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REGISTERING TO VOTE IS THE FIRST STEP TO TAKE YOUR POWER BACK AS A CITIZEN

This weekend is the official window for all South African citizens who are of voting age to go to the nearby voting station with their ID and register as a voter. Once you register as a voter, your name will appear on the country's Voters' Roll.

Though this weekend is set aside by the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) for voter registration, that does not mean this weekend is the only time you can register to vote. Until such time the IEC officially closes registration, unregistered citizens who are of voting age can register at a designated place during the working hours. This weekend of 18-19 November is just meant to promote the need for registration

While the population of South Africa is 62 million, the citizens that are of voting age are 40 million. Of that 40 million, it is so far only 26 million that are registered to vote and shape the political landscape in terms of choosing their political representatives. Sadly, 14 million eligible voters remain unregistered and therefore not on the Voters' Roll. If you consider that the ruling ANC got 10 million votes in the previous Elections, you immediately see that the 14 million unregistered voters hold the key to correcting the wrongs of the country's politics by choosing the political representatives and political parties that know what we were in the liberation struggle for. Those are like AZAPO that will make sure that Onkgopotse Tiro, Steve Biko, Chris Hani, Sabelo Pama, Abubaker Asvat and the millions of the Azanian martyrs did not die in vain.

Let us go back to the 2019 General Elections to get a clearer picture. 26 million people were registered to vote. Of that 26 million, 9 million did not vote. There were also 9 million people that did not register at all. In the end, only 17 million people voted. The number of people of voting age who don't register has increased from 9 million to 14 million for the 2024 Elections. There is a sense in which the people are demonstrating lack of confidence in both the electoral and political system of this country. They seem to be throwing their hands in the air saying they have given up the attempt to rectify the South African politics to guarantee their own development as a people. This is a wrong approach to politics. Voter apathy is no cure to rotten and corrupt politics. If anything, refusal to vote gives a licence and a long lease of life to corruption. On the other hand, corruption pours dirty water on the sacrifices of the people to bring about liberation and democracy.

In a sense, a refusal to vote means the people are happy and welcome corruption by the ruling politicians and political parties. It does also mean that the people are happy that they are landless, jobless, homeless, poor and underdeveloped. Ironically, a refusal to vote is a vote for Black people to be forever trapped in shacks without any roads, clinics, schools, clean water and electricity. When you don't vote you are telling the corrupt politicians that they are doing a good job by looting the State resources and not going to jail for the corruption. You are giving them a go-ahead to carry on stealing the taxpayers' money so that there are no resources left to help deal with the problem of our children that are sleeping in the streets and smoking drugs like nyaope. When you don't vote you must know that you are contributing to giving confidence to corrupt politicians to loot the State resources that were supposed to help build schools for Black children so that they don't learn in mud schools and under trees. If you don't vote, you must in a sense take responsibility for the bucket and pit toilets to which Black schools in the villages and townships are condemned.

It does not help, in fact it is irresponsible to refuse to vote and later burn clinics, schools and libraries because you are protesting against corrupt politicians when you had a vote to remove them and replace them with the progressive and reliable ones that will do what you want as a voter. Anyway, why are you even protesting against these corrupt politicians when you chose not to vote? What I mean is that you did not put them there. They are not your choice because you stayed away from choosing your own political representatives. It makes political sense to hold a political representative you voted for. Of course, it is likely that you voted for somebody else than the corrupt politicians. At least, you participated and made your choice even if it did not win. Your unhappiness with the status quo of corruption and lack of service delivery makes political and developmental sense because you proposed the viable options through your vote. If you don't vote at all, what do you expect? Your refusal to vote and make an attempt to shape your own destiny is your loud voice that you don't care about corruption and lack of service delivery. In this regard, political protests make sense when you voted and got disregarded by those that directly or indirectly accessed political office through your vote. Even so, I grant that political protests are not limited to addressing lack of service delivery. They are methods of struggle through which the voiceless speak.

So far, 14.5 million women are registered to vote for the 2024 Elections. That means more than half of the registered voters are women. That is promising for political transformation. South African politics needs a shift from heartlessness and stoicism to empathetic political engagement. For the sake of our country, women must raise their voice. Once that voice is raised, society must open its ears and listen. Women must use the voter advantage to place the fight against patriarchy on the agenda of mainstream politics. However, being on the agenda does not guarantee that an item will be engaged as a priority. Women have a historical duty to ensure that the political issues that relate to Women's Liberation are highlighted in the 2024 Elections.

Back to the unregistered 14 million. It is worrying that the youth category of 20-29 years accounts for half of that number. Of the registered 26 million so far, the 18-29 years segment accounts for a lousy and hopeless 7%. These are the people that the adult society promises to be the leaders of tomorrow. Yet, as things stand, there will be no voice for young people in the 2024 Elections. Young people must remember the advice that they are the ones they have been waiting for. While they are told they are tomorrow's leaders, the preparation for that responsibility should start today. And there's no better way than to Register to Vote in the 2024 Elections.

There will be 23 000 voting stations throughout the municipalities in the country. We must remember that not to vote is to vote, though negatively and against your own political and developmental needs. For the sake of our country, let us register and vote to rehabilitate and restore credibility in the country's politics.