



**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**

## ANC's fears are a sign our democracy is maturing

Today we celebrate Heritage Day. I know that many of us will be relaxing with our loved ones around the braai. But I hope that many of us will also be commemorating the rich tapestry that is our unique South African culture.

I will be spending the day in George with members of the DA family where we will celebrate our shared diversity – a wonderfully South African oxymoron. In doing so, we will pay tribute to all those who helped shape our nation into what it is today.

I am not just talking about the political and religious leaders who shaped the new South Africa. It is true that we stand on the shoulders of giants. But it is equally true that we would not be where we are today if it weren't for the South African people.

It was the people of South Africa who agreed to peaceful negotiation instead of racial violence and retribution. It was the people who embraced a non-racial democracy. And it was the people who agreed to the final Constitution which guaranteed rights for all.

As we continue the journey that began on 2 February 1990, we should remember that it is the people – not the politicians – who have the power to shape the future they want. That is what a democracy is all about.

The very success of our democracy relies on people understanding this. Unless people realise that they have the power to call their leaders to account and change their circumstances through the ballot box, democracy is meaningless.

The trouble is that there are many people out there who think a political party is like a football team – that you must stay loyal through thick and thin.

Actually, the opposite is true. When a political party is corrupt and has policies that lead to the failed state, people not only have the right, but the responsibility to make an informed choice at the ballot box. This is called accountability.

Without it, you end up with dictatorship.

As I have said before: in a democracy, the politicians should be scared of the voters and not the other way around.

There are a great many signs that our democracy is heading in the wrong direction. If the ANC has its way and passes the Protection of Information Bill, the people will have more to fear from government than government will have to fear from them. This law will protect corrupt politicians from public scrutiny and punish those who dare to hold politicians accountable for their actions.

But, equally, there are signs that our democracy is maturing, that politicians are becoming scared of the voters.

The amusing headline of an article which ran on the front page of The Sowetan this week proclaimed: "ANC FEARS ZILLE." I am used to seeing headlines that say: "ANC BLAMES ZILLE", but where did the "FEAR" come from, I asked myself? I then read the accompanying report from the ANC's National General Council in Durban on Secretary-General Gwede Mantashe's 'Organisational Review Report on the State of the Organisation'.

Mantashe spoke of the "threat of opposition parties forming coalitions" and cited "the upward trend in support for the DA" as a significant challenge to the ANC's hegemony. Most significantly, he implored ANC structures to "resist the temptation of being arrogant" and "feeling that the support of our people is a given."

This is an important development. Not because the "ANC FEARS ZILLE". Not even because the "ANC FEARS THE DA". But because the ANC is starting to fear the voters. What a watershed for our politics! The more the ANC fears the voters, the more it will guard against arrogance, and the more it will strive to improve its performance. This is how democracy works.

Indeed, the ANC has every reason to be afraid of the voters: it has lost a number of seats in by-elections since the 2009 election – 8 of which have been to the DA.

We know that growing support for the DA depends on how well we perform – in opposition and in government. We sometimes must take tough decisions, but when we do so it is because our policies must work to create a context for job creation, service delivery, better education and health care. And we must at all times defend the constitution and the rule of law. These are the issues on which the voters should assess political parties and base their choice.

We are approaching a "tipping point" in our politics. This is the moment when people realise – in significant numbers – that the ANC has failed South Africa. We must make sure that we offer a better alternative – for everyone.

If South Africa can develop this democratic culture and choose an alternative, we will bequeath an important legacy to the next generation. It would be the greatest inheritance we could give them.

And one day, when they are standing around the braai on Heritage Day,

they may pay tribute to those people who understood the power of their vote and used it to entrench the foundations of our democracy.



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