

PRINCIPAL'S ASSEMBLY MESSAGE - FRIDAY 22ND APRIL 2016

You will all be aware that from Wednesday next week we have a very long break as we celebrate Freedom Day on Wednesday 27th April and Workers' Day on Sunday 1st May which means that Monday 2nd May is also a public holiday.

Freedom Day is to commemorate the first democratic elections held in South Africa on 27th April 1994. The elections were hailed as a miracle because despite the long history of institutionalised discrimination and oppression of non-white people, voting took place with spontaneous goodwill without violence or bloodshed. Similarly, Workers' Day is a reminder to us that all people who work deserve a fair wage and decent working conditions. It is also a reminder of the importance of establishing justice and a sense of responsibility and caring in the work place.

It is true to say that since that turning point in our history on 27th April 1994, the path to our democracy has not always been smooth. South Africa remains a country of extremes and the reality is that the majority of our population still live in poverty. Just this last week figures confirm that approximately 40% of the youth between the age of 25 and 35 are unemployed in this country - certainly a ticking time bomb. This against the depressing growth rate projection for 2016 of 0,8%.

We also need to remember that with our freedom comes the need for responsibility. Events over the past 12 months in South Africa have highlighted the fact that large portions of our population do not understand this fundamental principle of a democracy. For example, whilst most of us were sympathetic to the Fees Must Fall campaign at universities throughout the country, we would have been appalled by the wanton violence and destruction, particularly of property. Latest figures estimate the cost of damage during the Fees Must Fall campaign amounted to R300 million. At the same time we need to understand the legitimate frustrations which the students had which led to this violence. Just this last week right here in the city of Cape Town, severe damage was caused to the physical infrastructure of our City Metrorail, costing an estimated R70 million. Not to mention the severe impact that it has had on commuters who rely on these services to get to work.

What does this mean for us? I would like to suggest two things to contemplate:

We all need to be informed and to have an opinion. I encourage you to read newspapers and opinion columns either in hardcopy or on-line, and engage in the challenges and matters which affect our society. We cannot plead ignorance.

Secondly, it is clear that in the future this country will need "job creators" and not "job consumers". As you prepare for a career in the future think of that and the skills needed.

So while we have so much to celebrate in South Africa, such as the fact that we live in the most beautiful country and city in the world and that our judiciary has proved to be robust and independent, it is important and indeed sobering to be aware that we have a long way to go in achieving the seemingly illusive Rainbow Nation that we all dreamt of and aspired to in 1994.