

News**South African Limbo Ends With New President, Cyril Ramaphosa**

Ramaphosa was a lead negotiator in the transition from apartheid to democracy in the 1990s

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Associated Press

CAPE TOWN, South Africa — Cyril Ramaphosa became South Africa's president with a message of clean government and inclusiveness on Thursday, stirring the hopes of many South Africans that he can reverse a corrosive period of decline and division under his predecessor, Jacob Zuma.

Ramaphosa, a lead negotiator in the transition from apartheid to democracy in the early 1990s, was elected by jubilant ruling party legislators anxious to shed political limbo and get the leadership of the country back on track. In an indication of the challenges facing Ramaphosa, the two main opposition parties did not participate in the National Assembly vote, arguing it was a sham process because the ruling African National Congress party was tainted by its association with corruption scandals during the Zuma era.

Even so, the 65-year-old Ramaphosa delivered a measured, conciliatory speech to lawmakers in a chamber that had been the scene of heckling and sometimes scuffles during appearances by Zuma, who resigned late Wednesday after protracted discussions with ANC leaders who told him to step down or face a parliamentary motion of no confidence.

"I will try very hard not to disappoint the people of South Africa," Ramaphosa said soon after he was nominated as an



Cyril Ramaphosa is sworn in as South African President by Chief Justice Mogoeng Mogoeng, left, in Cape Town, South Africa Thursday Feb. 15, 2018. Ramaphosa on Thursday was elected unopposed as South Africa's new president by ruling party legislators after the Wednesday resignation of Jacob Zuma.

unopposed presidential candidate and elected by his party. He said the issue of corruption and mismanagement is on "our radar screen" and that one of his first aims is to meet rival party leaders so that "we can try and find a way of working together."

Chief Justice Mogoeng Mogoeng presided over the parliamentary election as well as a separate swearing-in ceremony for Ramaphosa, who had been Zuma's deputy and in December was narrowly elected leader of the ruling party over Zuma's ex-wife, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma.

Noting the celebrations by the ruling party legislators after days of national anxiety over whether or when Zuma would resign, the robed chief justice

said: "I'm trying to adapt to the environment. I'm not used to it. In a court of law, no singing is allowed."

While Ramaphosa has consolidated his control of the ANC in recent weeks, he still faces the delicate task of removing compromised figures from the old administration as part of his anti-corruption drive while trying to avoid alienating ruling party factions that could

try to undercut him. He must also restore the reputation of the ANC, which fought apartheid and has been in power since Nelson Mandela was elected South Africa's first black president in the first all-race elections in 1994.

The party's popularity fell as anger over corruption allegations grew and it suffered its worst showing at the polls in municipal elections in 2016. Investor jitters over the political situation contributed to sluggish economic growth, compounding generational problems of poverty and economic inequity that will put early pressure on Ramaphosa's administration.

Still, the South African rand strengthened Thursday to its highest level against the dollar in several years

amid a sense that the new president represents stability and transparency lacking under his predecessor.

The foundation of Mandela, who died in 2013, said the state must now act against "networks of criminality" that have hurt the country's democracy.

As the country marks the centenary of Mandela's 1918 birth, "there is a need to reckon with the failures of the democratic era," the foundation said. "We believe that we are at a critical moment in our history, one which offers us the unique opportunity to reflect, to rebuild, and to transform."

The country's main opposition party, the Democratic Alliance, will work with Ramaphosa if he acts in the interests of the South African people, said party leader Mmusi Maimane.

"We will hold you accountable and I will see you in 2019 on the ballot box," Maimane said. While Ramaphosa welcomed Maimane's offer of cooperation, he described the election warning as "grandstanding."

Members of a smaller opposition party, the Economic Freedom Fighters, walked out of the chamber before Ramaphosa's election, saying it was illegitimate because South Africa's top court had ruled that lawmakers failed to hold Zuma to account in a scandal over state-funded upgrades to his private home.

The ruling party is "incapable of fighting corruption and maladministration from within its own ranks," said opposition leader Julius Malema.

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