

DAY OF RECONCILIATION 2016

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The Day of Reconciliation was somewhat of a latecomer to the slate of negotiated and agreed on public holidays in the new South Africa. The first celebration took place on 16 December 1995 and was crafted in a way that aimed to acknowledge and affirm two different histories, one which emerged in 1838 at the Battle of Blood River, initially called Dingaan's Day, and subsequently called Day of the Vow and Day of the Covenant. The second momentous event on the same day in 1961 was the formation of *Umkhonto we Sizwe*, the armed wing of the ANC.

While these weighty chapters in the history of South Africa evoke powerful responses, it is largely due to the will of all South Africans, from the early 1990s, to move forward together and embrace and promote reconciliation and national unity that lay at the heart of what has become the Day of Reconciliation.

It is a day that is cause for pause to reflect on the preamble of the *Constitution* commencing with the opening line, *We, the people of South Africa* and concluding in several national languages with *May God protect our people*. The emphasis on maintaining collective stewardship, *united in our diversity*, for a country healing from a painful past, is testimony to a commitment by all sides that were engaged in the process of negotiations in the early 1990s that South Africa cherish its character as a multi-cultural, multi-racial, multi-religious and tolerant society, with allegiance to one nation and one country.

The task of nation building and reconciliation remains a journey that South Africans continue to traverse, sometimes with setbacks but mostly in the embrace of the values and provisions of the *Constitution* and the *Bill of Rights* which *enshrines the rights of all people in the country and affirms the democratic values of human dignity, equality and freedom*.

The *Constitution* provides the assurance, through its protections, for South Africans to engage robustly in matters large and small - from views and legal action of executive conduct, to the exploration and analysis of South Africa's role and place in the international community, to challenging misdeeds of public officials, to voting with our feet during local and national elections.

All of this is the embodiment of the South African journey and will culminate in a Day of Reconciliation on 16 December 2016, which binds us together in reflection of what it means to be South African and crucially how we want to collectively shape a future together so that successive generations build on a rich legacy of compassion, trust and respect.