

Preventing the Second Disenfranchisement Speech by JC Krynauw - Founder of Renew South Africa

For generations, the majority of South Africans were stripped of the vote by the politics of the day.

We gave that system a name: apartheid.

But let us not comfort ourselves with the illusion that apartheid simply vanished forever.

It did not disappear.

It evolved. It transformed.

Today, millions are not denied the vote by law.

Instead, sixty percent of eligible voters have become so embittered by the relentless failures of government, at every level, that they refuse to vote.

Failure is no longer episodic.

It is systemic.

It is lived.

Broken promises have been piled upon broken promises until they form a mountain beneath which trust lies buried.

Governance has been hollowed out.

And our democracy, once a beacon, is losing both its meaning and its attraction in the eyes of citizens.

Let us be clear: it is not apathy that keeps nearly sixty percent of eligible voters away from the polls.

It is not indifference.

It is deep, heartfelt disillusionment.

This is a new kind of disenfranchisement.

Silent, corrosive, unrecorded in statutes.

A second apartheid, not enforced by law, is coming into existence through the collapse of faith in government.

We have not escaped our past.

We have re-engineered it, by default, not design.

And it cuts into the soul of our people.

If we fail to act, history will not repeat itself politely or forgivingly.

It will return with greater force, greater fury, greater vengeance, and far less mercy.

A new struggle is already underway.

The fractures are visible.

The strain is audible.

The centre is beginning to give way.

Our fragile economy will weaken further under these pressures.

And the cost will not be abstract.

It will be paid in lost jobs, rising unrest, shrinking safety, and the rapid erosion of hope.

And when hope is gone, nothing will hold.

The warning signs are no longer subtle.

They are everywhere.

They confront us every waking day.

Organised crime is mutating into a mafia-like carbuncle, tightening its grip on water, construction, small businesses, and entire communities through extortion. The army is now deployed within our borders. On one side, corruption corrodes the state. On the other, criminal networks consolidate power through terror. And in between, ordinary South Africans are being crushed. The rule of law has not yet collapsed—but it is collapsing, crime by crime, gunshot by gunshot. We once believed our institutions were resilient. But we saw how close we came to catastrophe when our National Treasury stood on the brink of capture in a single weekend, and the markets recoiled in fear. Now, revelations from the Madlanga Commission implicate senior figures in law enforcement. With each revelation, trust drains further away. And as trust collapses, cynicism spirals. The language of fragmentation rises, with calls by Zuma, McKenzie, and others for ethnic groups to retreat into tribal laagers. Whispers of withdrawal grow louder. Dreams of separation become yearnings. Let us state this without ambiguity: There is no future in division. None. United, we stand. Divided, we fall. Our survival depends not on uniformity, but on standing together in our full and remarkable diversity. Beyond our borders, global instability batters economies, deepens poverty, and narrows the space for recovery. So what, then, is the answer? The answer is not abstract. It is not distant. It is us. A strong, engaged, united citizenry. And that begins with the simplest, most powerful act in a democracy: the vote. The coming local government elections will not be routine. They will be decisive. They may well rank among the most consequential in our democratic history. The health of our democracy is at stake. If democracy fails, stability will follow it into the abyss. And without stability, there is no future. There is no future for politics, for business, for any of us. This is why voter education is not a side issue. It is the central task of our time. People must see, clearly and concretely, how their vote connects to their daily struggles: to jobs, to transport costs, to electricity tariffs, to water security, to safety, to roads, to infrastructure. When turnout collapses, political accountability collapses with it. When citizens withdraw, power goes unchecked. This is why Renew South Africa matters.

You may ask: what difference can we make?

The answer is simple: a profound one.

Because the idea we advance is both practical and transformative.

Section 152 of our Constitution defines the purpose of local government.

The Municipal Systems Act requires every municipality to adopt a five-year Integrated Development Plan (IDP).

But a plan is only as strong as the people who shape it.

And when those with the greatest stake have the smallest voice, the result is predictable: a structure without a foundation.

We propose to correct this flaw.

Before the elections, communities must come together to create proto-IDPs. These must be people-driven development plans that reflect real needs, real priorities, real urgency.

Community leaders, religious leaders, academics, professionals, business leaders, society in its full breadth, must gather, deliberate, and design.

And when they do, the gaps will become unmistakable.

Because, truth be told, the state has failed to do the heavy lifting.

Johannesburg has not resolved its water crisis.

Cape Town has not broken the grip of gangsterism.

So let the people lead.

If a proto-IDP is prepared before the election, it becomes a bargaining instrument of immense power.

Political parties seeking votes will have to commit formally to adopting these plans if they really want those votes.

And then something remarkable will happen:

People will vote, not for vague promises, but for their own plans, shaped by their own hands.

This is the double dividend:

Politicians are compelled to carry the burden they have avoided, and citizens are given a real, tangible reason to participate.

I stand here as an octogenarian.

So does my colleague.

We speak not from theory, but from long observation and from the hard lessons of history.

History teaches us this, without exception:

When societies neglect meaningful civic participation, they do not merely stagnate—they fracture.

At first slowly.

Then suddenly.

Then irreversibly.

Empires have fallen this way.

Nations have unravelled this way.

And now, quietly, steadily, we too are joining the queue.

We must arrest this second disenfranchisement.

We must halt this silent drift away from democracy.

And we can.

Starting here.

Starting now.

Together, through our networks, our resources, and our shared commitment, we can convene a historic Citizen Conference in Cape Town to produce a proto-IDP worthy of our people.

The investment required is small.

The cost of inaction is immeasurable.

Because when disorder takes hold, no amount of money can restore what has been lost.

So let us read the signs.

Let us understand the moment.

And let us act, together, before the window closes.