

## **Only a functional Parliament can save South Africa from a failing government**

*By Siviwe Gwarube MP – DA National Spokesperson*

Chairperson,

The marker of success for Parliament should never just be about the number of plenary sessions held; the frequency of public meetings which are often hijacked by political parties who bus in their supporters; or even the amount of times Ministers come to read their responses to prepared questions in the House.

It has to be more than that.

The task is far greater for two reasons.

One, South Africa has a painful history of racial segregation, which was legislated for in this very Parliament.

Parliament under the Apartheid government rubber-stamped the most abhorrent laws against black South Africans.

This shows how powerful – for good or bad – this institution can be.

The second and perhaps the most urgent reason is the situation South Africa finds itself in, which requires a legislature up to the task.

Abantu abanamisebenzi – in their millions.

Over 50% yabantu beli bahlala phantsi kwemeko yentluphekho.

Abantu abakhusekelelanga kwindawo abahlala kuzo.

Simane siziva i-crime statistics ezothusayo oku ingathi ayingobantu aba babulawayo okanye badlwengulwayo.

Yonke lento yenzeka phantsi korhulumente ophethwe ngumbutho ozimisele ukubhukuqana bekhangelana nezikhundla.

Urhulumente who presided over the greatest money heist under State Capture since the dawn of democracy.

All of these things require a strong Parliament that doesn't relegate itself to simply being a captive audience for the executive when they bother to show up.

The task is greater.

The work is urgent and incredibly important.

While the institution has managed its finances well and obtained clean audit outcomes, the yardstick of its effectiveness lies with the people.

Even as Parliament lies in ruins after the devastating fire earlier this year, the work of the two Houses cannot depend on the existence of buildings.

In fact, now is the time to intensify our efforts to get Parliament working again.

Now is the time to rebuild – both literally and figuratively.

Many have said the fire that gutted these Houses of Parliament is a true representation of the state of the institution after it has been hollowed out over decades.

The teeth of Parliament have been plucked out systemically and left only a shell that has so much unused potential.

The drafters of the Constitution and the Rules of Parliament imagined an institution that would have the muscle to deal with the most pressing issues of the day.

We have been equipped with oversight mechanisms such as the Rules Committees, Parliamentary Inquiries and capacity to draft laws that will benefit the people we are meant to serve.

Over the past 10 years, Parliament has passed 40 Bills brought before it by ordinary members versus the 312 brought by the Executive.

This signals a crisis – not of capacity – but of political will.

A functional Parliament would jump swiftly to deal with the findings of the Zondo Commission.

Having failed to prevent the looting of billions of public money, we should make sure that those who are guilty of this crime are held to account.

We should not have a Chair of Chairs in Mr Cedrick Frolick who has serious allegations hanging over his head for his role in State Capture, still actively presiding over the work of Parliament until he is cleared.

We should act with speed to demand answers from President Ramaphosa regarding the millions of rands that were found on his property.

Questions about how that much money that was allowed to be stored in his farm; how a suspect accused of this theft was dealt with outside the criminal justice system; and whether SARS was made aware of this sum of money – should come directly from this House.

No sitting President should simply go on about his business and Parliament sits idly.

We should be summoning the Minister of Police, Bheki Cele, to account for the skyrocketing crime statistics in our country.

The blood bath in our communities is something this House should concern itself with.

This institution should lead the charge in the fight against poverty and unemployment.

The very people who sent us here to represent them are suffering under the crushing pressure of a cost of living crisis and rising joblessness.

The solutions for growing the economy and cushioning South Africans against global factors must come from Parliament.

Sound financial management of Parliament will never make up for the lacklustre attitude of many MPs towards the work that ought to be done.

The institution could run smoothly and still leave South Africans wondering where their elected public representatives are.

This is why these budget processes cannot simply be another tick-box exercise embedded in the Parliamentary calendar.

This is why I implore you to put party political interests aside when it comes to the work that we do here.

Let us approach accountability and government delivery as a united Parliament so that we can have some hope of rescuing South Africa from the clutches of ruin.

The oath we all took compels us to do so.