



# We must all commit on Freedom Day to keeping the dream alive

*It's crucial to make democracy work by addressing wrongs*

IN 2022, our commemoration of Freedom Day (April 27) is also a celebration of years of democracy in South Africa.

We must continue to cherish and develop our democracy because it cannot flourish without the dedication and commitment of citizens and leaders.

This commitment is manifested in manifold forms. We must not forget the vision, dream, expectations and passion that we had for democracy when Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo and other leaders were released from prison, when liberation movements were unbanned, when an interim Constitution for the new Republic was negotiated, and when the first democratic elections took place.

We know that democracy is not perfect, and that it is at best the "least bad" form of human government that we have. Democracy, however, does have a perfect and noble vision.

This vision can be phrased as a life of dignity for all, healing for all, freedom for all, justice for all and equality for all.

We must keep this dream alive. We must channel our energies and use our cultural, spiritual, social, economic and intellectual resources to make this dream come true. We have the freedom to do so.

We should guard against indoctrinating people, but it is important that South Africans develop a collective loyalty to our country, and to the vision and values, ideals and principles of our Constitution of 1996.

The American theologian Donald Shriver encouraged a healthy loyalty of citizens to their country.

One of his books, *Honest Patriots* (2006), has the significant subtitle, *Loving your country enough to name its misdeeds*. This means we can build a

## COMMENT



NICO KOOPMAN

patriotism that is not uncritical and blind to the wrongs of our land. I don't hear enough love and patriotism language in South Africa.

A second dedication that democracy needs to flourish is the fact that we must build a participatory democracy.

We should nurture a love for our country that prompts people to participate in public discussions and debates about the future of the country.

We should build lively and healthy public discussion, public dialogue and public discourse, which impact upon public opinion formation, public decision-making, public policymaking, public behaviour, public morality and public practices.

Access to the media and social media via modern technology provides ample opportunity for participation in public discourse.

Related to this participation in the form of public discourse is the building and development of an active and activist civil society.

In his book *Blessed are the Organised, Grassroots Democracy in America* (2010), Princeton philosopher Jeffrey Stout pleads for initiatives at grass-roots level to build a better society.

Civil society refers to institutions and organisations other than the corporate sector and the political sector.

These include institutions in the domains of education, culture, art, religion and sport.

Social movements, non-governmental organisations, clubs, neighbourhoods, volunteer groups and volunteer initiatives are all part of civil society.

Civil society played a crucial role in breaking down apartheid, and now it is needed to build democracy.

If democracy is not a participatory democracy, it will struggle to flourish.

Another dedication is that democracy needs to be inclusive. Democracy promises a better life for all, a life of dignity for all.

In societies like South Africa, deep divides of inequality exist.

Millions are excluded from the benefits that democracy offers, among other basic goods and services and necessities: access to education, housing, health care and safe living environments, employment, opportunities to make a meaningful contribution to the common good, and opportunities to fulfil your potentialities.

Where we do not work towards higher levels of equality and equilibrium in society, the dream of democracy might become a nightmare.

The exclusion of so many South Africans from the good fruits of democracy lets democracy perish rather than flourish. It also prevents citizens from truly enjoying their hard-won freedoms.

Democracy can become more inclusive if leaders and citizens practise an ethos of care.

In their initiative and publication, *The Care Manifesto*, five members of

an original London reading group, Andreas Chatzidakis, Jamie Hakim, Jo Littler, Catherine Rottenberg and Lynne Segal, plead that care be put at centre stage in the light of our interdependencies that exist in society.

Caring politics, caring kinship, caring communities, caring states, caring economies, and caring ecologies should be developed.

Then democracy shall flourish.

In her 2013 publication *Caring Democracies: Markets, Equality and Justice*, the famous feminist political scientist Joan Tronto builds on her earlier work about an ethic of care.

She also pleads for a caring democracy, in which not only individuals fulfil our care responsibilities, but where markets are also caring and where politics are caring.

For democracies to flourish, a growing worldwide culture of carelessness should be overcome.

This care should be practised as strapping up your boots in the intimate circles of the nuclear and extended family, as charity in the case of a few selected individuals and groups, but also as sacrificial compassion and justice to all by all societal systems.

As we celebrate Freedom Day, let's also remind ourselves that our dedication should be the audacity to keep on hoping.

Hope is to refuse to settle for the current state of affairs, but to imagine new possibilities and to work for the materialisation of those possibilities: possibilities like societies of dignity, healing, justice, freedom and the equality of all.

*Professor Koopman is deputy vice-chancellor: Social Impact, Transformation and Personnel at Stellenbosch University.*



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