

Tutu disturbed at Mbeki ouster in South Africa: Warns against payback mentality

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Nobel Peace Prize laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu says that ousted South African president Thabo Mbeki scored significant economic achievements and promoted peace in Africa, but he made enemies within his own party due to “his intolerance of challenges and dissent.”

Still, Tutu warned on September 22 against a payback mentality. “It is good old-fashioned tit-for-tat. Our country deserves better. The way of retribution leads to a banana republic,” Tutu said in a statement.

Mbeki announced his resignation September 21 after the ruling African National Congress asked him to step down after nine years as South African president. The measure followed infighting between his faction and supporters of new party leader Jacob Zuma.

The ANC said its deputy president, Kgalema Motlanthe, would succeed the 66-year-old Mbeki as head of state until national elections are held in seven months.

“Motlanthe will be the president, not interim; he will be the president of the republic until the election,” said ANC parliamentary spokesperson K. K. Khumalo.

Mbeki’s decision to resign followed suggestions that he had interfered politically in a corruption case involving Zuma. Mbeki later announced that he will take legal action to clear his name and have the findings against him declared unconstitutional.

Another African church leader praised Mbeki. “This has taught a good lesson that a president can be recalled, even in young democracies,” said Mvume Dandala, general secretary of the All Africa Conference of Churches.

Dandala, a Methodist from South Africa, called for a peaceful transition to a new leadership and warned that if not handled carefully, the change of president could throw the country into a crisis.

Tutu, the former Anglican archbishop of Cape Town, has been critical of the policies of Mbeki, including his resistance to battling the country's HIV/AIDS problem and reluctance to intervene diplomatically in the turmoil in neighboring Zimbabwe.

Tutu praised Mbeki for his recent action in bringing Zimbabwe's political opponents closer, but noted: "South Africa puzzled many of our friends by odd foreign policy decisions that betrayed our history on his [Mbeki's] watch. Those enemies have got their revenge and are gloating as they rub his nose in the mud."

The globe-trotting archbishop, much-honored for his long-ago fight against apartheid, said he was deeply disturbed that the nation of South Africa "has been subordinated to a political party." Quoting from the ANC's Freedom Charter, Tutu said, "'South Africa belongs to all who live in it,' not to any political formation, however powerful."

He continued, "Perhaps now we will call for changes in our constitution. Let our president be elected directly by all South Africans, and let us abolish party lists." – *Ecumenical News International*