

# Concern about silence on key threats to SA's economic longevity

South Africa has a leadership crisis, but this is not limited to government. Trevor Ncube, entrepreneur and publisher of SA's *Mail & Guardian* newspaper, recently addressed corporate leaders on their silence on key threats to the country's economic longevity.



Gavin Tipper, chairman of Accelerate Cape Town, with Trevor Ncube, entrepreneur and publisher of *Mail & Guardian* South Africa

Speaking at the Accelerate Cape Town annual general meeting, held at Workshop 17 in the V&A Waterfront on Tuesday, 4 August 2015, Ncube appealed to big business to speak out more.

"Where are the private sector leaders who are prepared to speak truth to power despite the risk of losing the next government tender?" he asked.

Ncube cited as an example the business community's response to the SA government's decision - made in contravention of the two High Court orders - to allow the escape of Sudanese President al-Bashir from the country in June. "I am concerned about the view of politicians vis-à-vis the judiciary and the voice of the private sector was notably outstanding. Where do you stand - silently hoping that the problem will go away or will you speak up as business?"

## Local government

Of equal concern to Ncube is the state of local government. "Towns, cities and municipalities are decaying and are being used as ATMs for people to collect money without working for that money. People without infrastructure will rise up for electricity, water and schools. What is the private sector's view on this important issue?" he asked.

Chris Whelan, outgoing CEO of Accelerate Cape Town, reported on the business leadership organisation's requirement to address a pressing need for high, inclusive growth. According to Whelan, this presents a challenge that business leadership must take up.

"Multinational organisations have a far greater ability than sovereign governments to do so effectively, given their reach beyond country borders and other boundaries. Corporate South Africa has to leverage its corporate might for a more prosperous future that will bridge economic and social divides. There is a high expectation on us for ethical leadership," he added.

## **Supporting civil society**

In a related point, Ncube called on business to more actively invest in supporting civil society so as to help strengthen its voice as a means by which to challenge the status quo. "Civil society is not as vibrant as it was. We have a funding crisis in South Africa in that business does not fund civil society. Foreigners are left to fund it. Do we value the important role of civil society?"

Gavin Tipper, chairman of Accelerate Cape Town, spoke of grave concerns for the current state of South Africa, including a dearth of leadership with few catalysts for change. "It is vital that business step up to the plate to provide the necessary leadership, and it is only able to do so if given a strong voice. Accelerate Cape Town is one of the organisations that has a crucial role to play in the next period of South Africa's development," he said.

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