**DEBATE ON VOTE 27: OFFICE OF THE CHIEF JUSTICE**

1. Chairperson, when former president Jacob Zuma proclaimed the Office of the Chief Justice as a department with its own budget vote in 2010, we applauded the move because it further cemented the aspirational goal of an independent judiciary in the country.
2. The independence of the judiciary is sacrosanct in a country with a history such as the one we have, and a country with excessive inequalities and humungous gaps between the rich who happen to be predominantly white, and the poor, who happen to be predominantly black.
3. The independence of the judiciary is further a priority because of the rampant corruption amongst those who lead. We must never have a situation wherein certain politicians and their handlers can at any time capture the judiciary and judicial reasoning in the country for their own nefarious interests.
4. Since the adoption of the Constitution in 1996 up until the retirement of Chief Justice Mogoeng Mogoerng, there was always that certainty that even when the judges got things wrong, the judiciary itself was beyond capture.
5. The mistakes made were bona fide mistakes, and the judiciary always had capacity to self-correct.
6. It is for these reasons that we have always supported the budget votes of the Office of the Chief Justice in the past.
7. Since the ascendancy of Comrade Raymond Zondo to the office of the Chief Justice, there is no longer that confidence and certainty that the judiciary is led by a person who is beyond the reach of the greasy and dirty hands of politicians.
8. First, the manner of his appointment left much to be desired. The Judicial Service Commission sat and interviewed four candidates, and after intense deliberations, recommended that Justice Mandisa Maya be appointed as Chief Justice.
9. Mr Ramaphosa, without reasons, decided to ignore that recommendation and appointed Comrade Zondo as Chief Justice.
10. The only inference to be drawn is that the appointment of Comrade Zondo was payback time for his susceptibility to dangle in politics and hold politically factional views on a range of issues.
11. The dangers were all there to see for everyone. Even while he was still Acting Chief Justice, Comrade Zondo saw it fit enter into a public spat with politicians on the role of the Constitution and on the suspected capture of the judiciary by politicians.
12. While Chief Justice, Comrade Zondo recently made public statements about his views on former President Jacob Zuma and the Gupta’s. Both Zuma and the Gupta’s may litigate up to the Constitutional Court, and Zondo may have to sit and listen to people he has already condemned as corrupt.
13. Would it be unreasonable therefore for Mr Zuma to never want Zondo presiding over his affairs? Would it be unreasonable for him to not trust the impartiality of the judiciary?
14. All these would have been prevented had Comrade Zondo confined himself to adjudicating matters before the courts, instead of wanting to be a politician.
15. The same Comrade Chjef Justice once boldly proclaimed that the election of Cyril Ramaphosa as president of both the ANC and the country saved this country from collapse. Would he ever preside in a fair and impartial manner when he is required to make judgements on the conduct of Ramaphosa and those associated with him if he is of the view that Ramaphosa is a godsent?
16. While dabbling in politics, Comrade Zondo has ignored the core functions of his office.
17. The administration of justice across the country is collapsing. There has been no intervention made to improve efficiency in the Masters office, leading to prolonged delays in the administration of estates.
18. We have judges who have obviously not been trained sufficiently and who are unable to deliver judgements on time.
19. The administration of the lower courts and the level of judicial decisions taken by the lower courts leave many of our people vulnerable to miscarriage of justice.
20. In his own annual judiciary report, Comrade Zondo bemoaned the incompetence and lack of proper leadership at the Land Claims Court, leading to abnormal delays in the finalisation of cases in that court.
21. The importance of the Office of the Chief Justice is however not diminished by the fact that the leader is out of his depth.
22. We are particularly in support of the judicial education function of the office and would want to see more money channelled towards this function.
23. For this reason, we are in support of the budget vote for the Office of the Chief Justice, and we are looking forward to the end of the term of Comrade Zondo so that there can be proper administration of justice in this country again.
24. The EFF supports the budget vote.