

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
10 FEBRUARY 2017

A sad day in South Africa

JOHANNESBURG: The South African Council of Churches (SACC) has watched in shock and horror as the Parliament of South Africa deteriorated before the nations' eyes.

Yes, regrettably, South Africa and the rest of the continent have now become accustomed to the annual February tragi-comical theatre of our Parliament! In a sense the disheartening and chaotic drama of the SONA evening with over an hour of taxpayer's time and money fruitlessly expended, has come to represent the unfortunate "State of the Nation" - of irreconcilable divisions, feelings and the politics of disdain, insults and concomitant violent engagement by security forces, the chemical assault on the public gallery and the treatment of journalists outside the Chamber, all bordering seriously on the margins of constitutionalism. The spectre of police in riot gear in the hallowed precincts of Parliament was a regrettable sight.

Although we may appreciate the need to make differences of opinions known, the degeneration of the House to a brawl is a shame. The capacity to engage soberly and in earnest on differing views, of taking responsibility for mistakes and creating the environment for amends, and for healthy self-criticism is the core challenge of leadership and society in general in our country at all levels. It is a challenge of values and what makes for the common good. It was blatantly clear that this capacity has been lost.

Regardless of what the country seeks to achieve at public policy level, even as pronounced through such as the august State of the Nation Address, this political culture that runs through the veins of our body politic fermenting to a perfect bubble at every SONA, undermines the Constitutional Promise of the Post-Apartheid South Africa with democratic institutions in which people have their trust.

Is there an end in sight, or is the deepening pathology of our political and governmental environment a precipitous hurtle into the dark abyss? God forbid! We all need to take responsibility to respect ourselves as individuals, to respect the institutions we represent, to respect and honour the prescripts of our constitutionalism, and to respect the citizenry whose fate depends on a functional State system across the board. South Africa deserves much better, especially in the year that the country celebrates the centenary of Oliver Tambo's selfless life.

This is not *The South Africa We Pray For!*

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