

Thuli Madonsela on the pedestal of hope

 By [Nicci Botha](#)

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Former public protector, Thuli Madonsela, says she has neither the skills nor inclination for political office, but is committed in her role as chair of social justice at the University of Stellenbosch to help "create the South Africa of our dreams".



Thuli Madonsela, chair of social justice, Stellenbosch University

Pedestal of hope

President Cyril Ramaphosa's election has once again placed the country on a pedestal of hope, she told the audience at Old Mutual's Investment Insights seminar in Cape Town. This concept comes from Thabo Mbeki's salute to Nelson Mandela's generation that "pulled the country out of the abyss and placed it on the pedestal of hope on which it rests today".

Yet Madonsela remains cautious. "Things are looking good. Partly due to Cyril Ramaphosa's speech, the rand is looking good. But things can change."

In his State of the Nation Address (Sona) Ramaphosa provided policy certainty, but the question remains whether he has provided policy resonance.

"Yes, some policies are providing hope, but the process of engagement with government will determine their success. Sometimes this might even involve trying to reconcile what appears to be irreconcilable. No one wants to go back to the

'winter of despair' we had last year."

She explained there is a difference between policy certainty and policy resonance by using education as an example.

"If our education system currently faces challenges regarding quality and the ability to meet the demands of the day, one needs to relook the system and not just have more of the same approaches," Madonsela said.

"President Ramaphosa said a whole lot of discussions will take place on the topic of education - including science and technology. That is an opportunity for us to interface with government to ensure a match between what the industry and social needs are, and what they will be in 10 to 15 years' time."

Epic leadership

South Africa is at a crossroads, Madonsela said, and we can transcend the challenges through epic leadership. She explained that the epic part of the term is an acronym for:

- **Ethical:** doing what's right the right way
- **Purpose driven:** staying focused on your goals
- **Impact conscious:** be conscious of the consequences of your actions
- **Committed to service:** Let service lead

Madonsela points out even great leadership can be misplaced to the sidelines, citing Hitler as an example. "What kind of leadership will ensure the dream and vision is kept alive?"

Loyalty

She explains there are two kinds of loyalty. The unquestioning loyalty to government resulting to the turbulence and maladministration of the past few years, and the unquestionable loyalty to the people of South Africa.

"In state-owned enterprises we now see that some of the people who will be prosecuted are good people and just wanted to keep their jobs. Somebody at the top, however, wanted them to have unquestioned loyalty, so the service fell apart," she said.

Madonsela says she has paid the price for refusing to accept unquestioning loyalty, which includes ludicrous accusations that she was a spy acting for the CIA, MI6 and even Mossad. Although she tells these stories with wry humour, they no doubt still cut deep.

Social justice

Madonsela explains that we are not just spectators and all our actions have an impact on the world around us. Using the concept of ubuntu – a human being is a human being because we are all people – she says we must all work together to ensure social justice. "The South Africa we want and the world we yearn for lies in our collective effort.

"You and I will have to ensure we continuously define success not as a zero-sum game where one will win and one will lose.

"This should also be the approach of the business sector. Play your part in social justice. Instead of only investing in opportunities, you can see how you can invest to actually create opportunities."

White monopoly capital

Last year's buzz phrase "white monopoly capital" only got so much airtime and support was because it spoke to people's

real pain, Madonsela said.

"It was a classic case of diverting people away from state capture by giving them a dead cat - but that cat is not dead. If we don't all join hands, then someday someone might pull that scapegoat out again to bring division," she said.

She said she is encouraged by what is currently being done by law-enforcement agencies investigating state capture and she expects some arrests and jail sentences as a result.

"The swamp will be drained in terms of state capture and this will give a serious blow to corruption. At the same time, I believe we must look back to find out why it took so long for the state-capture investigation to start. A lot of evidence might have gone lost by now," she said.

She would like to see the Hawks pounce on anyone who was out of line, regardless whether they supported Ramaphosa or Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma.

"My greatest fear is that some evidence on state capture would have been destroyed by now so that some guilty people might not get brought to task. The Gupta leaks were great, but the inquiry must now authenticate those emails. I am not sure whether some evidence has not been destroyed by now," said Madonsela.

On the other hand, the fact that the head of the inquiry, and the second most senior judge in the land, Raymond Zondo, has the authority to source his own staff for the inquiry, something that is unprecedented, but ensures the integrity and autonomy of the proceedings.

"To create a functional state, you must focus on ethical government even before you deal with state capture. We need a lot of emphasis on building civil society so that we never find ourselves again on the brink of catastrophe like last year."

ABOUT NICCI BOTHA

Nicci Botha has been wordsmithing for more than 20 years, covering just about every subject under the sun and then some. She's strung together words on sustainable development, maritime matters, mining, marketing, medical, lifestyle... and that elixir of life - chocolate. Nicci has worked for local and international media houses including Primedia, Caxton, Lloyd's and Reuters. Her new passion is digital media.

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