

Africa Day Speech

Speech by Zak Mbhele MP,

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ANC has learnt nothing from post-colonial Africa's failed promise

When the wave of decolonisation started sweeping through Africa in the mid-20th century, independence from the yoke of oppression and exploitation by European powers was widely expected to usher in a new age of political, economic and social freedom that would benefit all the diverse peoples of the Mother Continent.

Unfortunately, this promise of a bright future was soon dimmed, as many of these new nations succumbed to a number of internal problems, from ethnic-based identity politics that tore apart what were often already fragile societies, to civil wars and military coups.

The reason for most of these problems was selfish decision-making on the part of many African political leaders and elites which ended up suffocating, if not completely snuffing out, the flame of hope for African unity, peace, prosperity and development.

Unfortunately, the ANC has failed to learn the lessons of history, and the story that could have been told about any number of fragile and failing states on the African continent since the 1970s has been replicated by the ANC in a tragic tale of needless national sabotage. That story begins with the abundant optimism of a fresh start, in the midst of a new and emerging global order.

But in less than two decades, an increasingly out-of-touch liberation movement that is unable to adapt enough to constitutional governance spreads its rot to every corner and every level of society, such that what was an inspirational vision at the beginning, instead turns into a story of missed opportunities, misspent resources and misguided policies.

Over time, every page of this storybook tells of chronic mismanagement and endemic corruption, rooted in patronage politics and the narrow agenda of elite self-enrichment, at the expense of broad-based development and delivery.

This detrimental, narrow thinking is being demonstrated as we speak by the actions and inactions of this ANC government that are putting South Africa at risk of being removed from AGOA because of this government's decision to hold joint military exercises with Russia, and reportedly supply arms to them as well, and its refusal to condemn Russia's invasion of the Ukraine.

Clearly the ANC puts first its own narrow affinity with Russia and seeking benefits for its own elite through alignment with an authoritarian aggressor, rather than putting first the broad and best interests of South Africa.

A key problem facing us in Africa, from Cape to Cairo, from Dakar to Dar es Salaam, is that while we are the youngest continent, we are governed by among the oldest leaders. Africa Day will only achieve its highest meaning and significance when this imbalance is corrected, for how reliably can we entrust the African Union's *Agenda 2063* to custodians who won't even be there to suffer the consequences of failing to achieve it?