

South African president renews call for Gaza ceasefire, Palestinian state

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Cape Town, February 9 (RHC)-- South African President Cyril Ramaphosa has reaffirmed his country's commitment to helping secure a ceasefire in the war on Gaza and an eventual two-state solution between Israel and Palestine, during his annual State of the Nation Address.

Speaking before lawmakers at Cape Town City Hall on Thursday, the president said that “guided by the fundamental principle of human rights and freedom”, South Africa had taken up the Palestinian cause “to prevent further deaths and destruction in Gaza.”

South Africa has filed a case at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague accusing Israel of genocide in Gaza. Last month, the court issued an interim ruling, saying it has jurisdiction to hear the case and ordering Israel to take all measures to prevent genocidal acts.

“We have welcomed the ruling of the International Court of Justice that Israel must take all measures within its power to prevent acts of genocide against Palestinians,” Ramaphosa said in his address. “We condemn the killing of civilians on all sides and call on all parties involved in the conflict to commit to a peace process that will deliver a two-state solution,” he added.

Al Jazeera’s Fahmida Miller, reporting from Johannesburg after the address, said South Africa thus far considers its case at the ICJ “a success.”

“Ramaphosa had said that there really is no conflict across any part of the world that is intractable and can’t be resolved through negotiations, and that’s what he said when dealing with the issue of the war on Gaza and saying that South Africa was firmly behind the Palestinian people ... and that they would use all diplomatic and legal methods to continue that fight and bring a ceasefire and a two-state solution to that region,” the Al Jazeera correspondent added.

This year is a key election year for South Africa. Ramaphosa’s governing African National Congress (ANC) has led the country since the first democratic election after the end of apartheid took place in 1994.

Though historically dominant, the ANC is struggling in the polls, and many analysts say it will for the first time get less than the 50 percent parliamentary majority it has won in past elections.

On Thursday, the third-largest opposition party, the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) also boycotted the State of the Nation Address after its leader and deputy leader were suspended from parliament for storming the stage during last year’s address.

Ramaphosa, 71, used his address to highlight how far the country has come since the end of apartheid.

“Ramaphosa used the occasion to talk about some of the progress that has been made over the past 30 years,” Miller said. “The ANC is going through a very difficult time. The governing party in South Africa, many would say, has failed millions of South Africans in that little has changed, but the ANC would say something different.”

“Ultimately [Ramaphosa] used the speech to try and highlight what the governing party has done over the past three decades, and to try to get South Africans to come out to the polls, and try and sort of renew their hope in the party, try and fix some of the difficulties the party has experienced,” she added.

Ramaphosa also spoke about the steps his government has taken to address the country’s prolonged energy crisis. “We are confident that the worst is behind us and the end of load shedding is finally within reach,” he said using the local term for blackouts. He also pledged thousands of new jobs, saying his government “made significant progress on measures to grow the economy, create jobs and reduce poverty”.

Without naming him, Ramaphosa also took a swipe at his predecessor Jacob Zuma, 81, who last month was suspended from the governing party after backing a breakaway party that threatens to take votes away from ANC.

Listing the challenges South Africa has faced in recent decades, Ramaphosa said “perhaps the greatest damage” to the nation was inflicted by the period of massive corruption that marked Zuma’s rule. “For a

decade, individuals at the highest levels of the state conspired with private individuals to take over and repurpose state-owned enterprises, law enforcement agencies and other public institutions,” he said.

“Billions of rands that were meant to meet the needs of ordinary South Africans were stolen.”

South Africans are expected to go to the polls sometime between May and August this year.

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