

# More flak for Zuma on teen pregnancy

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AS PRESIDENT Jacob Zuma faced another round of criticism in Parliament yesterday, a fresh wave of backlash raged over his utterances that teenage mothers be removed from their babies until they have completed schooling.

Reiterating the controversial statements he made during his 2009 election campaign, Zuma said on Tuesday that teenage girls must be taken far away from their babies.

"They (teenage girls) must be taken away and forced to go to school, far away," the president said in his response to the debate on his address to the House of Traditional Leaders.

Zuma's statement drew criticism from children's rights and social welfare activist organisations. Katharine Hall, a senior researcher at the University of Cape Town's Children's Institute, said Zuma's utterances were absurd.

"The president's suggestion to remove the babies of young mothers from their care is clearly ludicrous and uninformed, presumably made in jest to build rapport with traditional leaders he was addressing in Parliament," Hall said.

She added that the idea of separating children from their mothers was "inappropriate and unhelpful" because the legislation gives young women the right to return to their educa-

SOME of President Zuma's controversial statements

● **On same-sex marriage and homosexuality (August 2006)**

"Same-sex marriage is a disgrace to the nation and to God. When I was growing up, *ungqingili* (homosexuals in Zulu) could not stand in front of me, I would knock him out."

● **On his daughter, Duduzile, getting married (May 2012)**

"I was also happy because I wouldn't want to stay with daughters who are not getting married, because that in itself is a problem in society. I know people today think being single is nice. It's actually not right. That is a distortion."

● **On a new generation of Africans trying to adopt others' lifestyles (December 2012)**

"Even if you apply any kind of

tion after giving birth.

Zuma is known for his traditional views, which are often at odds with South Africa's constitution. In 2012, the Commission on Gender Equality ruled against Zuma for his statement that it was a problem in society for a parent to stay with an unmarried daughter.

Zuma, while acknowledging that his initial statement had sparked controversy, was unrepentant on Tuesday. "The women protested, I want to take their kids away from them and blah, blah, blah. So I kept quiet, because I was saving in no way

## Presidential faux pas



lotion and straighten your hair, you will never be white."

● **On black people keeping pets (December 2012)**

"Spending money on buying dog food, taking it to the vet and for walks belongs to white culture and is not the African way."

● **On South Africa's roads infrastructure (October 2013)**

"We can't think like Africans, in Africa, generally. We are in Johannesburg, this is Johannesburg. It's not some national road in Malawi."

● **On politics and religion (May 2008)**

"God expects (the ANC) to rule this country because we are the only organisation which was blessed by pastors when it was formed. It is even blessed in heaven. That is why we will rule until Jesus comes back..."

can you have young kids being mothers of other kids and young boys being fathers of kids - they know nothing of it."

The president said allowing teenage mothers to leave school early was an untenable burden on society and the state's social welfare bill.

Hall said Zuma's statements were an indication of the general misconceptions about the trends in teenage pregnancy in the country.

"First, there is a widespread belief that teenage pregnancy is an escalating problem. This is not true. Fewer teenagers have

babies nowadays than they did in earlier times," she said.

Lisa Vetten, a research associate at the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research, said the president's utterances were appalling. "It's shocking that the head of state can make these policy pronouncements in contradiction to his government policy and programmes.

"It's most unfortunate that people scapegoat teenage girls for anything and everything that's wrong in the country. If he (Zuma) was to read research, he would see that teenage girls don't fall pregnant because they

are bored, stupid or want to irritate their parents."

Nondumiso Nsiband, executive director of Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre, said it was significant that Zuma's statements were made "less than a week after the government's claim that 'few countries can claim to have done better than what democratic South Africa has done to empower its women'.

The DA called on Zuma to retract his statement.

Presidential spokesman Mac Maharaj said Zuma had not singled out girls for criticism.