

## Zuma Defends Govt Stance On Dalai Lama

Written by Rudi Prinsloo

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ANC president Jacob Zuma on Tuesday backed the government's stance on denying the Dalai Lama a visa to visit South Africa in March.

Government "must have considered a number of issues" in taking its decision, Zuma told a business breakfast hosted by the South African Institute of Race Relations in Johannesburg.

"There are relations between countries that have specific protocol and certain things to be respected in one form or the other," he said.

The African National Congress's presidential candidate said government took decisions which were informed "by the nature of their relations with other countries".

"As I understand it they are not saying that the Dalai Lama cannot come to South Africa. I think they are saying March, the month March, is a serious month between the Dalai Lama and China in a very specific way," he said.

Zuma added that there were a number of countries who refused the Dalai Lama entry in March.

In March 1969, the Dalai Lama set up a Tibetan government-in-exile in India.

The government had drawn criticism from human rights organisations and even members of its own cabinet when it denied the Dalai Lama a visa to attend a peace conference.

The conference was indefinitely postponed after key speakers such as Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, and former president FW de Klerk pulled out as a result of government's decision.

Zuma said South Africa was not the first country to take the kind of action that it did.

"You know that South Africa is not the first one... Problems arose between France and China because of the Dalai Lama, and France had to later apologise... This is not an isolated agenda South Africa has taken," Zuma said.

He said South Africa's foreign policy would remain the same even though there is a new ANC leadership.

Zuma also came out in defence of former president Thabo Mbeki's approach on Zimbabwe.

South Africa was widely criticised for its "quiet diplomacy" stance on its troubled neighbour.

Zuma said that approaches followed by other countries had not worked in tackling the Zimbabwean crisis.

"No one could offer a better alternative," he said.

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He said South Africa's approach was the only one which yielded any results, and all those that were critical of the country because of its stance should be aware of this.

Zimbabwe had since formed an inclusive government tasked with rebuilding the former "bread basket's" tattered economy, he said.

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