

Zuma withdraws all defamation suits

President Jacob Zuma has withdrawn legal action against various media over cartoons and articles he considered defamatory, says a report on the [IoL](#) site.

'In consultation with his legal team, President Zuma has elected to withdraw his claims against the various entities and in so doing bring these matters to a close, mindful as he is that much of the litigation commenced before the President assumed office,' his spokesperson Mac Maharaj said. The material, from 2006 to 2010, prompted Zuma to institute legal action against various media groups and individuals associated with them. But now he felt 'that measured as against the broader national interest and challenges which the country is faced with, his personal sentiments, however aggrieved he may feel, must give way'. Maharaj said Zuma had considered the cartoons and articles defamatory or calculated to 'bring his good name, and in some instances the office of the President, into disrepute'. In some instances they sought to cast African males in a particularly negative light with 'bigoted and racist overtones and innuendo'. Maharaj said the decision was 'informed by the broader agenda of reconciliation and nation building'. [Full report on the IoL site](#)

The decision may also have been influenced by the fact that Zuma missed a deadline last Thursday for legal documents to be submitted relating to six of his claims against media groups and individuals associated with them, says a [Mail & Guardian Online](#) report. It notes he initiated 14 claims against the media between 2006-2010, amounting to around R60m. They included a R5m action against Jonathan Shapiro over his Zapiro cartoon showing Zuma loosening his trousers while 'Lady Justice' is being pinned down by his colleagues, which was dropped in October. Earlier this year, two claims against Rapport and one against the Sunday Sun were also dropped and Zuma was ordered to pay legal costs. Other claims were against publications including the Star and The Citizen. Only one of the 14 was settled in his favour, notes [Die Burger](#) - Media24 paid R50 000 to Zuma for the publication of a reader's letter in Rapport. According to a report on the [News24](#) site, Media lawyer Dario Milo, from Webber Wentzel, said Zuma's move shows he recognises that as head of state, he must be the subject of legitimate criticism. 'I think that the sheer magnitude of the claims by the President sent out a signal that was detrimental in terms of freedom of expression.' Milo, who welcomed the decision to withdraw the charges, was previously reported as saying the ease with which claims were instituted between 2006 and 2010 but then neglected could point to Zuma never really being serious about them in the first place. [Full report on the News24 site](#) [Full Mail & Guardian Online report](#) [Full report in Die Burger](#)