

**THE PEOPLE OF GOD AND ALL PEOPLE OF GOOD WILL
ON 20 YEARS OF DEMOCRACY**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Looking back on twenty years of the democratic experience in South Africa we can say with the prophet Isaiah, **"The hand of the Lord has done this"** (Isaiah 41:20).

The death of our first President, Nelson Mandela, became an opportunity to recall and appreciate the treasure of our democracy, which he was so instrumental in initiating together with other leaders and ordinary people who sacrificed, some of them to the point of death, to lead us to where we are today.

Our peaceful transition from apartheid to the democratic dispensation and the setting up of various constitutional mechanisms that promote and foster the rule of democracy and the rights of all have seen us succeeding in restoring the dignity of the majority of our people, which was denied by the apartheid regime. Statistics relating to houses built, water provided, electricity supplied, roads constructed, health facilities created, social grants implemented are some of the few indicators of the improvement of lives brought about by democracy.

While giving thanks, we also decry at the same time that many still live in intolerable conditions. Many are left hopeless and unskilled. Many still lack access to quality care. At the same time we decry that life has become so cheap. How many are still entrenched in racially biased attitudes and behaviour. We continue to hear horrific stories of child abuse, rape, domestic violence and the abuse of the elderly.

The Challenge to Get Involved

Let us pledge ourselves anew to strive to rebuild our country according to the values enshrined in the **Gospel of Jesus Christ.**

Let us work together at the eradication of crime and murder, the drug trade and human trafficking. Let us put our efforts into making South Africa hospitable to all and banishing xenophobia and racially motivated evils.

Transparency and accountability are virtues which build democracy. We should be able to hold each other accountable for the use of our freedoms and the use of the resources of our land. We should be able to hold police accountable for combating crime and teachers for educating our children, parents for loving and caring for their children, priests and religious ministers for the spiritual growth of our people. The list is long but in the end we all are accountable to treating each other with dignity and respect.

Democracy requires of political leaders the implementation of the policies for which they stood before the electorate. It also requires of everyone to become involved and make a contribution through civil and faith based associations.

We are invited as an expression of our gratitude for the precious gift of our developing democracy, to pledge ourselves anew to making a positive and meaningful contribution to building our country and its peoples.

Let us pray together and often for the grace to do what the Lord requires of us in building the earthly city. **"Unless the Lord builds the house, they labour in vain those who build it."** (Psalm 127:1)

Joint Pastoral Letter of the Bishops of the SACBC and Leadership Conference of Consecrated Life.