



Zuma-Gupta betrayal of public trust must be investigated, says Corruption Watch

The controversy surrounding the relationship between the president and the Gupta family demands immediate resolution. It is a particularly damaging distraction at a time when the country faces pressing economic problems, problems that are strongly related to the governance issues represented in the Gupta affair.

In essence, business interests represented by the Gupta family stand accused of having bought the state. The sellers are alleged to include no less than the president of the republic. It is admitted that the president's family has benefitted from the Gupta business interests, and there is strong prima facie evidence that senior government officials and advisers have similarly benefitted.

Three senior leaders of the ruling party have confirmed that they were offered cabinet positions by the Guptas. In one case – that of Minister Fikile Mbalula – this is corroborated by a witness and is not denied by the beneficiary, the Presidency or the Guptas. In at least one of those cases – that of Ms. Vytjie Mentor – it is clear that the Guptas sought, in exchange, official decisions that would favour their business interests. In another case it is clear that the minister of mineral resources used his high office to benefit the Gupta business interests.

These allegations constitute, on any definition, grand corruption and should be investigated and prosecuted by the criminal justice authorities.

David Lewis, executive director of Corruption Watch, commented:

'It is clear that certain of the business practices of the Gupta family strongly suggest contravention of the anti-corruption legislation and, as such, should be investigated by the criminal justice authorities. However, it is equally clear that the core of the problem is not to be found in the Saxonwold compound of the Guptas, but rather in the president's office in the Union Buildings.'

There will be more Guptas, and there probably already are, Lewis said, because sharp-elbowed, unscrupulous money interests will always prey on public resources.

"That is why the people elect representatives who are charged with defending their resources. Corruption can only take hold when those empowered to protect the resources of the public, abuse that power in order to pursue their private interests.

"The trust of the South African public has been grievously betrayed. The court of public opinion has passed judgment. It should be viewed as binding upon our public representatives."

Corruption Watch calls on the criminal justice authorities to investigate certain of the business practices of the Gupta family and of those political leaders and public officials allegedly implicated in these practices.

It calls on the ruling party, and particularly the parliamentary caucus, to examine the gross ethical transgressions of its leaders, and to pass its judgment on those practices.

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