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Before one can discuss the current challenges and opportunities in building democracy in SA and the Region, one has to look at some of the definitions of democracy.

- a political system in which the supreme power lies in a body of citizens who can elect people to represent them
- Democracy is a form of government. While the term democracy is typically used in the context of a political state, the principles are also applicable to other groups and organisations.
- majority rule: the doctrine that the numerical majority of an organised group can make decisions binding on the whole group

I truly believe there are many obstacles and opportunities in building democracy and striving for it in South Africa and the Region, so let me begin by looking at some of the obstacles.

Although most South Africans contributed to the abolishment of apartheid, it still lives in the heart of many.

They have forgiven but not forgotten!

For many teenagers, we were too young to remember the apartheid era and do not know of the hurt, but we are constantly reminded of this by our parents and grandparents.

How are the children of SA support to grow as a result of this? Let us consider the various ways this constant reminder is a challenge in SA and affects the youth:

- It stunts growth as the youth of South Africa cannot grow out of the shell of apartheid.
- It stirs up feelings of hurt and anger.
- It is difficult for the youth to make a change and progress towards the future.

I believe the people of SA have not grown out of the shell of the apartheid mentality. And this can be seen in many forms. This was clearly shown by the people of SA through the xenophobic attacks.

This proved that we as SA citizens are afraid of change.

It can also be seen when people of different cultures and beliefs interact with each other, why do we become threatened by this? We need to reconcile within ourselves to move forward and progress towards the future.

Crime, poverty, the high rate of HIV/Aids and unemployment all challenge democracy and nation-building.

Only when we have combated these issues will it be possible to move onwards and upwards in SA. Nevertheless there are many good things that have come out of democracy.

On this very day in 1976 students fought for their right to be taught in their mother tongue. Slowly, but surely, changes took place and we now have the RIGHTS they fought for!

We now have 11 official languages. We also have laws and rules stated in the Constitution that have created opportunities for individuals.

We have freedom of expression and choice - this helps prevent people from being exploited, and allows individuals the right to practice their religious cultures and beliefs.

The constitution benefits the entire country as SA enters the global arena of revolution.

Lastly I would like to pay tribute and give thanks to all who have given their lives for the freedom we all have.

It is now time for the youth to take the baton from them and sprint to the finish line and make our diverse country the great beautiful place it deserves to be!