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SOUTH AFRICA'S TRUTH FEST - BUT WHERE ARE THE CONSEQUENCES?

The media is replete with reportage on commissions and inquiries currently underway in South Africa, all intent on unearthing the truth - the truth about State capture and corruption (Zondo Commission), the truth about the fitness of two top officials in the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) to hold office (Mokgoro Commission), the truth about tax administration and governance at SARS (the Nugent Inquiry) and the truth about the PIC, Africa's largest asset manager (the Mpati Commission).

President Cyril Ramaphosa did indeed provide relief to a nation fatigued by corruption, capture and abuse of public funds by setting up or boosting these commissions of inquiry within nine months of his assumption of duties. He committed to cleaning up SARS, seeking new leadership at the NPA and at several State-owned enterprises (SOEs) including Eskom, PRASA, the SABC, Denel, and Transnet. He committed to unearthing the truth and setting the country on the right track.

The media has done a sterling job of keeping the public abreast of details from testimonies and revelations from these inquiries. Not least, the salacious no-holds barred testimony from one-time COO of Bosasa, current whistle-blower and State witness, Angelo Agrizzi, at the Zondo Commission.

Testimony, affidavits, outright lies and half-truths have all been spoken before these commissions and more will no doubt emerge in the coming days and weeks. The public has predictably reacted with anger and outrage at the sheer quantum of public resources that have been siphoned off and the theft by some of the most senior government officials, who have been anything but stewards of our resources.

While some consequences have been felt by individuals like Tom Moyane, former SARS boss, there have been very few party-political consequences for those tainted by State capture and corruption. In addition, the bulk of misdeeds have apparently not yet been adequately investigated by the Hawks to put together cases that can be presented to the NPA for prosecution. One would have wanted to see the Hawks, for instance, apply for search and seizure warrants in the cases that have come to the fore in the work of the various commissions, as this would prevent possible culprits from hiding or destroying evidence. And therefore, no punishment has been meted out to anyone thus far. It is important to remember that the Zondo Commission by its mandate can refer any matter for further investigation and prosecution. This should start happening soon.

The question that is of paramount interest to the public is that while the information produced by the various commissions might reveal the truth, what is truth without consequences? The demand for consequences must be uppermost in our minds as the magnitude of revelations emerge. Without consequences, the time, cost and effort to gather the truth through these commissions, is rendered meaningless. The criminal justice system, and specifically the Hawks as its investigating arm, must come to this truth fest sooner rather than later. The new National Director of Public Prosecutions (NDPP), when she starts



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her new job on 1 February, should not wait too long to start with prosecutions. This should, at last, lead to consequences.

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Note: Former President FW de Klerk will, in his speech at the Cape Town Press Club on 23 January also stress the need for truth with consequences.