

## **Remarks on the Election Ethics Charter**

**13 April 2016**

Programme Director, MRM Board members, Honourable members of Parliament and leaders of various political parties here present, Deputy Chairperson of SALGA, Cllr, our speaker of the day Prof Paulus Zulu, representative of the IEC, Dr..., honoured guests, ladies and gentlemen.

It is a singular honour for me to welcome all of you to witness the signing and endorsement of the MRM's Charter of Election Ethics. It would be remiss of me not to thank in particular SALGA with whom MRM recently signed a MOU as well as the political parties who have graciously accepted our invitation. Your presence ladies and gentlemen underscores the significance of this event. We chose this venue because it is the custodian of the Supreme Law of the land, our Constitution Court. I salute the Judiciary for passing two ground breaking judgements whose effects are still reverberating around the country. One is on the Tlokwe by election; the second being the definition of the powers of the Public Protector which was necessitated by the Nkandla scandal. The Court displayed its brilliant sense of jurisprudence, courage, integrity and fairness. Both judgements remind us that the constitution is not a document we refer to from time to time. It is a living testimony to our constitution, democracy and freedom. Through its Bill of Rights that document has given us the power and the right to choose leaders or political parties to manage the affairs of the country from time to time. Implied also the right to withdraw their mandate if elected representatives betray their trust, fail to deliver on their promises to improve the material conditions of the country or even worse if they flout the laws of the Republic.

Honourable members, shortly before the General Election of 2014, MRM produced a much acclaimed document called Charter of Election Ethics. It was a result of in-depth reflection on how the two decades of democracy had influenced people's perceptions of what elections can achieve. In applauding the sterling work of the IEC and political parties, we concluded that there was an urgent need to complement their work by highlighting the crucial role of ethics and moral values in the entire electoral process.

Some of our observations:

Twenty-two years into our democracy the political landscape has both changed and remained the same. What has changed:

- The vote is no longer a means to remove an oppressive apartheid regime as was the case in 1994. It has assumed broader proportions.
- More political parties are contesting the election.
- A huge cohort of young voters has emerged.

- Voting patterns are no longer rigidly along racial or ethnic lines.
- Number of voters has increased significantly.
- Dubious role of money in determining outcomes of elections. Calls for more transparency are growing by the day.
- Huge influx of legal and illegal immigrants.
- Most voters are literate.

In contrast, certain realities have remained the same or have only changed at a snail's pace.

- Gap between the rich and poor.
- Disparity in terms of service delivery between the dominant social classes and the underclass.
- Differences in the provision of quality education between the wealthy and poor communities.
- Unemployment especially among young people.
- Residues of racism and tribalism.
- Most of these factors have a huge influence on the perceptions and decisions of voters.

Elections, including democratic ones, have some common characteristics. They have been even described as war, Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton, Bernie Anders and Cruz are "fighting" an election. Each one of them and their campaign managers are digging up and throwing any missile at one another, as long as it is within the ambit of the law. American voters have the right to literally undress every candidate to ensure the final winner befits their image of an American president. Other common features in elections is the propensity of campaigners to indulge in hyperbole and theatrics. People enjoy public political debates, especially when they are televised or broadcast. They are fascinated by the display of the cut and thrust of political engagement. Candidates of political parties are public faces of their party election manifestoes as well as their policies.

We hope that the Charter of Election Ethics will make a modest contribution in ensuring that the voters in 2016 will do so with a heightened level of consciousness and responsibility. The co-drivers of a peaceful, free and fair election include the following:

1. Eligible voters, including first time voters
2. Ratepayers, civic organisations and youth
3. IEC
4. Political parties
5. Media
6. Independent observers

Ladies and gentlemen allow me to leave you with some pearls of wisdom from Mahatma Ghandi:

*The things that will destroy us are:*

*Politics without principle*

*Pleasure without conscience*

*Wealth without work*

*Knowledge without character*

*Business without morality*

*Science without humanity and*

*Worship without sacrifice.*

Underlying the statement is that whatever we do should be regulated by limits which, in their turn, should be based on principle and morality. MRM wishes all the parties, IEC and the voters a memorable and successful election.