



INCLUSIVE SOCIETY
INSTITUTE

MEDIA RELEASE

ISI PRESENTS ELECTORAL SYSTEM PROPOSALS TO IEC
Idealism needs to be tempered with realism

The Inclusive Society Institute (ISI) presented its proposals for electoral reform to the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) today. The proposals emanate from the work done by the institute's expert-panel constituted to respond to the Constitutional Court ruling declaring the current Electoral Act invalid, in that it does not provide for independent candidates to stand for election at the national and provincial spheres.

The IEC was represented by its Commission, senior management and provincial representatives, whilst the ISI was represented by the Convenor of the expert-panel, Mr Roelf Meyer, and its Chief Executive Officer, Mr Daryl Swanepoel.

In presenting its proposals the institute argued for a mixed constituency / PR system, where, at the national level, 300 candidates would be elected via 66 multi-member constituencies (MMCs) comprising between 3 and 7 members per MMC, and 100 members via a compensatory PR list, which list will be used to ensure overall proportionality in terms of the number of votes cast in the election. The MMCs would be based on the existing district and metropolitan council boundaries. The same concept will be applied at the provincial level.

The institute holds the conviction that the model being proposed by itself, best balances accountability and representivity, with executional practicality and simplicity, whilst adhering to the constitutional prescription of proportionality, in general. In developing the new system, idealism needs to be tempered with a dose of realism.

The institute warned against a single-seat constituency model, as this could have unintended consequences for smaller parties. It is quite conceivable that the single-seat constituency model could result in only a few number of stronger parties being elected in constituencies. Even if single-seat constituencies were to be combined with a compensatory PR list, the result could still be swayed in favour of the bigger parties. Smaller parties would only stand a chance of election via the PR-list.

In contrast, the ISI's MMC proposal guarantees multi-party representation at constituency level across the country. This, the institute believes, is important to ensure diversity across all geographic areas.

Whatever the outcome of the electoral reform dialogue, the ISI is resolute that a system of proportional representation needs to be retained, as such a system is best suited in a country, such as South Africa, whose democracy is still in the process of maturing, and whose population is drawn from diverse cultural, linguistic, religious and demographic communities. Social Cohesion requires the whole nation to have a sense of connectedness, and to be part of the national discourse aimed at developing a country in which all can have a sense of belonging.

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