

CIVIL SOCIETY COMMITMENT TO REBUILDING DEMOCRACY

A Statement by Civil Society Organisations Advancing Active Citizenship and a Stronger Democracy

Preamble

We, civil society organisations working to advance democracy, with a particular focus on electoral democracy, come together at a moment that demands more of us than observation alone. Democracy does not sustain itself. It is strengthened through informed participation, accountable institutions and the continued involvement of citizens in the decisions that affect their lives. This is a responsibility that no single institution can carry alone.

We recognise that public confidence in democratic institutions has been strained by misinformation, manipulation, declining trust and the distance many citizens experience between themselves and the institutions meant to serve them. We do not come together merely to assign blame, but to accept our responsibility as civil society: to equip citizens with credible information, create opportunities for meaningful participation, protect the integrity of democratic processes and strengthen relationships between citizens and the state.

We therefore commit ourselves, publicly and collectively, to the following commitments and mandate.

I. Our Commitments

We, civil society organisations working to advance democracy, with a particular focus on electoral democracy, commit ourselves to:

1. Uphold the principles of free, fair and credible elections, conducted transparently and without unlawful interference, intimidation or manipulation. We recognise that electoral integrity requires the active participation of citizens, civil society, institutions and communities throughout the electoral cycle.
2. Recognise citizens not only as voters, but as active participants in democracy. Casting a ballot is one important expression of citizenship, but democratic participation extends beyond election day. We commit to supporting citizens to understand their rights, exercise their responsibilities, participate in public life and hold elected representatives and public institutions accountable.
3. Provide voter and civic education that is accurate, accessible, inclusive and responsive to the lived realities of communities, including young people, women, persons with disabilities, rural communities and other groups that face barriers to participation.

4. Remain independent and non-partisan, answerable to no political party, faction or narrow interest, and use that independence in service of citizens and the public good.
5. Speak honestly and without fear or favour about what we observe, whether our findings are convenient to those in power or not, and hold all political actors and institutions to consistent democratic standards.
6. Work collectively to restore public trust in democratic institutions by strengthening civic knowledge, encouraging meaningful participation and supporting transparent and accountable governance.

II. Our Mandate

In pursuit of these commitments, civil society pledges to:

1. Advance Voter and Civic Education

We will provide credible, non-partisan and accessible voter and civic education before, during and after elections. Our work will help citizens understand democratic institutions, electoral processes, constitutional rights and the different ways in which they can participate in public life.

- Share accurate information about voter registration, voting procedures and electoral processes.
- Build citizens' capacity to identify and resist misinformation, disinformation, political manipulation and incitement.
- Create spaces for dialogue, critical reflection and learning within communities.
- Encourage participation that extends beyond voting to include public consultation, community organising, advocacy and engagement with elected representatives.

2. Support Electoral Integrity

We will contribute to the transparency and credibility of the electoral process through civic education, community mobilisation, monitoring and, where relevant, trained and impartial election observation.

- Promote peaceful, lawful and informed participation throughout the electoral cycle.
- Monitor and document barriers, irregularities and threats to meaningful electoral participation.
- Record and communicate findings factually, transparently and without distortion or exaggeration.
- Share information with citizens in clear and accessible language.

3. Engage the Electoral Commission

We will engage the Electoral Commission of South Africa constructively on matters within its mandate, recognising its constitutional responsibility to manage elections while supporting accountability, independence, transparency and competence.

- Raise concerns, irregularities and complaints through the appropriate channels, promptly and in good faith.
- Support the Commission's independence against political interference, capture or undue influence.
- Advocate for adequate resources, capacity, accessibility and transparency in the Commission's operations.
- Hold the Commission accountable where it falls short of its constitutional and legal obligations.

4. Promote a Safe and Peaceful Electoral Environment

We will engage relevant institutions, including law-enforcement and security agencies, to support the conditions necessary for peaceful, open and credible elections.

- Advocate for the safety of voters, election officials, candidates, observers and communities.
- Promote the professional, impartial and proportionate conduct of security personnel throughout the electoral period.
- Monitor and report incidents of intimidation, political violence or the partisan use of state resources.
- Support appropriate coordination among communities, civil society, electoral authorities and security agencies to prevent and respond to violence or disruption.

5. Strengthen Civic Participation Beyond Elections

We will continue our work beyond election day, recognising that democracy is sustained through active and informed citizenship.

- Support citizens to engage public institutions and elected representatives.
- Promote participation in public consultations, community structures and democratic decision-making processes.
- Strengthen civic organisations and community networks as spaces for collective action.
- Encourage institutions to respond meaningfully to the voices, experiences and priorities of citizens.

III. The Democracy We Are Strengthening

We are not merely protecting an event that takes place on a single day. We are strengthening a democratic culture in which people understand that their voices matter, institutions serve the public, differences are resolved peacefully and those entrusted with power remain accountable to citizens.



This work rests on principles we will not compromise:

- Every eligible citizen must have a fair opportunity to participate.
- Every vote must carry equal value and be counted accurately.
- Every institution must remain accountable to the public it serves.
- Every democratic process must be transparent and open to scrutiny.
- Every citizen must have access to credible information.
- Every electoral dispute must be addressed through lawful and peaceful means.

Closing Declaration

We make this pledge not as spectators to democracy, but as its active participants and co-custodians. We will work with communities, institutions and one another to strengthen democratic participation, protect electoral integrity and build a culture of informed and active citizenship.

We recognise that democracy is not the responsibility of government, political parties or the Electoral Commission alone. It belongs to all of us, and its strength depends on what we are prepared to do together.

This is our commitment. This is our mandate. This is our contribution to a democracy shaped by informed, active and empowered citizens.

Signatories

On behalf of the organisations named below, we affix our signatures in support of this commitment:

Organisation / Structure Name:

Name of Representative and Designation:

Date:

Signature:
