

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON FREEDOM DAY IN SOUTH AFRICA

By Elita de Klerk, Deputy-Chair of the FW de Klerk Foundation

Freedom Day in South Africa is the annual celebration of South Africa's first non-racial democratic elections in 1994. It marks the end of 342 years of colonialism, segregation and apartheid white minority rule.

At this point in time, we need to look universally at countries like Afghanistan and Ukraine that are still seeking freedom and hold them in our heart, particularly on a day like this.

My starting point in writing this was when I lost my husband on 11 November 2021. Then I encountered a lot of mixed messages - many were full of hatred. At the time, I was aware I had to personally walk through my pain, and not try to avoid it. Face it, head on.

I had the full knowledge that only this way could the healing process begin.

The messages of hatred troubled me - not for me, but for the people from whom it originated. It made me realise that much of society in South Africa had not healed. It made me realise that South Africa is in parts a deeply traumatized society. This realization brought me a lot of chagrin - and an intense calling to do something about it.

Of course, South Africa remains full of racism. If we allow the racist spirit to control us, it takes our freedom away. Every day is a new day. We have to renew our minds to the possibilities of change that come with forgiveness and understanding. We need to unite together, reason together and move forward.

Hate is a spiritual prison. The shackles of hatred do not allow us to move.

We must face our pain, collectively, head on, as painful as it is and allow light to come in. Unattended trauma is the fuel for the cycle of violence in our society.

How can we embrace freedom when we are prisoners of ourselves?

The expression "Let go and let God" is so powerful.

I realise what I am saying is extremely difficult if also faced with poverty, inequality and other infringements of one's freedom.

Somewhere, society must wake up and start taking responsibility for bringing morality to the forefront. Start behaving towards others with care and concern, sensitivity and tact, honesty and integrity, generosity and grace, forbearance and forgiveness. Only like this we will evolve and achieve freedom. Freedom from all, freedom for all.