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Zwelinzima Vavi Statement on the occasion of him being placed on special leave

Friday 16 August 2013, by [VAVI Zwelinzima](#) (Date first published: 16 August 2013).

Yesterday the 15th of August 2013, COSATU National Office Bearers (NOBs) held a historic press conference to announce that I have been placed on special leave pending an investigation and disciplinary action.

Today I am releasing the letter my lawyers wrote to COSATU for the attention of the presiding officer of the Special Central Executive Committee held on the 14th August 2013. The lawyers were requesting that the meeting be either cancelled and/or postponed because they believed that a number of the people who were to take the decision were prejudiced and have long been pushing that I be removed from my position. See the letter from my lawyers with attachments.

The National Office Bearers of COSATU in their own wisdom decided that the matters raised in this letter were not relevant to the discussion of the Special CEC. I disagreed with this decision and placed it on record that there was a strong connection between the issues raised in the letter and the matter on the agenda in that if others have been mobilised to remove me they would stop at nothing, including using any incident to achieve their goals. I believe this is exactly what happened in the meeting.

The NOBs decided that they would propose to the meeting an approach that says the matter for which the meeting has been convened and the content of my letter be handled through a Presidents and General Secretaries forum outside the special CEC meeting, with a view of tabling the recommendations on how these matters could be better handled and provided to the affiliates in the next COSATU CEC meeting scheduled for the 16-18 September 2013. It is now history that the NOBs did not push for this approach in the meeting.

No informed COSATU member, or member of society, can claim to be unaware of the fact that, for more than a year now, some faceless and at times identified, leaders of certain COSATU affiliates have openly and in public launched a systematic campaign aimed at removing me at the COSATU 11th National Congress, and when that failed, at the February and May 2013 CEC.

One of the intentions of the so-called intelligence report which we are distributing to members of the press today, is clear - to divide COSATU. It forms part of a campaign currently under way to weaken and destroy a COSATU that many have come to appreciate as a independent, fearless spokesperson of the interests of the most downtrodden in our country and elsewhere in the world, a true and reliable friend of the most marginalised all over the world that holds the moral compass of our young democracy. It is a campaign to reduce COSATU into a labour desk of the governing party, where leaders, whose ambitions are to serve in Parliament and Cabinet, will be able to advance their individual personal careers. Quite clearly, those who have formed long queues in the corruption-feeding trough fear an independent organisation, and I believe they have designed schemes to divide and destroy COSATU, no matter the consequences for workers' interests and South Africa as whole.

As you will see in the so-called intelligence report, the aim is not only to smear and destroy me as an individual, but also to also discredit and destroy a number of other prominent South Africans such as

Tokyo Sexwale, Judge Dikgang Moseneke, Cyril Ramaphosa, Irvin Jim etc.

This so-called intelligence report also makes out that the Marikana massacre, the service delivery protests and the xenophobic attacks in our country were not genuine responses by the poor to their squalid living and working conditions, but part of a grand conspiracy to overthrow a democratically elected state, led by the liberation movement, as well as other governments in the African continent. This reports aims to create paranoia in order to justify its true and sinister aims – politically annihilating those who are perceived as opponents and dare to speak the truth to power.

My lawyers are writing a letter to the Minister of Intelligence, Siyabonga Cwele, to check if this report is a product of any of the state organs. We will also write a letter to the Inspector General who is the intelligence ombudsman to ask him to investigate if state institutions have not been abused to divide workers organisations and smear individuals.

I have no doubt in my mind that this report has been widely circulated amongst certain leaders in the organisation, and has changed the reader's perspectives about me. Individuals who only yesterday would have laid their lives on the line in my defence and in the defence of the organisation have changed in the recent past and today are my worst political enemies.

Throughout my life I formed part of the collective that fought against the abuse of state institutions for narrow factional activities in our organisations. The public will recall that COSATU, our icon and father Nelson Mandela, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and others took a strong stance against misinformation that Cyril Ramaphosa, Tokyo Sexwale and Mathew Phosa were plotting to stage a coupe d'état. We took the same stance when some in the intelligence community produced a "Browse Mole" report, the aim of which was to smear the current President of the ANC, cde Jacob Zuma whilst he was still Deputy President.

Today a report which has all the hallmarks of being the work of rogue elements in the intelligence community, who are in the employ of factionalists within our organisations, produced a complete and a total fabrication by, amongst other things, constructing "transcripts" of telephone discussions and meetings that never took place with the purpose of smearing me and getting me removed as the General Secretary.

The Federation of workers is today in total turmoil, divided and totally paralysed. COSATU, thanks to these schemes to divide it, is today unable to take forward its Congress or workers' decisions to engineer a Lula Moment or second phase of transition for a radical economic transformation which will included fighting for the banning of labour brokers, fighting for a 40 hour working week, fighting for a national minimum wage, and for policies aimed at addressing the record high levels of unemployment, poverty and inequalities or fighting corruption that has reached catastrophic levels.

As we move towards celebrating the 20th anniversary of our hard earned democracy, it is extremely concerning that the abuse of state institutions to drive internal factional wars and destroy individuals continues. Some of us put our lives on the line, and fought hard to end such abuse. We naively thought this phenomenon was buried in the Polokwane conference of the ANC held in 2007. We were wrong!

At this moment I wish to recall statements made by the icon of the American civil rights moment who had this to say about moments like these: *"In the End, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends."* Martin Luther King, Jr.

The same worldwide respected icon of the black American struggles for justice said: *"The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he*

stands at times of challenge and controversy. The true neighbor will risk his position, his prestige, and even his life for the welfare of others."

I have instructed my lawyers to challenge the decision to put me on leave of absence pending investigation and possible disciplinary action for, amongst others, the following reasons:

1. The President of COSATU prejudiced himself because he circulated the so-called intelligence report whose intention is to smear and destroy my person.
2. The President of COSATU chaired the meeting even though he publicly found me guilty of bringing the federation in disrepute.
3. A number of affiliates leaders prejudiced themselves in that they clearly had been influenced by the so-called intelligence report circulated by the President. We will show in the courts that the people who share the belief that I am an agent of American imperialism are not limited to those highlighted in my lawyer's letter.
4. The decision to suspend in order to launch an investigation is unfair and invalid and has trampled on my rights as an individual. I also believe that the other staff member's rights have been trampled and that she has been caught in the cross fire. What will be investigated when I have already admitted that I have erred and apologised dozens of times? COSATU in the past had no qualms in accepting a public apology of the then Deputy President in Court - today the same COSATU won't forgive its own product who has broken no law or any of the COSATU policies.
5. I was not given an opportunity to motivate why I should not be put on special leave. In a desperate cover up to close this hole, only yesterday at the meeting with the leaders mandated to communicate the decision of the special CEC to me, the COSATU President asked me to state why I should not be put on special leave. I responded to tell them that the question has become rhetorical in that even if I were to convince them that the CEC was wrong, they would not be in a position to change a decision taken the previous day. However, I went on to express my feeling why the suspension was an act of vengeance to conclude attempts to remove me, which had failed on previous occasions, now using this saga that I have acknowledged and apologised for.

I believe a grave injustice is being visited on me. I believe that my suspension will be proven to be both procedurally and substantially unfair. The laws of the country, including the right to be treated fairly, has been trampled upon by the very same people who are mandated to defend the rights of workers and all South Africans, including myself.

I believe that South Africans, workers and the poor, including COSATU members in particular, must be aware of these injustices. It is up to them to decide whether or not to bury their heads in the sand because they are still safe in their corners. I believe that the next persons to be politically persecuted is not just going to be Irvin Jim and those other leaders of the unions that are defending my rights, but all those other South Africans that are listed in the so called intelligence report.

I recall this saying which is a lesson for all:

First they came for the communists, and I did not speak out because I was not a communist;

Then they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out because I was not a socialist;

Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out because I was not a trade unionist;

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew;

Then they came for me and there was no one left to speak out for me.

Zwelinzima Vavi
