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POSITIONING STATEMENT

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SACC POSITIONING STATEMENT ON THE 2024 GENERAL ELECTIONS

Introduction: God's Invitation to the Church

As the South African Council of Churches (SACC), we acknowledge God's invitation for God's people to participate in the governance of life according to God's will in the world. The church has a specific calling it must fulfilling in influencing the world for such work. In our context the reality of the coming national and provincial elections calls on us to respond as guided by God.

The SACC exists as a witness for God's justice, working for just governance in service to all, always with their needs at heart. In the 2019 Civil Society Manifesto, the SACC, under the theme Anchoring Democracy, asserts:

"South Africa is a Constitutional Democracy, where the Constitution is the highest law of the land, rooted in openness, democracy, accountability, and social justice; such a Constitutional Democracy must be anchored in serving the interests of all who live in this country, especially those who are socially, economically and politically the weakest, in the spirit of the popular dictum "The people shall govern!"

We have embraced our constitutional right to operate as a social justice advocate for the people who fill our pews every week and for the communities we serve, making sure our united Christian voice resounds with the needs of the people.

Context: Biblical Imperatives on Elections

One of the first responsibilities that God gave to human beings is that of being co-responsible with God in nurturing a future of creation. In Genesis it is recorded God said, *"Let us make humankind in our image, in our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over the wild animals of the earth, and over the creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."*(Gen 1:26). This entrusts upon humanity the moral responsibility to contribute in the governance of all created life according to God's intent and will for creation.

Elections: Reflecting the will of the people

The choice of who should govern is a sacred responsibility not only given by the constitution of the country it is also a godly mandate given to us from creation. This

brings with it not only our agency to choose but also the ethical responsibility in choosing.

The book of Deuteronomy builds on this and Moses, by the sheer weight of the responsibility to govern says, *“How can I bear your problems and your burdens and your disputes all by myself?”* (Deut. 1:12) He appeals to the people’s agency and says, *“Choose some wise, understanding and respected men from each of your tribes, and I will set them over you.”* (Deut. 1:13)

The responsibility and power lie with the people, echoing Moses’s call to choose wise, understanding, and respected leaders. Participating in elections is not merely a civic duty but a sacred opportunity to manifest God’s vision of just and compassionate leadership on Earth.

The establishment of the new nation in the land that God is giving to the people is based on the will of the people as guided by God in the choice of the leadership. *“When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you and have taken possession of it and settled in it, and you say, “Let us set a king over us like all the nations around us, be sure to appoint over you a king the Lord your God chooses.”* (Deut.17:14-15a) The people appoint because the responsibility and power is theirs as guided by God.

In the New Testament the new community of faith formed around the crucified risen Lord continues to take responsibility for the choice of leaders to manage their affairs. *“Brothers and sisters, select amongst you seven men of good reputation, full of the spirit of wisdom whom we can appoint to the duty.”* (Acts 6:3) The message is clear - *“... select amongst you...”* This echoes God’s system of governance and leadership from the beginning of time and today, this can be applied into choosing those who manage the affairs of a nation.

The responsibility to choose, appoint or select a leader is always predicated on the community that God is intending for the people. At the core of that community is the value of dignity for all, justice for all, radical love to God and neighbour, the pursuit of reconciliation, peace and mutuality. This is the community that Martin Luther King Jr calls *‘the beloved community’*. This beloved community is built on the covenant that God has with God’s people.

Titus 3:2 calls on us *“To slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle towards everyone.”* Even as we undertake this contestation for political power, we remind all South Africans to avoid a discourse that is full of slander, that creates the breeding ground to dehumanise each other.

The Mission of the Church: Peacebuilders and Peacekeepers

The mission of the church is to introduce the reign of God on earth that brings about shalom, with all its attributes. It is the people's quest for peace in its fullness that compels the church to be involved in matters of democracy, good governance and peacekeeping.

The church has an important role to play by empowering people to participate in processes leading to democracy and enabling them to protect their and other people's intrinsic rights in society as they live their lives. (Khumalo 2009:248)

In the context of the upcoming elections, it is imperative for churches to invest in peacekeeping efforts for the betterment of the nation. Just as the Scriptures emphasise the pursuit of peace and mutual edification (Romans 14:19), the role of the church extends beyond spiritual matters to the promotion of societal harmony. The biblical narrative is replete with instances where God's people are called to be peacemakers, echoing the words of Jesus in the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:9). As South Africa prepares for its democratic process, churches are uniquely positioned to foster an environment of reconciliation and understanding, echoing the divine mandate to seek the welfare of the city (Jeremiah 29:7). By actively engaging in peacekeeping initiatives, churches demonstrate their commitment to God's vision of shalom, where justice and righteousness flourish, ultimately contributing to the flourishing of the nation.

Moreover, as the nation navigates the complexities of elections, promoting ethical conduct becomes paramount. Drawing from biblical principles of integrity and honesty (Proverbs 11:3, Proverbs 16:8), churches have a responsibility to advocate for ethical conduct among candidates, voters and electoral processes. In a period marked by political fervour and competing interests, the church stands as a beacon of moral guidance, reminding individuals of their duty to uphold the principles of fairness and accountability.

The South Africa We Pray 4: Anchored in Democracy

The work of the SACC of Anchoring Democracy through our churches is a critical part of the churches' mandate in the South African context. SACC leaders of the past sat at many tables where peace was eventually brokered and reached for our country, because peace is a core principle of our faith. We honour the God of Peace by advocating for peace every day. Peace in our hearts, that then finds expression in our thoughts and words, and which then leads to a peaceful demeanour. We have inherited peace in our redemption, according to John 14:27 which says, "*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you.*"

It is with the above dispensation of electing leaders for a nation and the inheritance of peace that the SACC is praying for a peaceful and safe election. The National Day of Prayer for the 2024 General Elections is set as Sunday 5 May 2024, at the Grace Bible Church in Soweto, and we see it as our collective responsibility to encourage all our member churches, and the entire Body of Christ to make their preparations for the commemoration of this day.

SACC's 2024 General Election Intention

Finally, we set the Godly intention of justice and peace over all electoral processes. We remind ourselves that God has given us His peace. *"And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guide your hearts and minds."* (Philippians 4:6-7) We, therefore, commit ourselves to a peace that transcends all understanding so that our hearts and minds are guided by God in the decisions we, as a nation, make.

Peace can only abound where there is a presence of love, and if we can see each other as compatriots and not enemies, we can accept each other's choices without waging war against each other because we share the vision of a country inspired by justice and love and peace. *"Finally all of you be like-minded, be sympathetic, love another, be compassionate and humble."* (1 Peter 3:8)

Ultimately, we all must seek a common commitment to resolving all the big national challenges we face, especially for the benefit of all those who are vulnerable in society. Our party-political considerations must not destroy our love for each other; our differences should not cause hatred amongst each other. *"Let us, therefore, make every effort to do what leads to peace and mutual edification."* (Romans 14:19)

As the voice of the Church in South Africa, we must embody humility and insist that those who will lead us must have the humility to put the people of our country ahead of their own partisan interests. We must guard against idolatry which can easily turn our pulpits into tools in the political system, but rather ensure that our Christian witness within the political sphere can evaluate all political systems prophetically from the perspective of the reign of God.

God bless South Africa.
Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrica.
Morena boloka setjhaba sa heso.