

'Constitution solid, wonderful'

**SIPHO MASONDO and
HARRIET MCLEA**

Ramaphosa: No threat to democracy's birth certificate

AN ETERNAL flame of democracy was lit outside the Constitutional Court in Johannesburg last night — 15 years after the signing of the constitution.

Former president Nelson Mandela lit a candle in Qunu in the Eastern Cape on Saturday.

The candle was then transported to Johannesburg for last night's ceremony, where it was used to light a torch that was passed through the hands of the former chairman of the Constitutional Assembly, Cyril Ramaphosa, his deputy, Leon Wessels, former chief justices of the Constitutional Court and its current head, Mogoeng Mogoeng.

'There is no threat I perceive. It is an enduring document'

Motlanthe said: "We are lighting the eternal flame of democracy with the intention that it will dispel darkness that once imprisoned our nation."

A 250m-high beam of light was switched on during the event and will become a permanent feature of the Johannesburg skyline.

Earlier yesterday, Ramaphosa, a senior ANC politician and member of the ruling party's national executive committee, said South Africa's constitution was not under threat from any political party or individuals.

"There is no threat that I perceive. The constitution is a solid and wonderful document. It is an enduring document."

The celebration was organised by the Constitution Hill Trust, of which Ramaphosa is chairman.

Former chief justice Arthur Chaskalson and Cheryl Carolus, who are both members of the trust's board, said there was also

nothing wrong with the government wanting to study Constitutional Court judgments and their effects on citizens.

This follows the government's announcement two weeks ago that it would appoint an independent research institute to study the Constitutional Court's judgments

to ensure they conformed to the country's transformation agenda.

Chaskalson said "everybody is welcome to read our judgments".

"They are studied by many countries all over the world, including well-established democracies like America, and have been considered in high regard. It's good that gov-

ernment wants to study them."

Carolus said it was time, not only for the government, but all South Africans to reflect on the court's judgments and how they had continued to defend democracy.

Recently, the ANC had voiced concerns about "certain" people allegedly attempting to "co-govern"

by challenging government decisions through the courts, in particular the Constitutional Court.

Examples included Johannesburg businessman Hugh Glennister — who successfully challenged the disbanding of the Scorpions — and the DA, which recently succeeded in getting the courts to declare the appointment of NPA boss Menzi Simelane unlawful.

● See Big Read



ETERNAL FLAME: Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe lights the flame of democracy at Constitution Hill in Johannesburg last night to celebrate the 15th anniversary of the signing of the constitution
Picture: LAUREN MULLIGAN