



# Time to find moral compass once again

**T**HE struggle for a new and transformed South Africa that was finally inaugurated in 1994 was always grounded in the belief of justice. Ethics was always an integral part of freedom, justice and democracy.

Apartheid was always perceived to be the most immoral and unethical social, political and economic system that South Africa experienced.

In particular, the state that presided over the apartheid society was believed by the majority of South Africans and many people in the civilised world as patently immoral and unethical.

The alternative to apartheid would be a just and ethical society.

In particular, the majority of South Africans believed that their history, culture, spirituality and history of Struggle provided the ethical foundation for the new society.

When a democratic political dispensation was finally established in the country, the people's love for freedom and justice assumed but did not confirm the continued commitment to social and political morality.

Those involved in developing the constitution worked on the basis of an implicit morality that history and the struggle for justice presumably implied.

And so the constitution clearly displays self-evident ethical values.

Those who promulgated the battery of laws that have been passed since 1994 functioned on the grounds that South Africa was crafted as a result of and, on the basis of, an ethics of struggle as we soldier on in the pursuit of further maturing our democracy.

Those who conducted the inductions of public representatives into parliamentary, local government legislatures, and cabinet posts in the last 22 years did so on the understanding that they were more than political and public posts; they were roles grounded in strong ethical foundations.

Those who were appointed to the public service under the new government were tasked with delivering services to the people.

So many sacrifices were made and so many died for or suffered in apartheid jails so that the rights of the people could be guaranteed.

In view of this those appointed were chosen as defenders of a public morality ingrained deeply in the constitution and inscribed in their hearts and souls.

The companies and corporate citizens of South Africa who have been in the process of remaking and reshaping themselves since 1994 to serve a nation in the making did so presupposing a new moral basis for doing business in a post-colonial and a post-apartheid South Africa, consciously or unconsciously.

Those who exercised their votes for political parties in the political democratic system that was inaugurated in 1994, did so with an understanding of a fundamentally ethical political process.

The list continues, of the social, political and economic processes, through which South Africa tried to build a new ethically acceptable society.

However, it has not taken long before crime, social and individual abuse, theft, mistrust, racism, tribalism and ethnicity, corruption and all manner of unexpected negative social and national characteristics reared



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their ugly heads.

The excitement of the first few years of democratic rule and social dispensation have long since waned.

In the past few years a new despondency and hopelessness have begun to induce acts of rebellion euphemistically dubbed service delivery protests but clearly distinguishable from revolutionary resistance practices of the Struggle period before 1994.

Concerned, therefore, that the new South African society's erstwhile moral underpinnings have become porous, dangerously subjective and, unreliable as a basis for building a cohesive society capable of promoting social, political, cultural and economic development, MISTRA's Ethics Project seeks to search for a new consensus for the moral vision of the country and people.

To this end the project is conducting a dialogue process aimed at creating a broadly accepted ethical programme for the new South Africa, rooted in the constitution, in our history as a great nation constituted by morally sensitive communities and inherited and shared values such as ubuntu.

This project seeks to reach back to and draw from the values of an illustrious Struggle for liberation which was waged over many years by a plurality of organisations of the oppressed people and supported by men and women throughout the world who stood by the values of justice, freedom and liberation.

The programme would be produced by a group of people who are diverse in terms of their backgrounds, perspectives, interests and commitments, but who are united in the thought that South African stakeholders must develop and abide by a social compact if the country is to save itself and progress.

Lawyers, judges, academics, social activists, trade unionists, religious leaders and practitioners, citizens, non-governmental organisations, young people, political parties, business people and organisations, students and student organisations, leaders of all areas of our society, will be invited to take part in a conference that will reflect on and debate on the moral foundations of the South African society.

Morally, who are we, what characterises and distinguishes us? The ethics conference will take place at the Development Bank of Southern Africa on September 15 and 16 in Midrand.

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