

Speech by **Bridget Masango MP**

DA Spokesperson on Social Development

Honourable Chairperson,

Today, as we celebrate our heritage, we must remember that it was not a gift from above but the result of men and women who worked for, dedicated their lives to so that our cultural diversity can be celebrated. As we reflect on our heritage, we must acknowledge everyone who has contributed to our social development and honour the enduring impact of their work.

Let me draw your attention to a powerful observation made by Nelson Mandela during the UN Summit for Social Development in 1995. He said:

“however, the need to pursue the good of all has been subsumed under the narrow interest of the self or the corporate unit. The endless cycle then becomes: better circumstances for a few, precarious ones for many, and indeed, worse for the majority.”

Chairperson, how prophetic these words have proved to be.

Back home, men and women from every persuasion, from lawyers to activists, to faith-based organisations, constitutionalists and academics worked tirelessly to draft laws that would change history for the poor and vulnerable. These laws were intended to reshape the lives of those who had been marginalised, ensuring their full participation in the newfound democracy so many had fought so hard to achieve,

The entire world rallied around South Africa offering support to ensure that these transformative laws could be effectively implemented.

Many individuals assumed pivotal roles to ensure that children, the elderly, persons with disabilities, and all beneficiaries of these laws would have their dignity restored and their lives improved.

There is not enough time in this debate to single out all those who made great sacrifices and efforts to see these laws enacted and implemented. Their efforts helped move the needle towards changing the status of the poor and vulnerable, allowing them to confidently start enjoying the fruits of the hard-earned democracy.

We can all attest to the fact that the journey started by those brave and courageous men and women those 30 years ago, from all sectors of society – including but not limited to, government in all its spheres, civil society, the international development community – was not without its challenges. Yet their efforts saved many lives, restored dignity, and started the process of knitting the fabric of society together, South Africa found its space in the community of nations as a promoter of human rights and a key player in the protection of those rights for whomever may have been kicked to the curb by the previous administration.

All of us sitting here today received the baton from those trailblazing visionaries who saw victory during the dark days and who envisioned a better socio-economic ecosystem. These South Africans believed that if they could overcome apartheid, no challenge would be insurmountable.

However, our celebration of their legacy must be tempered with concern. The number of poor increase every day, as do the number of older persons who are abused, some of them violently for their meagre government grants. The number of children living in child and youth care centres is increasing; the number of children who are abandoned on train station benches, in pit toilets and under bridges also grows daily.

So, we must ask ourselves how it is that we have failed those who came before us, who did such great work to change and improve the lives of the poor and vulnerable. What would they say about the current state of poverty and vulnerability? Have we properly implemented and amended the laws they crafted so carefully? Has the heritage they bequeathed to us been superseded by our “narrow interest of the self” that Mr Mandela warned of?

As members of the 7th Parliament, can we rise to the critical challenges facing us? Can we set aside our political differences, if for nothing or no one else, for the sake of those whose rights exist on paper, but remain unrealized? Can we reduce the number of stunted children, lessen the abuse of women and children, and alleviate the vulnerability of the elderly starting today?

Let Heritage Day 2025 be the start of a changing experience. The change that will allow all South Africans to meaningfully celebrate their culture and diversity in a country that belongs to them.

I call on us all to work together to achieve this. South Africans deserve no less and God will surely help us.

Thank you, Chairperson.