



SA *today*



A WEEKLY NEWSLETTER FROM HELEN ZILLE

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Welcome to the latest edition of **SA Today**, the weekly newsletter from the Leader of the Democratic Alliance, Helen Zille.

**SA Today**  
**Helen Zille, DA Leader**

## Breaking through the race barrier

When The Economist labelled Africa "The Hopeless Continent" ten years ago, the magazine was suggesting that the downward spiral towards the failed state is inevitable in Africa. We know it is not.

We are making a different choice. More and more South Africans want our politics to be an open contest of ideas and values, rather than a closed circle of conflict between race groups.

Very few complex plural societies have made this choice.

That is because race is a powerful mobiliser. So are culture, language, and religion. These things shape our identity. Our need to belong is real and important to us all. But more and more, South Africans are realising that making a different political choice is not a threat to their identity. In fact, quite the reverse. Each of us can confidently be who we are only if we secure that right for everyone else. Each time we stand up for another's rights, we defend our own.

South Africans are, increasingly, choosing to value each other by what Martin Luther King described as the "content of our characters", not the colour of our skins. We are choosing to come together on a platform of shared values – integrity, fairness, service, tolerance, the quest for excellence. All of these override the things that separate us.

South Africans who are making this choice are coming together in the Democratic Alliance. It is the reason why the DA has become, in Professor Lawrence Schlemmer's words, "the most non-racial party South Africa has ever had."

This week, we saw this trend accelerate. We won three more by-elections in wards we have never won before. We have now won 11 new wards since last year's election. But the most exciting development of all, this year, was breaking through another race barrier. In political terms it is like breaking the sound barrier. It is an historic moment. If we seize it, it will be the beginning of a new era.

Each new DA victory shows that South Africa's democracy is working. People are making free choices.

Nothing can describe the exhilaration you feel when you get an SMS in the middle of the night to say that we have just won a 52% majority in a voting district where there is not a single minority voter. Only black South Africans freely choosing to support the Democratic Alliance. Just one year ago, a mere 1.8% of voters supported us in Mkhondo, Mpumalanga. Since then, the people who live there have made a different choice. This confirmed what we saw in the Grabouw by-election in May this year. Voters who change their minds are not disloyal. On the contrary. This is the stuff of which all successful democracies are made.

It is also the result of exceptional sustained effort and dedication. It shows we can do it. And it sends a clear message to the political analysts who propose that we remain a party for minorities only. The voters don't agree with you. We all know that it usually takes the analysts a few years to catch up with the voters.

What these analysts don't understand is that the DA could never be a party just for minorities, even if some may think it strategic to do so. Our entire reason for being is to challenge the notion that ethnic and racial nationalism is the only way South Africans can conduct their politics. And that is what we are doing. We are building a new majority.

For this reason, I am particularly excited by the many young people, from all backgrounds, who are making the DA their political home. They are beginning to emerge everywhere and will soon take their place in leadership roles throughout our party. To meet and engage with them is to become really optimistic about South Africa's future. Their choice for the DA will transform our party and our country.

Many of us don't realise just how significant our progress has been. It sometimes takes an outsider to point this out.

During the World Cup I was privileged to meet international leaders who, without exception, understand the DA's epoch-making achievements.

They know that Africa cannot succeed unless South Africa's democracy succeeds.

They understand the significance of our party's growth from just over 300,000 votes in 1994 to just under 3-million votes last year. We did this by offering an alternative to racial and ethnic nationalism. And that truly contradicts the logic of history on our continent.

[This week's edition of SA Today is an extract of Helen Zille's opening address at the DA's Federal Congress taking place this weekend. [Click here](#) for the full text of her speech]

*Helen Frie*

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