



**Declaration of the Conference for Democratic Renewal and Change as adopted  
on 2 July 2022 at the Birchwood Hotel and Conference Centre, Ekurhuleni,  
Gauteng Province, South Africa**

1. We, the representatives of diverse civil society groups, organised labour and business, faith based and community organisations, academia, and the media, and all who live in South Africa who pledge allegiance to the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996* (the *Constitution*), declare for our country and the world to know that:
  - 1.1. The *Constitution* which guarantees South Africans wide-ranging political and socio-economic rights and liberties in a participatory democracy - drafted to be a binding source of national unity - is under direct threat due to the insurrectionary and other nefarious activities of corrupt forces in our society that are opposed to democratic rule, the rule of law and constitutionalism.
  - 1.2. The *Constitution* provides a framework for a '*political freedom and bread*' developmental agenda, to redress historical inequalities and uplift the material conditions of South Africans through the various generations of rights it enshrines. However, poor service delivery, organised criminal syndicates, large-scale corruption, and the systemic capture of the state by an organised network of compromised politicians, public servants and private business interests has over the past decade weakened our democracy and placed at risk the ability of the state to ensure that all our people live in dignity. This has been tellingly confirmed by the Zondo Commission of Inquiry into State Capture.
  - 1.3. It is of grave concern that parliamentary oversight and the accountability of public representatives as envisaged in the *Constitution* have been seriously undermined by state capture and an electoral system that hinders

accountability to citizens. This in turn has eroded the trust and the legitimacy of parliament, the provincial legislatures, municipal authorities, and the wider government in the eyes of people in South Africa.

1.4. Inequality, poverty, joblessness, and violence, which we inherited from apartheid, have been made worse by a decade of state capture, corruption, and maladministration by the government. We envisage a new economic model that is inclusive and leaves no one behind, that meets people's basic needs and is characterised by values of empathy, solidarity, and social and climate justice.

## **IT IS TIME TO ACT**

**2. It is time for South Africans, irrespective of party-political affiliations, to confront the pain of the present and past.**

Democratic renewal and change are overdue. We dare not fail in changing course to achieve the vision of those who went before us, and including of those in more recent years, for whom no sacrifice was too great in their courageous actions to usher in and defend our democracy.

**3. We believe a new politics for South Africa is imperative.**

We need new and innovative ways of thinking about politics, mobilising and organising to re-ignite people's power. Our point of departure should be based on clear constitutional principles, economic inclusion, values of solidarity, social and climate justice, ethical behaviour, respect, collaboration, and transparency, which must advance participatory democracy and unity. The new politics must change the lived experience of joblessness, a stagnant economy, adverse climate change effects, and indefensible inequality. Similarly, the private sector must be held accountable to the duties and values of the *Constitution*.

**4. Now is the time to take back our democracy.**

Now is the time to defend our *Constitution*. We must make our constitutional democracy meaningful. It must enable the full expression of people's power, where citizens are empowered to become more active, rightfully exercising their political agency. We call for a democracy where the conduct, ethics and integrity of public representatives and public servants are beyond reproach; where openness, accountability and service to the people is the starting point and non-negotiable in practice.

**5. We pledge our commitment to a constitutional democracy, the supremacy of the *Constitution* and the rule of law.**

Our *Constitution* is based on a deep tradition of liberatory politics and embodies a binding social contract between the state and citizens in which we - as equal partners - are responsible for the progressive realisation of fundamental human rights and the effective and efficient rendering of quality services to all people, irrespective of race, ethnicity, gender, origin or class.

**6. We have a duty to act.**

We believe that when the state and its public representatives fail to fulfil their constitutional obligations and governmental responsibilities, we - individually and collectively - have a right and duty to hold them accountable in lawful and peaceful ways.

**7. We have a programme of action.**

Act we will. We, over three hundred individuals and representatives belonging to over a hundred organised formations of civil society present at this Conference, will focus our collective energies on the following aspects, among other matters, to strengthen our democracy and to meet the aspirations of all South Africans.

**7.1. Campaigning for a New Electoral System**

We deserve a democratic parliament that is accountable to the people and not one that is populated by members of political parties who are visible only prior to elections and accountable to the parties they represent, rather than the public. Elections based on the current closed party list system are unable to deliver a truly representative and accountable people's parliament. The proposed amendments to the *Electoral Act* fall short of an electoral system that realises the full potential of our constitutional democracy. We will campaign for fundamental reforms of the electoral system based on the principle of direct accountability of public representatives to voters and the citizens at large; adequate voter and civic education; maintaining and strengthening the existing provisions of the *Political Party Funding Act* (2018); increased transparency in political party funding, and the imposition of severe penalties on political parties that fail to declare their source of funding. Furthermore, we will monitor the performance of public representatives to ensure that they discharge their oversight responsibilities and act ethically. We will act collectively to protect the integrity of the 2024 general election.

## **7.2. Reclaiming and Renewing our Democracy**

The measure of a democracy is the quality of life and dignity of the people who live in that democracy. That means, among other things, sufficient food, jobs, good health services, better education, affordable public transport, clean water, personal safety, and cheaper and sustainable sources of energy for the populace. Presently, there is deep disaffection and alienation among South Africans, particularly young people, with the current political establishment because of the dire conditions in which the majority live. We will campaign for government, particularly at local level, to redirect its energies to meet people's basic needs. Such mobilisation will be at the level of communities aimed at building people's power. We need to reinvent democracy and take back statutory organs aimed at enhancing participatory democracy in our communities.

## **7.3. Professionalising and Restructuring the Public Service**

Cadre deployment has led to the politicisation of the public service and the intelligence and security services, and the appointment of inept officials in the public service and state-owned entities (SOEs). It must be done away with. We will campaign for the application of the merit principle, consequence management, greater transparency, and lifestyle audits for senior appointments in the public service and in SOEs. The aim is to promote a culture of professionalism and accountability and enhance performance of public servants in all three spheres of government, including of the Boards and Senior Management of SOEs.

## **7.4. Combatting Corruption and State Capture**

Widespread corruption and the capture of the state by shadow private, political and criminal networks have led to the weakening of democratic institutions and diminished the capability of the state to meet the needs of citizens. We welcome the Report of the Zondo Commission of Inquiry into State Capture, which has marshalled the evidence proving the stark reality of prevalent corruption and state capture in our country; and urge our citizens to engage with the Reports. We will continue with mass-based campaigns against corruption and state capture; demand that government implements the recommendations of the Zondo Commission; monitor progress in this regard; pressure the National Prosecuting Authority to charge and prosecute perpetrators and facilitators of corruption and state capture identified by the Zondo Commission; support on-going media investigations into corruption and challenge the dissemination of fake news and disinformation by captured journalists and on social media

platforms; and support whistle-blowers exposing corruption in government and the private sector. We will encourage research into both crafting a model law on whistleblowing and the establishment of an independent Anti-Corruption Agency in South Africa. We will strive to develop corruption fighters or accountability monitors at grassroots level within communities. We will mobilise the private sector to join the fight against corruption and state capture, conduct their business on ethical principles, deploy their resources in a manner that will grow the economy and create jobs and share their skills, resources and capabilities to improve service delivery, especially within municipalities.

#### **7.5. Standing up to the Destabilisation of Democracy**

As civil society formations we will stand up to activities aimed at destabilising our constitutional democracy; acts of sabotage; the destruction of public infrastructure; the threats to and violent attacks and assassination of political opponents, whistle-blowers, activists and persons exposing corruption and state capture; xenophobic attacks and the co-ordinated propagation of disinformation. We will mobilise citizens in defence of our democratic constitutional order.

#### **8. Build a popular movement for change.**

We hereby resolve that the Defend our Democracy Campaign be transformed as soon as practicable into a flexible popular movement based on institutional and organisational affiliation, including individual association, where deemed necessary. It shall not contest elections and will act in defence of our constitutional democracy and mobilise at every level in this regard. This movement shall be charged with the responsibility of implementing the programme of action adopted at this Conference, and the Conference Secretariat shall report on its activities to its members within the next twelve months.

#### **9. Join the popular movement for democracy.**

We invite organs of civil society and all constitutional democrats to unite under our banner and join hands in strengthening our democracy and meaningfully improving the lives of all South Africans. We do so in the hope that we can develop a national programme to build civil society capacity to do consistent oversight and accountability work. The programme of action will be continuously enhanced by the inputs of affiliated organisations and individuals.

**Thus adopted in the presence of individuals and representatives of over a hundred organisations at the Conference for Democratic Renewal and Change held on 1-2 July 2022 at the Birchwood Hotel and Conference Centre in Ekurhuleni, Gauteng Province, South Africa.**

**List of Registered Participating Organisations at Conference:**

#SA1STFORUM

70s Group

777 Action Group

Abahlali baseMjondolo

Accountability Lab

Accountability Now

Action4Accountability Project

Activate Change Drivers

Active Citizens Movement

Africa4Palestine

African Presbyterian Bafolisi Church

Afro-Middle East Centre

Ahmed Kathrada Foundation

Amnesty International South Africa

Anglican Church of Southern Africa

Auwal Socio Economic Research Institute (ASRI)

AwqafSA

Baptist Convention SA

Beit Emanuel Progressive Synagogue

Botsotso

Business Ecology

Business Leadership South Africa

Business Unity South Africa

Camissa Movement for Equality

Campaign for Free Expression (CFE)

Castro & Monica Mayathula Foundation

Centre for Advancement of Non-racialism and Democracy

Centre for Analytics & Behavioural Change

Centre for Good Governance and Social Justice NPC

Centre for Sustainability Transitions, Stellenbosch University

Change EQ  
Citizens of Conscience Foundation  
Civic Movement for Change  
Co-operative and Policy Alternative Centre  
Community Legal Assistance Safety Network Outreach Project  
Concerned African Forum  
Congress of Business and Economics  
Constitution Hill Trust  
Corruption Watch  
Council for the Advancement of the South African Constitution  
Council of African Independent Churches  
COSATU Parliamentary Office  
COVID Comms/ Mobilize  
Defend our Democracy Campaign  
Democratic Governance and Rights Unit, UCT  
Direct Democracy South Africa  
Dutch Reformed Church  
Edtech Bridges  
Environmental – Women’s Action Developmental Initiative  
Equal Education  
Equal Education Law Centre  
Extinction Rebellion South Africa  
Father A Nation SA NPC  
Finetown Ward Committee  
Fridays for the Future  
Future-left  
Get Informed Youth Development Centre  
Government and Public Policy  
Gugulethu CAN  
Health Workers Care Network  
Heinrich Boell Foundation

Helen Suzman Foundation  
Ikhaya Development  
Impact4Good  
Institute for Security Studies  
International Disarmament Initiative, South Africa  
ISIZIBA Community Based Organizations of South Africa  
June and Andrew Mlangeni Foundation  
Leaders for Integrity  
Legal Resources Centre  
Letsema Centre for Development and Democracy  
Lord Lead Organization  
Make it Happen Foundation (Mihafo)  
Mamagadimela Research and Projects  
Mapungubwe Institute of Strategic Reflection (MISTRA)  
Mining Affected Communities United in Action  
Moutse Community Development  
Muslim Judicial Council  
Muslim Youth Movement of South Africa  
My Vote Counts  
National Association of School Governing Bodies  
Nelson Mandela Children's Fund  
Ntwane Community Development Forum  
One SA  
Organisation Undoing Tax-abuse  
Palestine Solidarity Alliance  
Pan African Institute for Evidence  
Parent Power Movement  
Parktown Capital  
People's Choice  
Platform to Protect Whistleblowers in Africa  
Poet Laureate Group



Politically Awesh  
Progressive Health Forum  
Progressive Tamil Movement  
Project Obduratus (Project O)  
Public Affairs Research Institute  
QED  
Right2Know Campaign  
Rivonia Circle  
Small Business Institute  
Solidarity  
South African Communist Party  
South African Council of Churches  
South African Jews for a Free Palestine  
South African National Zakah Fund  
South African Women in Dialogue – Southern Forum  
Southern African Alcohol Policy Alliance in SA (SAAPA SA)  
Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference  
Stalwarts & Veterans Forum  
Strategic Dialogue Group  
Tambo Dadoo Palestinian Legal Fund  
The Evangelical Alliance of SA  
The Mbegu Platform  
The Methodist Church of Southern Africa  
The Whistleblower House  
The Zenex Foundation  
Thuso Community Development  
Treatment Action Campaign  
Trinity Arts Alive Projects  
Tshisimani Centre for Activist Education  
Tujaliane Community Organization  
Universities South Africa

Vereeniging Business Co-operation

Voice of the People Movement

WaterCAN (OUTA)

Wattville Community Action Network

Whistleblowers4Positive Social Change

Women of Waqf

Zenzele Community Project

<p><b>Issued by Defend our Democracy Campaign</b> <b>Email: defendourdemocracy1@gmail.com</b></p>
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**To officially endorse this Declaration in your personal or organisational capacity, click:**

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