

## **KAGISO TRUST: Fellow civil society compatriots – a call to action!**

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Almost thirty years into our democracy the cumulative effect of recent events are provoking the greatest feelings of sadness, fear, and anxiety, not only in the civil society sector but our country itself. Our collective activism and leadership in civil society and the NGO sector is needed today more than ever before. We write to you today in a humble contemplation to invite us all to re-examine our current trajectory and urgently review our country's current course.

Following the passing of Archbishop Desmond Tutu at the tail-end of 2021, the nation and the world at large has paused in deep contemplation and reflection of a life lived in singular, unrelenting, and tireless service of justice. His death closed a year in which the nation has endured perhaps the highest levels of trauma since the end of Apartheid, with the on-going impact of the COVID-19 pandemic; the shocking days of looting and violence we experienced in July 2021, as well as the conclusion, finally, of the Zondo Commission of Inquiry into State Capture. The impact of the cumulative stresses our society has experienced has exacerbated the underlying and structural fault lines in South Africa: the incomplete journey to national reconciliation, justice, equality, and peace for all.

Our nation is in deep crisis, with seemingly no viable alternative path to return to the promise of democracy won in 1994, when the Arch so prophetically captured the national mood of hope and optimism for a future for all "Rainbow people of God".

As we barely began our reflections on the life and work of the Arch, days and a mere matter of metres from where he was celebrated and laid to rest at the iconic St. Georges Cathedral in the heart of Cape Town, a raging inferno engulfed the Parliament of the Republic of South Africa. The nation has watched in horror as the seat of our representative democracy literally went up in smoke. Within 48 hours of this horrific event a lone individual hammered our Constitutional Court – the heartbeat of our hard-won democracy and a beacon for the protection and sustenance of our human rights.

If the Arch was still with us in physical form it would no doubt have occurred to him to ask whether God has forsaken us, and sent the final warning, a fiery message from the great beyond, that our nation, reborn of such boundless promise, has tested the patience of the powers that be, and they have rendered the verdict of guilty and delivered this judgement by fire!

### **A Judgement on Us All!**

The passing of the nation's moral compass and conscience has profoundly impacted all of us and prompted many to deep personal reflection and introspection. Desmond Mpilo Tutu gifted our nation and the world the shining example of the courage to act always on our convictions, to manifest the universal teachings of faith in our common humanity, shared destiny, and essential spiritual connection. Acting on these profound convictions, animating

the spirit of Jesus Christ and manifesting God's eternal love is not only a matter of expedience, but a matter of principle.

In committing to doing what is right, we must also closely examine what is wrong and what led to the triumph of evil over good. This questioning of evil is not an exercise in self-righteous condemnation, but the first step to fixing what is broken.

While we remember Tutu today as the icon he undoubtedly is and will remain, he has often reminded us that God's work is never done alone but always with others. One such example is the Kairos Document, developed by a collective of the clergy at the height of the anti-Apartheid struggle in 1985 to provide a theological framework of the Church's prophetic role in bringing justice to all:

*"A crisis is a judgment that brings out the best in some people and the worst in others. A crisis is a moment of truth that shows us up for what we really are. There will be no place to hide and no way of pretending to be what we are in fact not. At this moment in South Africa the [we are] about to be shown up for what it really is and no cover-up will be possible."*

As most of us have reflected on these tragic developments and momentous events which have engulfed South Africa, we undoubtedly also had an opportunity to reflect on the unforgiving life of an ordinary South African – a life of misery, hunger, depravity, a future uncertain and blighted. Moreover, we pondered on the unique gift we as a nation are gifted with – a rare and unique blend of great leaders such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo, Walter Sisulu, Albertina Sisulu, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, Reverent Beyers Naudé, Lillian Ngoyi, Ruth First, Helen Joseph, Solomon Mahlangu, Steve Biko, and many others. We must be overwhelmed to comprehend how things could have fallen apart, when we have enjoyed such unparalleled endowment of great servants of the people with such wisdom and commitment?

Is it because they somehow failed us, or we failed them? Is it because we are hesitant to listen and learn, to be good stewards of their teachings and sacrifices? The South Africa we have today is in stark contrast to a nation we sought to reconstruct in 1994, as envisioned in our constitutional binder.

We must also reflect on the fact that our sector not long ago was a beacon of hope and a shield for ordinary citizens – a strong and well-organized, resilient, innovative, and responsive civil society sector. What has happened to this dynamic sector?

This is the sector that played a pivotal role during difficult period of apartheid oppression, and it was an expression of resistance and hope, so vibrant that it could adapt to any given situation or changing circumstances. This is the sector that should have carried the baton from these gallant leaders of our liberation and defended our nation from the betrayal of our dreams – a better life for all. Can this sector rise to the call of national duty once more?

## **An Urgent Call To Action - Reclaiming Our Future!**

As the Archbishop so eloquent said:

*“Unless we work assiduously so that all of God's children, our brothers and sisters, members of our one human family, all will enjoy basic human rights, the right to a fulfilled life, the right of movement, of work, the freedom to be fully human, with a humanity measured by nothing less than the humanity of Jesus Christ Himself, then we are on the road inexorably to self-destruction, we are not far from global suicide; and yet it could be so different.”*

Our government and politicians have failed to lead our society towards the future all our children justly deserve. But we have also failed ourselves, as custodians of democracy, to hold those in power accountable. Beyond a ‘watchdog role’, we as civil society must once more emerge as leaders of society, active agents of change and a positive force for action to remedy the structural and systemic barriers to opportunity which afflicts our society.

A developmental social compact is urgently required, not only for the moral regeneration of society but as a foundational touchstone for economic and social justice. The social compact must represent a convergence between the NPO sector, business, labour and government; a shared agenda and common value-based realignment within the NPO sector towards focussing our attention on the immediate challenges and underline a new sense of urgency triggered by our moment of crisis and opportunity it presents.

In this context, the persistent question posed is:

*How should Civil Society Organisations as a sector organize itself to amplify its impact to meet our current challenges?*

### **How do we reclaim CS space (as innovative & responsive sector) and sustain its resilience?**

- CS should redefine and reimagine itself not just as a ‘watchdog’, but as active citizen and the critical author of national destiny.
- CS should organise, re-position its organisational relevance to maximise resources, and its social impact. This will intensify its voice in aiding government to be responsive, inclusive, effective in bringing about desired social transformation.
- Collaboration among the NPO's to share ideas, mentoring & building strong relationships with the communities we serve. Building an effective coordination of the sector, streamlining the funding and ensure accountability systems.
- Civil society must reconnect to its innovative, creative edge & impulse - its ability to innovate needs to be revitalised, renewed; for this to happen civil society must become a space for social activism and foster transformative power.

## Priority actions

We understand that our challenges are myriad and their causes multiple, inter-locking and complex. The well-recognised challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequalities are not mere statistics but flow directly into the challenges of GBV, youth disengagement, social unrest and geo-spatial under-development (urban-rural divide). The exclusion of women and youth in our economy reflects itself also in under-representation in policy making and political processes. At the same time, the on-going impacts of COVID-19, which has led to the loss of life but also exposed the grave vulnerabilities of those most marginalised in society has not resulted in any significant policy making to tackle our underlying and systemic socio-economic architecture. We cannot ignore the long-lasting effects of a lack of social and political accountability which our current governance system seems to be mired with and the resultant rampant corruption and unaccountability at all levels of society. Nor can we ignore the political impotence displayed by our leaders when called upon to act decisively against those who steal, lie and cheat with seeming impunity.

Without active and independent self-agency on our part as civil society we will remain locked out of the arena of policy making and responding reactively to each new aspect of our crisis. We can no longer remain spectators in the destiny of the nation; we can no longer sit on the side-line hoping for the outcome of the game to change. We need to enter the field of play as full participants capable of controlling our own destiny as a community of interest. A new ecosystem needs to be created and we can start by:

- Building a developmental civil society – based on 360 degree review and consolidation of civil society learnings, reflections, & experiences from the field, and incubating common agenda for the journey ahead;
- Structured and accountable engagement framework between government & the NPO sector through a renewed developmental social compact ;
- Democratising representation and the strategic role of institutions supporting democracy such as NEDLAC, Parliament and Chapter 9 & 10 institutions;

Kagiso Trust is calling and inviting all sectors of civil society to join forces in redefining and characterising our present period of national anguish and entrenching a new developmental civil society paradigm in action – in defence of our constitutional democracy - rebuilding a better and different tomorrow, anchoring hope for generations to come. There are times when we are all called together to unify for a good course, and we are called to defend our future – and advance the interests of South Africa – that moment is now. This is the moment when civil society is called to rise, to re-map our shared agenda for change in 2022 and beyond. This call will culminate in a civil society consultative conference later in the year.

***Moving Forward Together – Reclaiming Democratic Agency for  
People Centred Development!***