



SOUTH AFRICA

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ADDRESS BY BONOLO MODISE, PROVINCIAL ELECTORAL OFFICER: NORTHERN CAPE AT THE LAUNCH OF THE 2022 SCHOOLS DEMOCRACY PROGRAMME

The great Franz Fanon once said: “Each generation must discover its mission, fulfil it or betray it, in relative opacity.”

The generation of Nelson Mandela discovered their mission. And so did the 1976 generation. Their mission was to defeat the evil system of apartheid and free the majority in this country from oppression. This they achieved, through the sacrifices of many who paid the ultimate price.

The question then arises. What then, is the mission of the 2022 generation?

We can debate about how we go about it, but I am sure that we can agree that the mission of this generation is to build the South Africa of our dreams.

Many of the members of the generations I have referred to were in high school when they were forced to make decisions about their mission in life.

So, it is not too early and neither are you too young to not only understand but to play an active role in decisions about your own future.

Now is the time! Ke nako!

The Electoral Commission’s role is to empower South Africa’s young citizens with knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for active citizenship and encourage them to register and vote in elections to nurture our young democracy.

The Commission’s goal is to create a new generation of active citizens, proud to register, participate in elections and begin to shape their own future. The 2022 Schools Democracy Programme, which has a focus week from 25-29 April to coincide with Freedom Day, is about entrenching the values and rights of our Constitution and promoting responsible and active citizenship among all South Africans.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The children of South Africa have rights and responsibilities. Our children have:

- The right to family care, love and protection.

- The right to a clean environment and the responsibility to take care of their environment by cleaning the space they live in.
- A right to food and the responsibility not to be wasteful.

But with these rights come responsibilities.

So, what, you may ask, are your responsibilities as children and pupils?

One of the first responsibilities is to show love, respect and caring to others, especially the elderly.

The other, perhaps bigger, is the responsibility to build your own future.

Today we are here to work with you and help you take the first step to make sure that your dreams - whatever they are - do come true. One of the most fundamental steps to take is to understand your role and responsibility as a citizen of this beautiful country.

All of us have the responsibility to be active citizens who participate in all decisions about all aspects of our lives. We should all shout the refrain: "Nothing about us without us."

One of the biggest contributions we can make in the creation of our own future is to participate in the elections of public representatives. This is so because public representatives take decisions about the majority aspects of our lives.

Some of you may already have your identity cards and others, among you, will soon come of age and get their cards. We urge you to use this first period as a young adult to register to vote and to go on and cast your vote. It is the most fulfilling single act, one through which you take your future into the hands and not leave it to others to decide.

It is important to remind ourselves that participating in electoral democracy is not something that should be left for adults or politicians to do. We don't want them to make decisions for us because we can make our own decisions. Nothing about us without us!

Many of you are going to be in tertiary institutions soon to continue on the journey to realize your own dreams.

The dreams of many heroes of our times were knocked into better shape once they were in tertiary institutions. In an effort to assist you in the civic education journey that we start today, the Commission has also launched a special voter registration programme for university students. We did so because the duty and process of building our own future is a lifelong process.

The Commission understands that our high schools are populated by a special generation of young South Africans, often referred to as "Generations Z". The key characteristics of this special generation is that they are highly mobile, inspired, questioning and extremely bright.

The digital revolution has provided us with technology that enables us to play the role in the historical mission bestowed on us. In the palm of our hands, at a click, we can do a number of things to build our future; to get ready to vote or to check that we are correctly registered.

It is important that the youth plays their part because research shows that electoral abstention among the youth is a point of concern but we believe that they can change all of that!

Research shows that those within the age group of 15-34 years constitute more than a third (i.e. about 35%) of the estimated population of about 50 million people.

However, during the 2021 local elections, a total of 175 206 18-19 year-olds registered and 124 905 of them voted on election day giving us a voter participation rate of 71 per cent. This is way above the average turnout of 46 per cent. Therefore, once registered young voters do participate in large numbers.

The Commission has launched the Civic and Democracy Education campaign to cultivate and instill a culture of electoral democracy; and active citizenry among young South Africans in both the public and private institutions of learning, to enhance voter registration and voter participation in both SRC elections and in national, provincial and local government elections.

It is our firm belief that engaging young South Africans' views about democracy and elections through voter education based dialogue will enhance voter participation among this particular group of the electorate population.

Today we take decisive steps shape our future.

Let us, as the great Mahatma Gandhi once said, be the change that we want to see.