

Statement of South African Civil Society Organisations in Response to US President Trump's threats

We, South African Civil Society organisations, looking to protect and promote human rights and democracy in our country, are appalled not only at the threats issued by US President Trump against South Africa but by his dangerous lies.

South Africa's government and executive are frequently deserving of fierce criticism. And we are proud of our record in doing so and of our unrelenting efforts to hold them to account.

But the idea that South Africa is "confiscating land and treating certain classes of people very badly" is demonstrably untrue and would be absurd were this lie not now being propounded at the very highest levels of US government.

The recently promulgated Expropriation Act does not look to confiscate land but is an attempt to address the dispossession and removal from land that long characterized South Africa's history and remains a festering sore in our country. It looks to secure a peaceful, prosperous future for all South Africans while respecting the rights of current property owners.

Moreover, our Constitution and our courts have long been praised globally for their championing and protection of human rights and civil liberties. Such flaws as there may be with the Expropriation Act will be fully scrutinized by our court system, and if found wanting, struck down.

How ironic that Trump in fighting off the various criminal charges he has recently faced should have compared himself to democratic South Africa's first president, Nelson Mandela, when it was Mandela who pointedly observed that democracy in SA must mean addressing centuries of land dispossession and denial, "creating opportunity for the poor to provide for themselves, their families and their communities, and to contribute to the wealth of the country as a whole through productive agricultural enterprise."

In his threat, Trump leaves unstated exactly who the certain classes are who are being treated very badly. Thirty years after democracy, South Africa remains among the most unequal places on earth with that inequality largely tracking racial lines: the typical Black household in South Africa owns 5 per cent of the wealth held by the typical White household. For far too many South Africans democracy has yet to allow an escape from crippling poverty.

Another bleak irony of Trump's threat is that the most significant funding contributed by the US to South Africa at present goes to healthcare-related initiatives. Those most directly impacted by any US funding cut are likely to be already among the most desperate, destitute South Africans. Trump's actions will only make them more so and by potentially

fueling tensions between the “haves” and the “have-nots” in South Africa may inadvertently threaten the interests of those “certain classes” for whom Trump ostensibly seeks to act.

As South African civil society we will remain engaged, as we have always been, in the search for a more perfect union in our country – in seeking to hold our government to account, protect democracy and human rights, and eradicate poverty and human misery.

We are unquestionably saddened that those we once took to be potential partners in this endeavour – to perfect our union as they looked to perfect theirs – should shamefully have abandoned that enterprise. But we are enraged that through thuggery and threat they would now look to deliberately endanger our endeavour.

Afesis

Alliance for Rural Democracy

Ahmed Kathrada Foundation

Campaign on Digital Ethics

Campaign for Free Expression

Council for the Advancement of the South African Constitution

Corruption Watch

Defend Our Democracy

Foundation for Human Rights

Helen Suzman Foundation

Justice and Activism Hub

Land Access Movement of South Africa

Legal Resources Centre

Media Monitoring Africa

Open Secrets

Public Interest South Africa

Public Affairs Research Institute

Socio-Economic Rights Institute

South African Green Revolutionary Council

The Desmond and Leah Tutu Foundation

The Surplus People’s Project

For further sign-ons, please indicate your endorsement by emailing

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