



## **Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference**

### **SACBC STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19 PROCUREMENT SCANDAL**

We join the nation in condemning the Covid-19 corruption scandal and the severe lack of ethical leadership that it represents.

Although we are deeply appalled, the news of the looting of public resources during the pandemic does not come as big surprise. We urge our leaders to take careful note of the way in which they have allowed a culture of impunity around corruption to develop and provide an enabling environment for the current Covid-19 corruption. In the previous years, despite serious allegations, there have been no arrests, prosecution and accountability for politicians and their families.

Anti-corruption institutions continue to be compromised and made less effective by patronage politics and blind allegiance to political factions. Meanwhile, “the corruption of the powerful ends up being paid for by the poor.” (Pope Francis, 19 December 2015).

It is evident that the current corruption scandal has further eroded public confidence in the office of the president and its ability to root out the cancer of corruption that is eating away the soul of our nation. We therefore make a special appeal to the president to abandon politics of expediency and appeasement and take bold steps to restore public trust in the presidency as an institution.

The effectiveness of current battle against the pandemic and economic recession requires the immediate intervention of the presidency which has the capacity to draw upon significant levels of public trust. During this difficult time in our nation when the lives and livelihoods of millions of people are at stake, the country cannot afford high levels of trust deficit in the government and the office of the president.

We wish to remind the president that the time for inter-ministerial committees, commissions of enquiries and political compromises is now over. We want to see the immediate suspension, investigation, arrests and prosecution of those involved, irrespective of who they are.

To this end, we make a strong appeal to the president and his cabinet to expedite the re-establishment of a specialized anti-corruption unit, equivalent to the Scorpions, and ensure that it is guaranteed sufficient levels of independence and budget allocations. Specialized courts to handle corruption cases should also receive serious



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consideration to ensure higher conviction rates and to expedite the resolution of corruption cases.

The current tender system should be reviewed in favour of greater transparency and accountability. The moral regeneration movement should also be strengthened with priority being given to a critical return to ethical values and family as a basic social unit. In the name of the voiceless and the poor whose means of survival is stolen from them by criminals posing as leaders, we expect the immediate response to these demands.

**Bishop Sithembele Sipuka**

**Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC) President**

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