



27 April 2023

Message on Freedom Day

“We are both humbled and elevated by the honour and privilege that you, the people of South Africa, have bestowed on us, as the first President of a united, democratic, non-racial and non-sexist government.”

- *President Nelson Mandela, Inauguration Speech 10 May 1994*

The dream and promise of 1994 was to exist in a new South Africa, one not plagued by the poverty, indignity and division that was fundamental to the apartheid regime, but one which embodied justice, peace, work, bread, water and salt for all.

In 1994, our country was meant to transition to a government that was established to serve the public, where positions of power bestowed by the people were not meant to be abused for personal gain. While the promise of a new democracy was in some ways met, a decay and rot has now firmly set in.

Government has not been able to deal with corruption and state capture on the scale that is required. The Zondo Commission recommendations seem to be less of a priority as we enter the 2024 election cycle. The National Prosecuting Authority NPA has mishandled the first state capture linked case to go to trial. Whistleblowers are still targeted, harassed and even killed for exposing the rot and demanding accountability.

School children still die in pit latrines, while others go hungry in their classrooms because of suspicious tenders for school nutrition programmes.

The slogan of South African Tourism once was: South Africa, ‘Alive with Possibility’. Can this still be said given that we are a country with over 30% unemployment and even higher youth unemployment rate? Municipalities in the North West have left R460 million in conditional grants earmarked for infrastructure for greater service delivery unspent in a province where piped water in households remains an issue. One cannot even begin to imagine what could have been done for education, housing and nutrition with the still unaccounted for R1.5 trillion lost between 2014- 2019.

As we approach the national elections in 2024, it is incumbent on every South African to demand more from their vote. South Africa has, since 1994, been made many promises which have been either completely unfulfilled or actively curtailed by corruption, mismanagement and neglect. What a party says it will do is not nearly as important as how they plan to implement it. The promises of incumbent hopefuls must be met with systems of accountability that will not allow for their performance to go unchecked until the next elections or the scandal comes about.

Further, we must demand that our trust – as members of the public - be earned everyday and not as a result of an invocation of nostalgia or reminiscing about past victories. We are currently experiencing a crisis in energy, in addressing crime, in the health sector, in water and sanitation and in addressing poverty – all fuelled by a toxic political culture. We must demand to know how these are being and how the failures that have brought us to this place will be addressed and accounted for.

Freedom Day gives the opportunity to reflect on where we have been and how much further we need to go. It gives us an opportunity to recommit to holding government accountable at all levels, and in doing so, defending our democratic gains that were ushered in in 1994.



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