



FW de Klerk
FOUNDATION

THE RIGHT AND RESPONSIBILITY TO VOTE

In 2016 the FW de Klerk Foundation joined a group of other foundations, led by or based on the legacy of iconic national leaders, under the banner of the National Foundations Dialogue Initiative (NFDI)*. The main goal of the NFDI is to lead and facilitate a process of ongoing dialogue between all South Africans on our common future, based on our shared commitment to our Constitution. This is in keeping with the FW de Klerk Foundation's vision and mission, of promoting FW de Klerk's presidential heritage, among others, to support and promote the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. This includes every South African's right to vote.

The NFDI jointly decided that member foundations should raise their individual voices about the upcoming election and the importance of all South Africans exercising their hard-won right to vote.

In the second chapter of the Constitution - the Bill of Rights - section 19 provides that every South African citizen has the right to make political choices, to participate in free, fair and regular elections and to vote in such elections. The hard-fought right to vote is enshrined in our Constitution and should therefore not be taken for granted or exercised lightly.

Before 1994, millions of South Africans did not have the right to vote, and even today, there are still more than two billion people throughout the world who do not have a meaningful vote.

Our right to vote gives us a say in the country's future.

In a constitutional democracy such as ours, the right to vote gives eligible South Africans a co-responsibility to determine our shared future. Without a good voter turn-out, the mandate of our future leaders will be diluted. If we do not vote, we will not have representatives to keep our elected leaders accountable. Although many voters may be dissatisfied with political parties and disillusioned with the direction our democracy has moved in the last nine years, as the FW de Klerk Foundation, and as a member of the NFDI, we urge all eligible voters to exercise their right to vote.

Let us not squander that hard-won right by staying away from the polls on 8 May.

It is, however, not only voters who have important responsibilities in the forthcoming election. Political parties and the Independent Election Commission (IEC) also have a responsibility in this regard.

The IEC must guarantee an environment in which free and fair electioneering can take place.

As an organisation working to promote both unity in diversity, as well as cordial inter-community relations and national unity, the FW de Klerk Foundation calls on citizens, as well



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as the IEC, to promote transparency, as well as to act in a respectful and peaceful manner - before, during, and after the elections.

Although we hold the IEC in high regard, the Foundation is concerned about a possible lack of capacity to manage an election in which a record 48 political parties will participate. We therefore urge the IEC to ensure that the necessary capacity is in place and, if needed, that the State provides the monetary resources (even at this late stage) to achieve this. As citizens, we believe it is important to support the IEC in its efforts to conduct a free and fair Election. Accordingly, the NFDI, through some of its Foundations, will participate in the Election as Independent Observers.

We also appeal to all political parties to be ethical in their electioneering and to abide scrupulously by the Electoral Code. In addition, political parties have a special role in educating and informing the voting public about contentious issues. We believe it is possible to run election campaigns without being slanderous to others, whipping up racial tensions or being disrespectful to opponents. Parties should let their principles - as enshrined in the Constitution - be visible during the last week of electioneering.

The election and democratic process will be greatly enhanced if citizens have sufficient information to make meaningful comparisons between the policies of the various parties. In many other democracies, this happens via a public presidential or leaders' debate. We regret that this has not happened in the run-up to these elections. We strongly recommend that this sort of debate should, in future, become a regular feature of South African election processes.

We also believe that a concerted effort must be made to reach out to undecided, marginalised or apathetic voters. There are millions of potential voters who are disenchanted with our democracy and who feel excluded from the normal electioneering processes. We must jointly, as foundations, political parties and other civil society organisations, make an effort to reach out to them. If left unattended, these voters will eventually become permanently disengaged from the political process, resulting over time in even lower levels of voter participation in future elections. In a young democracy, this cannot be allowed.

We, as a Foundation and as a member of the NFDI, further commit ourselves to keep elected political leaders accountable, not only to their election promises, but also in fulfilling their responsibilities as prescribed by our Constitution. This is an ongoing task, but it must be stressed in the run-up to this important general election that democracy is not simply an exercise that occurs once every five years.

Citizens and civil society organisations must remain constantly engaged between elections on issues relating to the government of the country.



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Finally, we as the FW de Klerk Foundation, and as a member of the NFDI, urge all South Africans to celebrate our constitutional democracy on 8 May. Turn out at your local voting station, cast your vote, embrace the fact that you are able to vote - and do so responsibly.

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***NFDI Member foundations: FW de Klerk Foundation, Thabo Mbeki Foundation, Desmond & Leah Tutu Legacy Foundation, Helen Suzman Foundation, Chief Albert Luthuli Foundation, Robert Sobukwe Foundation, Jakes Gerwel Foundation, Kgalema Motlanthe Foundation and Mlambo Foundation.**