

Distinguished Leaders of Political Parties,

Honourable Members of Parliament

Representatives of Civil Society Organizations, Business Organizations

Esteemed Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning.

It is an honor to stand before this assembly of political thought and democratic leadership. We gather here not merely as representatives of our respective parties, civil society organizations, corporates, and business organizations but as custodians of a shared democratic order—one that demands constant vigilance, reflection, and renewal.

Four years ago, we witnessed a pivotal shift in our political landscape with the revision of the Political Funding Law. That legislative revision was a milestone in our collective effort to bring greater transparency, accountability, and integrity to the financing of political activity. In a sense it reflected the will of the people and the wisdom of policymakers, who understood that the legitimacy of our democracy depends, in no small part, on how we fund our politics.

Today, we are called upon to reflect—not to congratulate ourselves, nor to cast blame—but to objectively assess the law's impact and ask: Has it delivered on its promise? Has it safeguarded our democracy? Has it enabled—not hindered—the healthy competition of ideas in the political marketplace?

In the spirit of open dialogue and modicum of responsibility, I would like to raise a few points in relation to the purpose of this symposium. Overall, we are gathered here to evaluate how far we have travelled since the promulgation of the political funding law. In other words, what strides have been made and what needs to happen to reach our desired ideal state.

First, we must assess the effectiveness of disclosure mechanisms. While the law was designed to enhance transparency, concerns remain about the opacity of certain contributions, the adequacy of public reporting and the efficacy of the enforcement framework.

Second, we must consider the law's impact on the promotion of multi-party democracy. Some parties and independent candidates often report difficulties in accessing legal and adequate funding. Has the law unintentionally widened the gap between well-established parties and emerging voices? If so, how might we ensure a more level playing field?

Third, we should examine the adequacy of public funding. Some democracies have embraced more public financing to reduce dependency on private donors. Has our approach struck the right balance? Should we expand, reform, or restrain public financing, mindful of our country's current fiscal constraints?

Fourth, enforcement remains a critical issue. Is the Commission appropriately structured and resourced to ensure compliance? Are the currently legislated administrative sanctions proportionate and effective?

These are not rhetorical questions. They are challenges that demand data, dialogue, and above all, political will.

To help navigate these questions the programme avails an opportunity to hear the initial outcomes of an evolving research undertaken by the Human Sciences Research Council. The insights from this evolving study are intended to inform discussion in this symposium and not a *fait accompli*. This is done because of the vital importance of public opinion in our democratic life.

The Commission will provide an account of its own experience in implementing the revised law since promulgation in 2021. Importantly, an indication will be provided as to how much went into the political parties since the advent of the disclosure regime. Emerging funding patterns will also be explored.

As is always necessary in evaluating regulatory frameworks, comparative analysis will be provided to juxtapose our own experiences with regulatory frameworks that obtain from other democracies around the world. Pertinently, case studies of Mexico, Tanzania and Senegal will be provided. Same will be done for our home region of Southern Africa.

Our Minister of Finance will also provide a perspective on the public funding of democracy in the country.

I urge all participants—regardless of ideological persuasion—to see this moment not as a burden, but as an opportunity. A chance to improve a law that touches the very soul of our democratic practice. To recommit to the principle that no political ambition should rest on secret money, undue influence, or inequitable advantage.

Let us remember, laws are not ends in themselves. They are instruments to serve the common good. When they fall short, we must have the courage to revise them. When they succeed, we must have the humility to strengthen them further.

Therefore, the purpose of this symposium is to evaluate our current framework with a view to providing the policy maker with parliament proposals to strengthen our regulatory framework.

Let our debates be rigorous, but respectful. Let our differences sharpen the outcome, not delay it. And let our unity be in service of something far greater than any single party—our democracy itself.

I thank you.