

Press Release

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South African Institute of Race Relations
The power of ideas

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Ominous raid on investigative journalist Jacques Pauw's home has a chilling effect on democracy

Profoundly worrying questions arise from the raid by the Hawks' Crimes Against The State Unit on the Riebeek Kasteel home of writer and investigative journalist Jacques Pauw, coming as it did just 48 hours after several compromised individuals regained power in President Cyril Ramaphosa's administration.

The raid on the author of the bestselling book, *The President's Keepers*, bodes ill for South Africa at the very moment when so many had pinned their hopes on a post-Jacob Zuma era of open, accountable government, and an environment that would encourage, not deter, the holding of the powerful to account.

South Africans may well wonder how it is that ANC politicians identified by investigative journalists as having been complicit in venal and corrupt conduct at their expense have survived despite commitments to clean and accountable governance, while one who had the courage to expose the rot is subjected to the hostile attention of the state's security apparatus.

This turn of events can only be described as ominous, for it has a chilling effect on the fundamentals of democracy: the freedom of citizens to make their own judgements on the strength of freely shared information and opinions.

It is accepted that no journalist, or any other citizen, is above the law. It is also true, however, that the intimidation of journalists or writers – especially those who have demonstrated signal courage in exposing corruption that has cost South Africans dearly over the past decade – is the expedient of authoritarian governments who either have something to hide, or are less afraid of curbing the truth than owning up to the consequences of the truth being told.

In such conditions, a climate of fear and intimidation undermines society's confidence in its freedoms and its future. South Africa, of course, is no stranger to the devastating political and economic consequences of such conditions.

The ANC government would do well to reflect on what is required of it to equal a battered and long-suffering South Africa's new-found optimism of recent weeks, and to digest the evidently unpalatable truth that the country is counting on it to demonstrate vigour in tackling those guilty of corruption – not the courageous few who have exposed it.

Ends.