

Cyril Ramaphosa Inaugurated as South African President

New head-of-state and leader of the African National Congress (ANC) comes from a trade union, political and business background

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Global Research, February 16, 2018

Region: [sub-Saharan Africa](#)

Theme: [History](#)

Featured image: South African President Cyril Ramaphosa and National Assembly Speaker Baleka Mbete at swearing in ceremony, Feb. 15, 2018

A transferal of power from former President Jacob Zuma to his Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa has taken place amid jubilation within the Republic of South Africa National Assembly.

President Ramaphosa was unopposed in his confirmation by the legislative body of the most industrialized state on the African continent.

The former trade union leader and chief negotiator for the African National Congress (ANC) after 1990, when former President Nelson Mandela was released from 27 years of imprisonment to embark upon a transitional process from the racist apartheid settler colonial system to a nonracial democratic dispensation, takes over the government amid much uncertainty in recent weeks. Ramaphosa had been chosen as the new ANC president at the National Elective Conference held in December at NASREC.

President Zuma has been under escalating pressure to resign from his office particularly since the ascendancy of Ramaphosa. Zuma and all other ANC and South African governmental heads-of-state are limited to two consecutive terms. Ramaphosa is required to stand again next year during the national elections for both the presidency and national assembly. At present the ANC has a substantial majority within parliament which it has maintained since its rise to power in 1994.

Former President Zuma has been targeted by the South African media for allegations of corruption, popularly referred to as “state capture.” Although Zuma has repeatedly denied such accusations, a growing number of officials within the ANC national leadership structures viewed Zuma as a political liability leading into the 2019 national poll.



Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa

Although this cloud had been hovering over Zuma for more than a decade, he had never been convicted in previous attempts at prosecution. A constitutional court decision in 2016 found that the former president had violated regulations surrounding the use of public funds for improvement at his residence in Nkandla.

Nonetheless, the-then President Zuma agreed to pay back funds which were deemed to have been spent inappropriately. Discussions between ANC NEC members and Zuma took on a sense of urgency during the first two weeks of February.

Reports indicated that Zuma had resisted resignation saying that the party had not stated specifically what laws and regulations he had violated. Additional media stories claimed that Zuma had agreed in principle to resign within a six month timeframe.

By February 12, the ANC leadership had made a decision to recall the president from office with immediate effect. Talks continued on February 13 while an announcement was made that Zuma would address the nation the following day.

In an extended nearly hour long interview over the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) television on the morning of February 14, Zuma put his case before the people and the world. He reiterated that he was not defying the party and was only asking for the NEC to articulate why it was imperative for him to step down.

However, later that evening, President Zuma went on national television and announced his resignation after a 30 minute address to the country. He thanked the ANC and the South African people for providing him with an opportunity to serve as a cadre and leader of the struggle for nearly six decades.

Response of the ANC and the Challenges of the New Leader

The resignation of the president was met with relieve by the party leadership. A statement was issued soon afterwards accepting Zuma's decision and commending him for his role within the organization.

This declaration by the ANC said in part:

“Having taken the difficult decision to recall Comrade Jacob Zuma, the African

National Congress nonetheless wants to salute the outstanding contribution he has made and express its profound gratitude to him for the role he has played in the African National Congress spanning over sixty years of loyal service. Whilst this may mark an end of his term of office as President of the Republic, we hope and believe Comrade Jacob Zuma will continue to work with the ANC as we undertake our program of fundamental organizational renewal and uniting all South Africans behind a shared vision of transformation and economic recovery. Comrade Zuma is the last in our line of Presidents to have worked closely with the longest serving President of the ANC, Comrade Oliver Tambo. He was trusted by Comrade OR and the ANC to set up underground structures of the movement. He also played a pivotal role in the peaceful negotiation of our transition from apartheid to democracy.”

On February 15, Deputy President Cyril Ramphosa was sworn in as the new leader of the Republic of South Africa. The president was nominated for the position by the ANC being the largest party within the National Assembly. Ramaphosa was uncontested in his bid for office leaving him with an immense responsibility of directing the country towards national unity and economic development.

At present South Africa is emerging from recession spawned by the challenges which are inflicting African and other emerging regions in the aftermath of the precipitous decline in energy and commodity prices since 2014. The South African rand, although recovering somewhat in recent months, has suffered depreciation over the last few years.

[Unemployment in South Africa](#) is officially at 26.7 percent during the final quarter of 2017 having declined slightly from 27.7 in the previous period. The nation of some 56 million people had a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of \$US295 billion at the end of 2016. Amid a slight recovery from the recession, the annual growth rate in 2016 was 0.3 percent.

The two leading industries in the economy, mining and manufacturing, have been in decline for a number of years. Much of this also stems from the systematic disinvestment from the country in response to the rise of the ANC to power and the militant character of the trade union movement which has demanded larger salaries, better benefits and working conditions.

[Business Live](#) reported in an article during May 2017 that:

“Manufacturing output was down 1.1% in the December quarter. This decrease was mainly due to lower production in the food and beverages sector, which was down 2.6 percent; and in petroleum, chemical products, rubber and plastic products, which was down by 2.3 percent. Mining and manufacturing output are two major pointers for the economy’s growth prospects. The Reserve Bank’s most recent forecast put economic growth for 2016 at 0.4 percent. Mining output, released earlier on Thursday, decreased by 1.9 percent year on year in December, and was 2.7 percent down for the quarter.”

Moreover, the radical redistribution of resources including land, finance, mining, manufacturing and agricultural production is far overdue. The recent ANC National Policy Conference during mid-2017 renewed its mandate for such reforms. Nevertheless, South Africa, despite its role as a leading economy on the continent, the region still remains well entrenched in the capitalist mode and relations of production.

A break with the world capitalist system in South Africa is necessary for genuine growth and

sustainable development. These measures would require similar policy efforts in other states throughout the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the African Union (AU) member states as well.

President Ramaphosa Takes Journey from Labor to Business and Political Leadership

Ramaphosa has decades of experience like Zuma in the ANC and resistance politics in South Africa. As the former Secretary General of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), Ramaphosa played a central role in the national liberation movement.



African National Congress members celebrate the inauguration of President Cyril Ramaphosa on Feb. 15, 2018

He was chosen by former ANC and South African President Nelson Mandela to lead the negotiation team which reached agreement on a new constitution mandating the removal of the racist apartheid system. There was much speculation that Ramaphosa would be the successor to Mandela. This position went to former President Thabo Mbeki who was elected as head-of-state in 1999.

Mbeki was re-elected again in 2004. Eventually resulting from factional issues, he was recalled by the ANC in 2008 paving the way for an interim administration under Deputy and later President Kgalema Motlanthe.

Ramaphosa left his position as Secretary General of the ANC in 1996 to pursue a career in business. This was done in part to provide funding for the party so that it was not reliant upon transnational corporations for its resources.

According to an article published by [News24](#) in July 2015:

“The ANC aimed to fund itself via selected and well positioned cadres placed within the private sector. This was done firstly to create a funding loophole which could not be done within the ANC as the capitals raised were from within

its own alliance. Secondly it ensured that the ANC would not need to rely on other companies to raise funds which could have become a risk if the private sector colluded against the ANC. Thirdly it would provide a mechanism for broad based ownership on the JSE (Johannesburg Stock Exchange) and link private sector companies to the ANC.”

President Ramaphosa will inevitably need to take swift action as it relates to the national economy along with the drought which has struck South Africa. A national drought emergency was declared recently. In Cape Town water resources are limited for personal usage.

The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), which Ramaphosa was a co-founder in 1985, has cited that priority for water distribution must not be with the still white-dominated agricultural sector. Cape Town municipal structures are controlled by the opposition right-wing Democratic Alliance (DA) and COSATU harshly criticized the DA Mayor Patricia De Lille along with her party in general for worsening the crisis.

COSATU noted in a press release issued in early February:

“The threat to jobs and lives of people through diseases from sanitation spills that the DA risked has happened because they want to ensure continued water supply to farmers. Surely farmer’s plants must be allowed to die before people do, but for the DA, Black people lives are less important than farmer’s profit, from export products. The city and the province should know how much water is available in the dam and who the water is meant to go to. If the calculation reveals that half the water that is in the dams must go to farmers, then that must be checked and stopped before creating panic among residents. Failure to do this would be ridiculous. The fact is that farmers have used more water and that needs to stop.”

These and other vital questions must be addressed soon by the Ramaphosa administration in order to prepare for the 2019 elections. Both COSATU and the South African Communist Party (SACP), the two key allies of the ANC in the Tripartite Alliance, have welcomed the inauguration of the new president pledging to work with the ANC for the advancement of the National Democratic Revolution (NDR).

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