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June 16 1976 marked the turning point in the history of the anti-apartheid struggle. The intention of the National Party Government – to use Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in black schools sparked a protest march by students in the township of Soweto.

This spark eventually led to a full blown uprising against the oppressive apartheid government spanning a period of two years. In the course of this struggle more than 600 students lost their lives, thousands were injured, many were imprisoned and scores of them went into exile.

Does this new South Africa emulate the principals those heroes who paid the ultimate price? Was their struggle in vain or was it well worth the price they paid?

What would M. J. Naidoo remark about our new SA?

Would he conclude that our new democracy is a socially just society?

There is no doubt that life in the new democracy is far better off than what life was under the apartheid regime particularly for black people like myself.

SA has one of the most advanced and progressive constitutions in the world, safe guarding our human rights and dignity, it has all the checks and balances covered in Chapter nine to protect democracy and our human rights.

It lays the foundation for institutions to make sure government does its job properly and that our rights are being protected.

The Public Protector, The Human Rights Commission, the Commission for Gender Equality, The Auditor General and so on are all state institutions designed to strengthen constitutional democracy in the country.

But let us examine what is happening in our society at a practical level. Let us look at a few clauses of the Bill of Rights in Chapter two of the constitution of the SA.

I have the right to dignity and respect. For this I salute all the fallen heroes of this struggle!

As a black person I would hate to be treated the way my grandparents were – as a second class citizen. I am proud to be regarded as a human being and be protected by the Constitution. But would I be accorded the dignity and respect if I visit the Eugene Terreblanche. Will my sister working as a maid for a white or for that matter a black in Durban North or Sandton be accorded the respect and dignity she deserves in terms of the bill of rights? I don't think so. We still have a long, way to go in inculcating a culture of human rights in SA.

I have the right to education as a result of those heroes who sacrificed their lives for a democratic SA.

Prior to 1994, I would not have been able to attend New West Secondary School because of the Group Areas Act. But now I have to pay a school fee of about R1000. I also have the right and the freedom to attend Westville Boys High, which incidentally is a government school. But I have to pay a basic school fee of R18 000 a year. This is the free education I was promised. So much for, I HAVE THE RIGHT TO FREE EDUCATION! What would Hector Peterson say?

My cousin Siphesihle from Northern Natal also has the right to education. There are sixty learners from two different grades in his class. There is no electricity, no computers, no windows in the classroom, and the toilets and teachers – they both don't work.

Siphesihle has the right to education.

Despite the shortcomings in the country's education system it must be pointed out there are far greater opportunities for black students when compared to the education system during the apartheid era. The youth of today display very little responsibility with respect to the right to education, after all with rights comes responsibility. It is not uncommon to find student truanting and bunking classes, showing scant respect for teachers, not completing projects and assignment, not being punctual at school and generally showing a disregard for education.

There is simply very little work ethic amongst the youth of today. There is a general culture entitlement, who do we blame for this culture? Who should provide the leadership and guidance? Who needs to engender an ethos of hard work and sacrifice? Surely the powers that be should look at creative ways of building a nation rather than building empires.

We need to get our nation working. Our parents, teachers, youth and above all our national leadership have to put our shoulders to the wheel to get our nation working – particularly the youth.

At my school we say lead by example. Our leaders cannot be pre-occupied with self-aggrandisement, once this happens this culture will cascade and permeate to all levels of society the passion, commitment and dedication with which we fought apartheid must be used to build our nation. The anti-apartheid struggle was taken to every city, town and township. Like wise the struggle to build our nation needs to be taken to every city, town and township.

Remember what Oliver Tambo said: "a nation that does not value its youth, does not deserve its future".

There needs to be an all out concerted effort to address this challenge, before we end up with a lost generation.

Thirdly, I have the right to housing, thanks to the heroes of the struggle.

There is no doubt that very few countries can compare to the pace of housing delivery in SA. This new democratic government has delivered more than 2 million housing opportunities. A feat that needs to be applauded

So while we can pat our backs and boast about the delivering of houses we need to be reminded that there are millions of South Africans living in overcrowded conditions and informal settlements. Thirteen years into the democracy and we still have people living in inhumane conditions –yes – we have the right to housing, what would M. J. Naidoo have said about this?

How has the government responded to the challenges of HIV/Aids? The president sees no relationship between HIV and Aids. He is in denial with the causes of Aids. So how can we as a nation make progress with regard to the pandemic sweeping across our country? The Minister of Health will only suggest garlic and beetroot to address the problem.

The role-out of anti-retrovirals has been met with resistance. The sterling work done by our former deputy minister of health Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge, especially with regards to building bridges with NGO's working in the field of HIV/Aids, resulted in her being fired, the president and the health ministry has let down SA.

With regard to crime, for several years the government hid behind the crime statistics and there came a time where they even hid the statistics.

Again, another denial with respect to the alarming crime rate in SA.

In view of all the challenges facing our beloved country, we need firstly a government that is free of fraud corruption. We need a government that can provide leadership and guidance to build a non racial nation that has a sound work ethic. The social ills like Aids, unemployment, education, housing and teenage anti-social behavior should be high on the agenda of government.

While government must do its part in addressing the social ills of society, we, as ordinary South Africans must also play a part in assisting to resolve these issues. We must get involved in community organisations and NGOs' as we need to resuscitate the organs of society to partner government for the good of our nation.

Finally, I always like to leave this message:

Nothing can ever wash away the ecstasy my fellow South Africans had on the day SA was declared a democratic nation. It was like rain after years of drought that poured on every South African, killing the rays of the torturous sun, treating the infection and promising a better future. The pure water that fell as rain was a symbol of cleansing and rinsing off of the different colors of our skin and leaving us with the most beautiful yet invisible skin color, and that is being South African. And now we stand before of the rest of the world as the most developed country in Africa, let us not lose the opportunity let us build the nation

So, my fellow South Africans let us unite and stand tall so the rest of the world can see what we mean when we say we are not Black, White, Colored or Indians, but we are South Africans and a true reflection of a rainbow nation.