

Awethu! A People's Platform for Social Justice

In the twenty years since South Africa's first democratic elections, the gains that have been made in law and in policy have not significantly impacted on the experience of inequality in our society. Our celebrated Constitution mandates government to transform South Africa into a country of equality, dignity and justice. Yet many of us are hungry, unhoused, have little access to basic services and suffer high levels of violence. Our celebrated Constitution calls on us to participate actively in our government. But we are increasingly alienated from government, shut out of decision-making and punished for protest and dissent. We cannot claim with any confidence that we are a democracy when inequalities of class, race, sex/gender and other discriminations persist to the degree they do. We cannot claim to be a democracy when collective democratic contestation is met with suspicion, police fire and repression.

We are at a critical point in our history. Either democracy must be deepened and greatly extended, or it will be lost to us. We have in our hands our constitution, which provides important instruments we can use to strengthen our struggles for social change. All progressive people and organisations in South Africa need to unite in a clear campaign to retrieve the project of democracy for all who live here. It is time to reassert and reclaim people's power over government. It is time to rally a strong political voice, based in communities, workplaces and schools, for social justice, equality, environmental transformation, solidarity, deepening democracy and dignity for all.

Awethu! It is Ours!

Inequality is widening when it should be narrowing.

Women, girls and sexual minorities live in fear of a constant threat of violence.

Poor communities bear the brunt of environmental damage caused by old and new industries.

Mining is increasing land dispossession and destruction of the environment

Large amounts of state funds are legally spent on luxuries for the politically powerful, while many struggle to put food on the table.

Too often, our police force and public service have acted without integrity or justice.

Public health services and schools are failing.

Rural people are marginalised from constitutional rights.

Unemployment is rising.

Corruption is everywhere.

There is no social justice in South Africa.

There are undemocratic tendencies in our government and the private sector. Important decisions are taken behind closed doors in the interests of few and at great expense to the majority. When people protest about inequality, poverty, pollution, land dispossession and lack of access to basic rights, many senior political leaders do not take their messages seriously, label them and attempt to silence them. Increasingly, the very protests that are a sign of the democratic spirit are met with terrible state violence. In the face of what we describe, the elected representatives of the people in parliament spend more time defending the decisions of their party bosses than promoting the rights of the people.

Business seems happy with a government that cracks down on workers and communities claiming their rights to protest. Business also wants more of our national wealth for itself. It wants policies that protects the wealthy, destroys the environment and limits our democratic rights.

If we continue on this path the poor will remain poor for a long time to come. Many more will become poorer. Inequality will grow. The effects of poverty and inequality on other forms of violence will increase.. This is not what people fought for, were imprisoned for and died for. This need not be. We are a country rich in resources, leadership and ideas.

We call for a broad, independent civic initiative that puts the political system on trial for failing to improve the lives of millions, that demands a more people-centred, participatory democratic project that holds government accountable to a political process that belongs to, and should serve, all of us equally.

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We are organisations and individuals who stand for social justice, equality, environmental transformation, solidarity, deepening democracy and dignity of all who live in our country. We value the democratic principles of accountability, collective deliberation, and inclusive decision-making. We aspire to a collectively owned, bottom-up process led by collective conversation about a way forward to a more radically democratic South Africa. All who are compelled by these principles are welcome to join in this platform to transform our democracy.

The *Awethu!* platform will not become another bureaucratic structure, but will campaign together as a non-aligned people's project. We will stimulate, support and build a movement that consolidates existing democratic conversations and actions across the country into a unified platform, where ideas and solidarities can spread and unseat conservative and anti-democratic political processes.

We call on like-minded organisations and individuals to join our efforts and advance their democratic alternatives on our collective platform. We must,

together, generate answers and solutions to address the challenges for the next 20 years of democracy.

To this end, we propose a first campaign around the 2014 national elections:

- Demand full disclosure by all political parties contesting the 2014 election of their funding sources;
- Undertake a People's Audit of top 20 politicians on the lists of the major political parties. This will look at their lifestyles, personal financial interests and track records on corruption. The audit will also outline their positions regarding fulfilling the rights to education, health, land, socio-economic justice, and labour rights;
- Conduct a People's Audit of election manifestos;
- Convene provincial meetings to discuss priorities and strategies to realise socio-economic rights, including health, basic education, sanitation, food, land and housing. These may culminate in the compilation of a charter embodying the principles for social justice, equality, environmental transformation, deepening democracy and dignity together with grass roots solutions to make democracy work for all ;
- Hold national and provincial marches to reclaim the spirit of 27 April 1994 and renew hope in social justice and state accountability.

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For further information, or to subscribe to the <i>Awethu!</i> platform, please contact Diane Massawe on 082 341 5436 or email awethuplatform@gmail.com .
