



INCLUSIVE SOCIETY INSTITUTE

Op-ed

Towards a National Commitment By Klaus Kotzé for the Inclusive Society Institute

The 'farmgate' saga has shown again that ours is a dynamic, modern democracy with an active public square. Notwithstanding the political significance of the episode, we should not allow its theatre to distract us from what could prove to be President Ramaphosa's most significant initiative. The recognition that as a nation, together, we must all commit to do things differently. That we need to establish a new social compact. An agreement that enjoins everyone in society in critically and actively responding to our national crises and objectives, so to give comprehensive expression to the principles and ideals enshrined in the Constitution.

Far too often, the much talked about social compact is seen as a soft, intangible issue. It is rebuked by pundits and media people as a slogan. A story that does not address the so-called real issues. But stories are anything but soft. We interpret and invent the world through stories – as South Africans we know this from our recent and ancient past. Stories are powerful tools that create shared belief, binding us in shared enterprise.

In his State of the Nation address, Ramaphosa again stressed the need to catalyse a comprehensive social compact. By committing to a 100-day deadline, he accentuated its urgency. Youth Day marked the passing of the 100th (working day). With little to show in terms of societal endorsement and with public attention absorbed by more distracting local and international affairs, we are running out of time to give expression to an effective and sustainable socio-economic order. It is time to seize what Joel Netshitenzhe has called our "strategic moment". It is time that the Republic is enjoined, in no uncertain terms, by a National Commitment.

To be clear, this is not primarily the responsibility of government, labour, or business. This is an approach that all citizens must endorse on a day-by-day basis. A personal commitment to a just and united South Africa. Through the decisions and conduct of every citizen, a desegregated economy must be created. Instead of attending to outdated and short-sighted theses, we must shatter the dominance of the so-called formal economy by cooperating in building an inclusive society. To do so, we must recognise the strategic value of integration. It is in the interest of all that outmoded economic ethics be abandoned. Wages cannot simply be maintained at the lowest amounts possible. Instead, by impressing upon all citizens to commit themselves, according to their potential and capacity, we give collective expression to a more equal, structurally transformed nation. Social compacting functions to elevate everybody. A strategic national approach to integrate formal and informal economies, allows not only for socio-economic mobility, enterprise and equity, it also holds the

excellent promise for capital growth, development and security. Such a strategic approach will elevate everybody to greater civic responsibility and action.

Responding to the strategic moment, the Inclusive Society Institute supports the development and adoption of a National Commitment to be pledged by all citizens. Such a National Commitment will give real and tangible expression to a broader social compact.

The Institute is of the view that broad discussions among a representative group of South Africans to agree on the wording of the National Commitment is needed. It should be guided by Constitutional transformation and speak to core national issues. Structural reform, land and security must be central. Once the details of the National Commitment have been agreed upon, it will have to be promoted by means of extensive public endorsement drive.

In being strategic and comprehensive, the National Commitment will be in everyone's interest. It must reflect on the past while being blatant in its future orientation. Though government and business have crucial roles to play, it is up to citizens to own and enact the Commitment. By pledging to the National Commitment, we all, like the spokes of a wheel, perform our parts in ensuring a shared future that is just and transformed.

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