

Cyril Ramaphosa's Marikana massacre "apology" is disingenuous and dishonest

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South African Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa's apology for Marikana has ignited controversy. EWN/Dr Jack

South Africa's Deputy President, [Cyril Ramaphosa](#), has "[apologised](#)" for his actions in the run up the [Marikana massacre](#) when police killed 34 striking mineworkers on August 16, 2012. His supposed apology during a speech at Rhodes University on May 7, 2017 – reportedly followed advice by struggle stalwart Winnie Madikizela-Mandela that he make amends and visit Marikana.

But, was it a proper apology?

Ramaphosa only referred to "language" he used in emails to fellow Lonmin directors, which he said "may have been unfortunate" and "[not appropriate](#)".

But, to the best of my knowledge, no one has ever requested an apology for "language". The concern is about his *actions* and their relationship to the killings.

Ramaphosa added that it was never his intention to have 34 mineworkers killed, but this again skirts the issue. Nobody suggested he was responsible for the 34 deaths, which followed after police opened fire on protesting miners and employees of Lonmin Mine in Marikana.

The argument is that his intervention made bloodshed more likely and that he could probably have stopped the killings had he acted differently. His critics (me included) are very clear that his failure to insist on negotiations led to the deaths.

Some fact checking is in order.

What the Marikana Commission found

The evidence in the [Marikana Commission of Inquiry](#) showed that Ramaphosa interceded at two specific moments. We need to separate these if his culpability is to be accurately assessed. Of course he may have been involved on other occasions, but we don't know about these.

- The first intervention was on August 12 2012, when he contacted then minister of police, Nathi Mthethwa, successfully lobbying him to send more police officers to Marikana.

In his recent weekend apology, Ramaphosa claimed:

Ten workers had been killed and my role was to stop further deaths.

In fact, at the time he spoke with Mthethwa, only two workers, both security guards, had been killed. The commission felt that, in contacting the police minister, Ramaphosa had acted responsibly, and this is not an unreasonable conclusion.

- The second intervention was on August 15, the day before the massacre. We know about this through the flurry of emails that Ramaphosa authored and received. These don't contain any evidence that he was acting benevolently.

By now there were about 800 police on the ground at Marikana, so no need to lobby for more. The focus of his new role was to persuade Susan Shabangu, then minister of mineral resources, that the Marikana miners were not engaging in a labour dispute but [“a dastardly criminal act”](#).

The significance of this is that if the conflict could be redefined, decisive police action could be justified. Ramaphosa was opposed to negotiations, which could have prevented further loss of blood. Instead, he supported the position of Lonmin and the South African Police Service, which would inevitably lead to deaths. Nobody planned for exactly 34 deaths, but deaths were anticipated, and Ramaphosa's supposed apology is silent on this.

The case against Ramaphosa

We don't know the full extent of Ramaphosa's knowledge about the operation planned for August 16. But, given his position as a director of Lonmin and willingness to act in its interests, it's unlikely he was unaware of “the plan” (which included use of lethal force).

Certainly two of Lonmin's vice presidents, Barnard Mokwena and Mark Munroe, were in the loop before the operation got underway. Thus, in my view there's a [prima facie](#) case for charging them with being accessories to murder.

Would they really have kept Ramaphosa in the dark? One reason we don't know the answer is that Lonmin's role was inadequately investigated by the commission. The company's representatives, including Ramaphosa, also only spent short periods at the commission's witness desk.



South African Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa at the Farlam Commission, in 2014. Reuters/Siphiwe Sibeko

In my opinion, there's enough evidence to charge Ramaphosa under the [Prevention and Combating of Corrupt Activities Act](#), a possibility flagged at the inquiry by counsel for injured and arrested persons, [Dali Mpofu](#).

It's possible that because he was pushing for a murder charge against Ramaphosa, Mpofu lacked the time to pursue this lesser crime. In one of his emails, Ramaphosa tells his Lonmin colleagues:

[d]iscussion with Minister Susan Shabangu -- I called her and told her that her silence and inaction about what is happening at Lonmin was bad for her and the government.

Given that, as acknowledged by the commission, Ramaphosa was a senior member of the governing ANC with enough weight to place pressure on the minister of police, the final words in the statement could be considered a threat. Whether or not Shabangu was influenced by Ramaphosa is not critical in terms of the law -- making the threat (just like offering a bribe) is illegal.

Elsewhere, Ramaphosa seeks to convey that he was a friend of the workers. But, as chairperson of Lonmin's transformation committee he was responsible for the company's failure to abide by its commitment to build 5,500 houses for employees, instead completing only three dwellings. Moreover, he benefited materially from the low wages that were the main grievance raised by the striking workers

[Ramaphosa](#) had been general secretary of the National Union of Mineworkers and, later, as secretary general of the African National Congress he had led his party in talks that brought an end to apartheid. He was a skilled negotiator perfectly positioned to bring a peaceful settlement to the dispute, but instead he aligned himself with Lonmin and the police in their attempt to crush the strike using lethal force.

What needs to happen

For an apology from Ramaphosa to have credibility, there should be full disclosure of everything he knows. This has not yet happened.

Furthermore, the following should happen:

- Full compensation to be paid, without further delay, to miners who were injured or wrongfully arrested and to the families of workers who were killed;
- Adequate funding for investigations by the Independent Police Investigative Directorate into which police officers should be prosecuted for the Marikana massacre deaths;
- Charging the police whose case files are now with the National Prosecuting Authority; and
- The immediate dismissal of Police Commissioner General Riah Phiyega, who was suspended after the commission found she lied during her testimony.

The Claassen Inquiry, appointed by President Jacob Zuma, [recommended her sacking](#) over six months ago, yet she continues to collect a large salary more than four years after a massacre in which she played a pivotal part.

Ramaphosa's "apology" makes one wonder whether he's in denial or just a desperate politician with [presidential ambitions](#). But his expressed regret was dishonest and disingenuous, and will not remove the stain that Marikana placed on his reputation.

Peter Alexander is the author of various publications on Marikana, most recently an assessment of the Farlam Commission of Inquiry published [in the Journal of Southern African Studies](#).