

SAfrica Wonders Who's First Lady For Polygamist President

Written by Rudi Prinsloo
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South Africans have long expected a Jacob Zuma presidency. But as his inauguration Saturday nears, they have a question for a man married five times and with three current wives: Who's the first lady?

Polygamy is legally recognised in South Africa, and the constitution makes no provisions for a first lady, according to Jessie Duarte, spokeswoman for the ruling African National Congress which swept last month's general elections.

"Mr Zuma can invite any of his wives or his daughters to official functions, depending on the occasion," she said.

However even his own party has trouble keeping up with his family, initially saying that he had two current wives and 18 children, but later updating his official biography to show three wives and 19 children.

All three wives will attend his inauguration on Saturday in Pretoria, and all of his children have been invited, his spokesman Zizi Kodwa said.

"He will be accompanied by his three spouses and children. He has also invited relatives from all corners of the country." His first wife is Sizakele Khumalo, whom he has known for 50 years and married in 1973. They have no children together, and she still lives in his village of Nkandla, deep in countryside of KwaZulu-Natal.

She avoids the public spotlight, generally shying away from public events and rarely attending official functions.

His second wife is Nompumelelo Ntuli Zuma, whom he married last year in a lavish wedding where they each donned leopard skins to dance for the traditional ceremony.

At 34 years old, she is about half the age of the 67-year-old president-elect and styles herself as one of the country's leading socialites.

Since their marriage, she has been seen frequently at high-profile events and was at his side when he cast his ballot in Nkandla for the April 22 polls.

Speculation is rife in local media that the younger wife is ahead in the first lady race.

In January, newspapers were abuzz with news that Zuma had paid lobola --a traditional gift of cattle, cash or other gifts to a fiancée's family -- to marry Durban socialite Thobeka Mabhija, with whom he is said to have two children.

The ANC's official biography says he is now married to Mabhija, though details of their marriage remain vague.

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One of Zuma's earlier wives, Kate Mantsho Zuma, committed suicide in 2000.

Despite a divorce in 1998, his former wife Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma remains in his inner circle as a member of cabinet.

The mother of four of his children, she is currently serving as foreign minister and is widely expected to remain in Zuma's new cabinet, possibly taking over the home affairs portfolio.

Even with Zuma under an intense spotlight during the election campaign, reports differ on how many children he has and whether he is planning to marry again. He has been linked to a Swazi princess, but has given no clear indication that he plans to wed her.

Zuma himself rarely speaks about his personal life, though he does not try to hide his love life either.

"There are plenty of politicians who have mistresses and children who they hide so as to pretend they're monogamous," he once said in a television interview.

"I prefer to be open. I love my wives and I'm proud of my children."

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