



Written by [Anthea Pollock](#) on March 9, 2021

The Long-standing Pandemic of Corruption in South Africa

When South African citizens heard that the country had secured a \$4.3 billion loan from the international Monetary Fund to support its post-COVID efforts, many saw it as merely a means of supporting the national government's longer-term pandemic of corruption, and were struck with a sense of despair. Citizens had legitimate grounds for concern that, aside from the burden of debt such a loan would place the country in, the IMF funds would find their way into the pockets of corrupt politicians. At the end of the day, corruption and mismanagement have been cornerstone elements in the governing of South Africa over the past two decades. It was estimated that the corruption in Jacob Zuma's second term as president cost the country \$100 billion.



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While corruption is expected, it would be fair to suggest that very few South Africans were prepared for the degree of fraudulent and inhumane conduct that has ensued during the COVID lockdown. When President Cyril Ramaphosa set up a ministerial committee to investigate reports of corrupt state tenders — involving businesses that provide medical equipment — he described those profiting from the disaster as a pack of hyenas (bearing in mind that these businesses imposed huge mark-ups on personal protection equipment). He added, “It is difficult to understand the utter lack of conscience that leads a businessperson who has heeded the call to provide lifesaving supplies during a devastating pandemic, to inflate the price of a surgical mask by as much as 900 percent.”

Arguably more astounding to many South Africans concerning this COVID-inspired corruption was the redirection and sale of foreign-aid food parcels that were meant for the poor. Ramaphosa continued, “Nor can one explain why a councilor would stockpile emergency food parcels meant for the poor for their own family — or why another councilor would divert water tankers en route to a needy community to their own home.”

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South Africa's online newspaper, Daily Maverick, expressed the general sentiment of the South African public when it stated, “Stealing from your own people is a crime; stealing during the pandemic is a crime against humanity.”

And the COVID-related crime in South Africa goes beyond corrupt politicians trying to enrich themselves at the expense of their fellow citizens. South African Police seized hundreds of fake COVID-19 vaccines on March 03 — and arrested four suspects (three Chinese and one Zambian national) in connection with the freight. According to a statement issued on the Interpol agency website:



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Some 400 ampoules — equivalent to about 2,400 doses — containing the fake vaccine were found at a warehouse in Germiston, east of Johannesburg, where officers also recovered a large quantity of fake 3M masks.

The seizure and arrests in South Africa led to the identification of a network selling counterfeit COVID-19 vaccines in China.

Police in China then raided the manufacturing premises, resulting in the arrest of some 80 suspects. More than 3,000 fake vaccines were seized on the scene.

Interpol Secretary General Juergen Stock referred to this exposure as the “tip of the iceberg when it comes to COVID-19 vaccine related crime.”

Then, according to Jason Eligh of The Global Initiative Against Transitional Organized Crime, there’s the issue of how drug dealers in South Africa have been transporting crystal meth across the country stashed in food parcels and medical supplies.

This raises the question: Why would or should South Africans believe the promises of change and building back a better country after the COVID crisis calms? If noble goals are abused for corrupt purposes, policymaking is held hostage to declining levels of accountability, the justice system is perceived as easily manipulated by international fugitives, and history dictates that revolutionaries (such as Julius Malema) find their mojo during politically dysfunctional times such as these. COVID aside, a government that seems incapable of establishing conditions for job creation, growing the economy, or implementing effective policing can’t honestly believe they’ve earned the trust of the people.



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