



Statement by Chairperson Glen Mashinini on behalf of the Electoral Commission on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Electoral Commission

TODAY marks a special day for the Electoral Commission of South Africa - the 20th anniversary of its founding. On this day in 1997 our first democratically elected president Nelson Mandela, appointed the first commissioners following public nominations and an interview process prescribed by the constitution.

The commissioners were Justice Johann Kriegler (chairperson), Dr Brigalia Bam (vice-chairperson) and Thoko Mpumlwana, Professor Herbert Vilakazi and Fanie van der Merwe.

The commission appointed Professor Mandla Mchunu as chief electoral officer to build the administration and lay the foundations of the organisation we know and love today.

The task of creating a permanent, professional electoral management body was not easy and was made more challenging by the looming national and provincial elections less than two years down the line. In a short space of time the IEC needed to build a national common voters roll and put in place people, systems, processes and policies to deliver a free, fair and credible election in 1999. A year later it would be called upon to conduct the first municipal elections.

Today it takes us the best part of between 18 months and two years to plan and deliver a general election. And that is with all the necessary systems largely in place.

Those who were here in the early days of 1997 and 1998 had no such legacies or short cuts. What they did have was optimism and dedication manifested by their passion for electoral democracy, a deep-seated desire for South Africa and its fledgling democracy to grow and flourish and an unshakable commitment to the values of the new constitution.

As the commission, it is worth reflecting on some of our accomplishments over the 20-year journey. We have delivered four successful national and provincial elections; Four successful municipal elections and about 1 000 successful by-elections; As part of our good corporate citizenship we have also assisted in hundreds of elections for other institutions including trade union movements and student representative councils.

Along the way we have set new records and benchmarks for elections. The voters' roll has grown nearly 45% from 18.17million to 26.33million since 1999 and has consistently been around the 80% registration mark.

The number of voting stations has increased from about 14650 in 1999 to more than 22 600 last year. The number of political parties contesting elections has risen almost threefold from 79 in 2011 to 205 last year. The number of candidates has more than doubled from 30 081 in 2000 to more than 63 000 last year.

Voter turnout has remained among the best in the world for voluntary participation at more than 70% in national and provincial elections. For municipal elections it has grown from 48% in 2000 to 58% last year.

Our institution and the distinguished work of our professional election practitioners have been recognised beyond our borders through multiple international and domestic accolades and awards.

Through our membership and participation at executive level on international bodies we have been privileged to share our experiences and to learn from others.

This has seen our staff members providing technical support and assistance to many elections on our continent and beyond, and taking part in and leading observer missions. Some of the systems and processes that we have put in place to ensure transparency and credibility remain aspirational benchmarks for electoral management bodies throughout the world - including our results centres and the party liaison committee system.

The IEC is synonymous with the birth of a democratic and free South Africa. Our institution is a national treasure that belongs to us all. Over the past 20 years we have earned the faith and trust of South Africans and the world through our hard work, professionalism and unquestionable integrity.

But we are only as good as our last election. We have to continue to earn the trust and faith of South Africa in each election. This means ensuring we constantly strive to meet our objectives including:

- Strengthening governance, institutional excellence, professionalism and enabling business processes at all levels of the organisation.
- Achieving pre-eminence in the area of managing elections and referenda, including strengthening a co-operative relationship with parties and other stakeholders
- Strengthening electoral democracy through continuous outreach, education and engagement.

Meeting this mandate requires adhering to the values of our organisation which are impartiality, integrity, accountability, transparency, participation, responsiveness and respect.

It cannot be over-emphasised that our integrity as individuals and as an organisation is the most important attribute we have. It is not an overstatement to say South Africa would not be the country it is today were it not for the IEC's successful achievement of its mandate.

We are founded on the constitution as an independent institution, subject only to the constitution and the law, which must be impartial and exercise its powers and perform its functions without fear, favour or prejudice.

The success of our institution has been our willingness and ability to adapt to our changing environment. The IEC must continue to strive to rise to even higher standards of accountability, transparency, impartiality and integrity.

We can take pride that the Electoral Commission has always been an institution rich in talent and which boasts a team of world-class, professional and highly experienced staff who serve with distinction. We have enjoyed one of the lowest staff turnovers in South Africa, which means we have been able to retain our talent, expertise and experience and to attract scarce skills.

As we move into the next 20 years, we must embrace organisational renewal.

Election management is a collaborative process and we should take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank our strategic partners for the invaluable contribution they have made to the success of elections and our organisation.

We would like to express our gratitude and appreciation to political parties; government departments and various state services; civil society; non-governmental organisations; faith-based organisations; traditional leaders; academic institutions and foundations; gender, disability, youth and other interest groups; and, international organisations.

Finally, we must thank the voters for putting their faith in us and making the elections a success.

The founders of our country and our organisation have left us a great endowment. They have left us a vibrant democracy, an established institution, efficient electoral processes and systems, a pool of talented employees and a reputation for integrity, professionalism and excellence.

When the next generation of South Africans meets to commemorate 40 years of democracy what will they say of the legacy we left them? Let us make sure that they look back with pride and respect at us. It's up to us to fulfil the vision of those on whose shoulders we stand today.

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