



**27 April 2022**

**Press Statement**

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**Ethical leadership required, particularly at times of crisis**

Today, South Africa marks 28 years of freedom from apartheid rule.

We value the ideals of freedom and democracy and acknowledge the significant gains made since 1994, but the occasion this year cannot be one that is celebratory. Instead, it should be a day in which we take serious stock of the state of our democracy.

This year's Freedom Day comes at a time when thousands of people in KwaZulu Natal and parts of the Eastern Cape and North West face the pain of losing loved ones, along with severe damage to homes, businesses and public infrastructure due to the recent floods.

It occurs as hundreds of Langa residents in the Western Cape remain displaced due to a fire that gutted the informal settlement several days ago.

As April heralds colder weather, South Africans are looking for alternate sources of staying warm and keeping their businesses going, as regular loadshedding becomes a reality.

Millions are still grappling with entrenched inequality, the impact of state capture and corruption, deteriorating municipalities and the resultant lack of services, a lack of water and sanitation, petrol price hikes and the day-to-day struggle of putting bread on the table.

In light of the numerous issues we face, this Freedom Day we call on public representatives and public servants to display heightened moral aptitude and to act with integrity, care and compassion.

We are repulsed by the allegations of government officials hijacking aid intended for rescue workers in KwaZulu Natal. We commend the vigilance of the individuals who took swift action to prevent the aid items being transported away.

We are similarly angered when those in power are given privileged treatment, particularly during a crisis. Leadership is about standing in the same queues as everyone else and refusing special treatment.

Leadership also requires a sensitivity to the sheer desperation of thousands across the country – it doesn't need political point scoring and the inability to acknowledge that poverty is brutal, irrespective of whether it is experienced in Cape Town or Umlazi.

It worries us that there is a persistent unwillingness to accept responsibility for political failures. Poor political decision-making, years of corruption and capture, and the lack of political accountability has left us with the mess we face at SOEs such as Eskom and Prasa. Those who draw the linkages between our toxic politics and the inability of the state to deliver basic services should not be shut down and sanctioned.

This Freedom Day, we want to remind political parties that it does not inspire any public confidence when those who face serious allegations of crime and corruption are put in positions of power. Similarly, public trust in government and political parties will continue declining, as we see little consequence for leaders whose names are closely associated with Covid-19 scandals, and for those behind acts of destabilisation and xenophobic flare ups.

We acknowledge the R1 billion in relief funding to be allocated to affected communities in KwaZulu Natal. We welcome President Ramaphosa's announcement that the Auditor General will be conducting real-time audits over the funds and that all disaster-related public procurement will be published online.

We demand immediate sanction against any public official or business found to be creating avenues to loot relief funds. Over and above criminal investigations, officials who try to divert funds must be fired on the spot and corrupt businesses and their directors permanently blacklisted on government's procurement databases. They must be publicly named and shamed.

The campaign acknowledges the tremendous work being done by organisations, communities and individuals on the ground, but we equally raise concern that the state is increasingly

becoming reliant on the NGO sector. A capable state must have partnerships with NGOs and other forms of civil society, but cannot abdicate its key responsibilities in serving the needs of the public.

The consistent pleas by South Africans for the government to deliver on its promises for basic services, allocation of habitable land, maintenance of public infrastructure and plans to mitigate the climate crisis have largely fallen on deaf ears over the years. We have reached a point, where there needs to be a fundamental shift around the urgency with which we address issues.

Almost three decades into democracy, people cannot be expected to live quietly in abject poverty without knowing whether they will be able to feed their children that evening. Those in power are seemingly disconnected from the building anger and levels of frustration. This Freedom Day, we appeal to government to get its house in order!

We urge all who live in South Africa, to draw the links between their lived experiences, the quality of our democracy and the political and governance decisions that are taken by the ruling parties and coalitions nationally, provincially and locally.

We urge people to read and engage on our recently launched paper which details these linkages, and the importance of participatory democracy. Comments from the public on the document will inform the Defend our Democracy Campaign's upcoming Conference for Democratic Renewal and Change, which we envisage being a catalyst for active citizenship, a revitalised democracy and a re-envisioned political culture. For more information, visit [www.defendourdemocracy.co.za](http://www.defendourdemocracy.co.za).

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