

MEDIA STATEMENT FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – 1 AUGUST 2025

STATEMENT ON THE APPOINTMENT OF JUDGE PRESIDENT DUNSTAN MLAMBO AS DEPUTY CHIEF JUSTICE OF SOUTH AFRICA

The Advocates for Transformation (AFT) wholeheartedly welcomes the appointment of former Judge President Dunstan Mlambo as Deputy Chief Justice of the Republic of South Africa. This is not merely a professional appointment; it is a moment of deep national significance. It is the elevation of a jurist who has not only served the Constitution – but shaped it, guarded it, and lived its values.

Deputy Chief Justice Mlambo is one of us. His rise is not individual glory – it is a collective triumph for all who believe in transformation with substance, in justice with compassion, and in Ubuntu rooted in law.

Born in Bushbuckridge and raised with humility and resolve, Deputy Chief Justice Mlambo's journey from Legal Aid attorney to the pinnacle of judicial leadership represents the arch of constitutional justice in motion. He began by defending the poor and marginalised in the dusty lower courts and rural communities. In those modest courtrooms, he became what he has remained – a servant of justice, a voice for the voiceless, and a steward of constitutional promise.

In a judicial career spanning more than 25 years – from the Labour Court to the Supreme Court of Appeal, and ultimately as Judge President of the Gauteng Division – Deputy Chief Justice Mlambo has been a reformist, a unifier, and a strategic visionary. He has modernised the judiciary through the introduction of digital systems such as CaseLines, expanded access to justice through virtual hearings, and prioritised restorative justice through mediation. These were not administrative decisions; they were value-laden interventions rooted in Ubuntu, accessibility, and dignity. In his own words: "The courts must ... come down from their ivory towers to defuse the situation on the ground by making justice accessible to all."

His jurisprudence has echoed the soul of the Constitution. He once wrote: "Public power must be exercised in a manner that is rational and not self-serving. The rule of law demands no less." In another matter involving executive accountability, he noted: "The President's conduct was inconsistent with the Constitution and the principle of accountability. This cannot be ignored or excused."

Perhaps most profoundly, on the recognition of identity in a post-apartheid legal order:

"The law cannot continue to assume that only one language, one dress, one culture is neutral. Transformation requires us to see and affirm African identities in public life."

Deputy Chief Justice Mlambo's leadership comes at a pivotal moment. Our Constitutional Court faces a deep trust deficit from sectors of society. It must defend its independence, restore institutional stability, and ensure jurisprudential coherence in a time of social and political contestation. He brings precisely the

steadiness, insight, and legitimacy required for this moment.

As one of South Africa's legal leaders on the continent, Deputy Chief Justice Mlambo has also been a quiet but firm voice in affirming constitutionalism across Africa. His legal reasoning offers a reference point for SADC justice systems and his embrace of African cultural dignity in equality jurisprudence places him at the centre of a growing Pan-African judicial consciousness.

The Constitution

demands more than qualifications – it demands conviction. Section 174(1) is satisfied by his experience. Section 174(2) is satisfied by his identity and track record of transformation. Section 165 is upheld in every word and judgment that protects judicial independence.

He once said: "We must not lose sight of the transformative mandate of our Constitution. Transformative adjudication requires courts to search for substantive justice ... in line with its spirit, purpose and objects." To that end, his entire career has embodied transformation not as an abstraction, but as daily, difficult, devoted work.

We, the Advocates for Transformation, take immense pride in standing with Deputy Chief Justice Mlambo. We know his heart, his intellect, and his dedication. He has mentored many of us, inspired us, challenged us, and reminded us that justice is not a performance – it is a responsibility. This is not just a judicial appointment. It is a national alignment between our highest court and our highest values. His story reminds us that the bench is not a destination. It is a calling – one that serves not power, but principle.

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