any and all efforts to diminish our hard-won democracy – whether these efforts take the form of corruption in state owned enterprises, the subversion of our law enforcement agencies, the sabotage of our economic infrastructure, or attacks on the independence and integrity of our judiciary.

We need to protect our Constitution, our democratic state and the electoral process from anyone who wants to weaken our democracy and deny the South African people of their hard-won freedom.

As we head into a new year, there are many challenges that we must confront as we work to rebuild and recover from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As we do so, let us draw strength and encouragement from our deep dedication to our democracy and our common desire to build a nation that is united, free and equal.

I wish you all the best for the year ahead.

With best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Cyril Ramaphosa".