



7 April 2022

Call for public feedback on conference paper on democratic renewal and change

The Defend our Democracy Campaign today launches its national discussion document on democratic renewal and change.

We call on all members of society to engage on its contents and share with us their feedback.

This document is important because through it, we hope that various sectors and organisations across the country, including individual members of the public, will use it as a basis to engage on the issue of democratic renewal and change.

These deliberations, and the feedback that we receive, will form the basis of the Defend Our Democracy Campaign's national Conference for Democratic Renewal and Change, to take place in June this year.

The **Conference for Democratic Renewal and Change** will:

- Identify the political, socio-economic and security challenges and threats facing our country, and search for solutions in this regard;
- Develop a framework for a national campaign, driven by an active citizenry and based on shared perspectives, to safeguard, renew and change our constitutional democracy;

- Examine and learn from examples of people and organisations working to strengthen our democracy and its democratic institutions;
- Consider relevant and appropriate changes that should be made to our *Constitution*, legal and regulatory framework, and governance and electoral systems, to revitalise our democracy;
- Explore ways of making our public service developmental, people-centred, efficient and effective;
- Address issues of economic justice, climate change and the realisation of socio-economic rights; and
- Design a nationwide campaign to combat corruption and state capture and call for those involved, irrespective of their status, to face the consequences of their unlawful actions.

Representatives of various sectors of society such as labour, civil society, business, faith-based communities, academia, media, sporting and cultural groups, social and development organisations, women and youth formations, and the legal fraternity, will be invited to attend.

Between now and the lead up to the conference, the campaign will host facilitated workshops across the length and breadth of the country, mobilising all sectors of society, particularly grassroots communities about the need for a revived democracy and political renewal.

Fundamentally, we want to change the notion that politics and democracy is the sole preserve of political parties. We cannot limit our participation to democracy by voting every few years, or not voting at all – as has been the case for many in the recent local government elections.

We need to be deliberating on issues such as electoral reform, party funding transparency, how to access local budget information, how to ensure that all public representatives, governing parties and coalitions are held to account, how to eradicate capture and corruption and ensure that those who are guilty wear orange overalls, and how to make sure that our streets and streetlights are not just left to fall into disrepair with the excuse being that there is no budget to fix term. These deliberations are central to a participatory democracy because these issues, which are in fact political in nature, impact us all on a day to day basis.

While we acknowledge the gains made in ensuring basic rights and services since 1994, we do believe that the time for democratic renewal is now! We can no longer tolerate a political culture that puts personal or party interests before that of the public, and that fails to deliver basic services, cannot account for the use of public money, cannot hold those responsible for destabilisation to account, and denies that there is a public health, water and sanitation, and electricity crisis in this country. Today for example, while the nation celebrates the birthday of a struggle icon Charlotte Maxeke, a hospital named after her remains dysfunctional, severely affecting the public health system in Gauteng.

Our call is simple. We want every person living in South Africa to rally together and defend, protect, enhance and improve South Africa's constitutional democracy. We, the people of South Africa, must stand as the last line of its defence.

*Please log on to the Defend Our Democracy website on www.defendourdemocracy.co.za to access the conference paper document. Alternatively, refer to our Twitter handle @ForDemocracySa for the link to the discussion paper.

Issued by Defend our Democracy Campaign

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