

TO OUR HOST,

PLEASE BEHAVE YOURSELF...

By

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South Africa is the only country in the world where you can proudly eat half raw meat, and call it biltong. You can dry apricots, and call it Meebos. You can even experience pathetic service in all eleven official languages at the Post Office; and when in an accident, the tow-truck will arrive long before the police or the ambulance! Our illegal immigrants actually leave the country due to crime, and pedestrians normally run at the sight of rain, but not at a huge truck. This is the glorious Rainbow Nation which we have come to enjoy and which we call Home.

For minorities living in South Africa, we are the guests of our African brothers. There is no better place to be in the world than SA today. There is freedom to worship, to congregate, to trade, to do humanitarian work, and to even speak out against injustice. We are all enjoying the sweet fruits of freedom. All of us are being hosted in the Grand Palace of the land of SA, and our hosts, the government, is administrating this palace and seeing to it that everyone is comfortable and happy.

When the door to this Grand Palace opened in 1994, everyone was optimistic of a bright future. Admittedly, administrating a Palace is no mean task and a few problems can be expected. However, the people of this country have noticed that some of our honourable hosts are beginning to behave like they didn't see food for the past 100 years, and they are just stuffing their mouths and eating up all the food in the kitchen, before it can even reaching the starving people at the table. Twenty years down the line, everything is still being blamed on Apartheid. We tell such officials: "Please behave yourself."

Corruption

Crime affects individuals, but corruption affects the whole country. At the moment, SA is bleeding from corruption. Every official, from top downwards, seems to be on the Biryani Train. Corruption has become so bad that it has become very difficult to even put the figures into words. How do you spell out R45 329 970 334-98? Today, most of the people in our Grand Castle are sick because of a scarcity of medicines in the hospital, their children are illiterate because teachers never show up for duty, and criminals are the happiest as the police actually

fear them. The only people happy to be on duty are the traffic cops who gleefully look for bribes, officials at the Dept. of Home Affairs who are busy legalising the aliens in this country, and of course, our E-Toll gantries which will never fail to snap you even on the stormiest of nights!

As our top officials are always having meetings in their plush boardrooms or having parties in the cosy Royal Garden, so they may not be aware of how their Castle is crumbling. Soon, our children will inherit a Castle that has no walls or plumbing, and it may be too late to save ourselves from complete ruin. Out of 176 countries, SA is ranked as the 69th most corrupt in the world. Research shows that the foremost form of corruption in SA is "Tenderpreneurism" - enriching oneself by means of government contracts, procured through bribery, personal connections, or by way of appointing family members and friends on positions of trust that makes it difficult for them to refuse the awarding of lucrative contracts. A tender to repair a roof will be given out that would normally cost about R20 000-, however over R600 000- will be charged for it. Billions of rands have been lost in this way.

The Arms Deal, finalised in 1999, became known for the bribery involved to gain contracts that enriched many high-ranking ministers. The Schabir Shaik trial arose partly from this scandal. Then we had the Travelgate Scandal in which 40 members of parliament were found to have illegally used parliamentary travel-vouchers worth R18 million for personal use, followed by former National Police Commissioner, Jackie Selebi, who was convicted in July 2010 for accepting R120 000- from alleged crime-syndicate boss, Glen Agliotti. And now we have Nkandla, where the President's private house has been given a gorgeous R247 million facelift, when millions of people don't even have a decent shack to live in!

The second most common form of corruption in SA is "BEE-Fronting." This is a process whereby qualifying "African" persons are given a seat on the Board of Directors of a company who have absolutely no decision-making powers on the Board. Their purpose is only to qualify the company for Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) contracts from government, and enjoy certain corporate and tax benefits. Corporates and large businesses have profited in the millions from this, and continue to do so. Whilst the rich have become super-rich through this, the working class continue to pay their dues diligently and become poorer and poorer.

How Does Corruption Affect our Country?

1. High prices to consumers: When businessmen are required to pay exorbitant duties, bribes, and taxes on their goods, they pass all the costs on the consumer - me and you. When the palms of officials are not "greased," then their goods are delayed, which also leads to higher costs. Both ways, the consumers pay the price of bribery and corruption.

2.Reduced foreign investment: When investors notice bad governance, their confidence in the said country falls. This leads to reduced goods and services, which in turn, pushes up inflation and the cost of living. People or companies with the required level of skill and competency hesitate to do business with the said country, which leads to entire country remaining backward.

3.Reduced commitment from donor agencies: In times of crises or debt, international donor or monetary agencies fear helping the said country, as the funds will most probably land up in the

pockets of officials, rather than the intended recipients. As corruption increases, the State fails to finance its deficit expenditure, and the little savings it has is now also absorbed by the deficit. Interest rates go up and the government has no capacity to respond to social and economic needs. As a result, the general standard of living of the people decreases and the country as a whole suffers unnecessarily.

4.Reduced tax revenues: Many people routinely practice tax-evasion due to poor service-delivery, whilst corrupt officials tend to award improper tax concessions to many. Many do not make a full disclosure of their income and their assets, whilst some may claim refunds on unclaimable expenditure such as grocery shopping and personal holidays. All this leads to less money in State coffers for health, education and social security.

5.Poor maintenance of public infrastructure: Because of corruption, maintenance and repairs to old roads, buildings and projects always take a back seat to new projects. For fear of being exposed, corrupt officials prefer awarding new contracts, rather than spending on old projects which they messed up. The more the corruption, the less the economic growth. Corruption thus steals the wealth of a nation and impoverishes it. It leads to oppression; unjust decisions are made and just ones are blocked. Undeserving people are given chances, whilst deserving ones are not.

A corrupt society is a selfish society which no amount of wealth can satisfy, and a selfish society does not know the meaning of dutifulness, faithfulness, loyalty and accountability. Is not our society headed in the same direction? Don't public servants complete the work of one day in two weeks, just to get paid better? Don't our employees take unnecessary sick leave or look forward to their tea-break, rather than their work? Don't our doctors first look at the Medical Aid limit before looking at their patients?

As we see the fish rotting from the head, everyone suddenly wants a share of the "forbidden pie." Anyone with a little power wants to abuse their authority, even if it's only for a can of coke. This disease has spread to every race and segment of society. Eating the next man's wealth unlawfully has become the norm, whereas the Qur'an in verse 2:188 tells us not to "seek access to judges in order to wilfully usurp the wealth of others." Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) cursed the one who offers a bribe, the one who accepts it, as well as the one who arranges it. Once, the noble Prophet sent 'Abdullah ibn Rawaha to estimate the amount of tax owed by the Jews on their palm trees. They offered him some money as a gift, and he told them: "What you have offered as a bribe is not permissible for us, and we do not accept it." (Muwatta Imam Malik) Thus, all public officials are bound to make a full disclosure of their assets and of any gifts received. If the State feels that such gifts may lead to favouritism, then it can ask for its return.

In Islam, we believe that the roots of bribery and corruption are greed for wealth, lack of God-consciousness and forgetting that we will be held accountable before God on the Final Day consisting of 500 000 years. No amount of surveillance, audits, checks and balances can ensure honesty and transparency, only accountability to our Creator. Verse 21:47 of the Qur'an tells us that on the Last Day, the scales of justice will be laid out so that not a soul will be dealt with unjustly. A person with an atom's worth of goodness will see it, as well as a person with an

atom's worth of evil.

Lastly, as elections draw close upon us, I urge everyone to vote for the party that is the most upright and sincere: those who will not give in to their passions and lusts, who cherish the ideals of justice and peace. Don't choose the party that can be easily corrupted. As to which party this is, it's up to you to decide.