



Press statement by
Mbali Ntuli MPL
Candidate for DA Leader

I challenge John to live television debates on his vision for the DA

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Note to editor: This was the statement made today by Candidate for DA Leader, **Mbali Ntuli MPL**, during a press conference in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal.

Last month I publicly announced that I would be resuming my campaign as the lockdown began to ease. When I did so, I was under no illusion that this is the most important internal election of the Democratic Alliance (DA).

I believe we are at a crossroads we can continue with the status quo of throwing facts at voters and hoping, somehow, we change their votes by telling them how they should vote or we can appeal to their hearts and engender in them a feeling of hope if they vote for us. Everybody knows that our governing party has failed dismally. Many people know that where we govern we have done a good job though there is still much work to do if we are being honest. None of these facts have significantly moved the electorate and I believe it is because we continue to speak as though voters are moved solely on facts when, in fact, it is a combination of facts, the feeling a party engenders, trust and a leader that is relatable.

The party has a choice continue with using the same playbook even if changing a few tactics here and there or under my leadership completely reimagine how we engage with our voters and work incredibly hard to earn their trust.

Last month the DA held its Federal Council where it resolved to proceed with a virtual congress despite my concerns over the fairness of that process which I have made public.

In any event, I am pleased that the Federal Council agreed to support my calls to hold a fully deliberative congress to deal with resolutions and critical constitutional amendments rather than the purely “elective congress” over one day, which we can all agree would have been a farce of an election.

I am happy that my colleagues at Federal Council recognized the importance of having a deliberative congress to deal with the issues that saw the party's regression at last year's national election.

I do still have reservations about the security and efficacy of the proposed online system that has been proposed for the upcoming Congress and as such, I have written to DA Federal Chairperson, Dr. Ivan Meyer, detailing my concerns and requesting assurances that these outstanding technical issues be dealt with and that the outcomes will be fully audited by an independent third party.

I made representations to IT system experts who are familiar with the technicalities of the OPA voting system, and the professional advice that was issued to myself and which was confirmed by Adrian Firth, the party's director of campaign technology, was highly concerning in that it confirmed that there were a number of significant flaws with the system's security architecture.

The OPA system will not allow for any verification of who is actually voting. Only that a vote took place. It is not auditable on this basis which is problematic if we intend to run a free and fair digital election system. I also stressed that in an environment where there is coercion and fear, there could be an effort to rig the results, it is alarming that this could be achieved as I am told by many people as simply forwarding an email link, and then allowing somebody else to vote for you.

The OPA system also crucially does not allow myself or anybody from my team to be able to ensure the fidelity and impartiality of the system, that the votes that are to be cast will in fact be allocated and attributed to the correct candidate. It is not good enough that candidates must simply trust that somebody will do this correctly from the party on their behalf. This is exactly why we do not allow the IEC to simply count votes on their own, but are legally required to have people independent of the process, to oversee it from start to finish. This is currently not possible as all votes will be counted back at our Federal Head Office.

As I wait for the chairperson to address those concerns it is important that the party begins to properly assess the candidates that will be on offer at the upcoming congress. This is a longstanding democratic tradition in democracies and liberal parties, especially amongst those that wish to be viewed as legitimate and being of requisite political maturity to govern. The concept of a series of "primary" debates is indeed deeply entrenched within the liberal tradition, and particularly necessary in a time when our government has been sorely lacking in transparency and openness. I believe debates provide an opportunity for the DA to show that we are a truly open and honest party, and that they allow not only our federal delegates, but the public at large to understand the contrast between John Steenhuisen and I as candidates for the party's top job.

It is fair to say that as an alternative government, our Federal Leader should, at all times, also be viewed as a prospective president of the Republic of South Africa.

It is therefore most certainly within the public interest to conduct a series of at least 4 live televised debates. Members of the DA, and the larger public, are tired of our politicians operating behind closed doors and under the cover of darkness, and not availing themselves for reasonable scrutiny and to be held accountable.

This must change, and so today, I am challenging the interim Federal Leader of the Democratic Alliance, Mr. John Steenhuisen, to a series of 4 live televised democratic debates, in keeping with the great liberal tradition.

I cannot think of a valid reason for John, or the party, to oppose an open and transparent debate of national interest on a public platform.

There are some very important and notable material differences between John's candidacy and mine, and the party deserves to scrutinize and vet us both fully. In fact, our Federal Constitution demands it.

There are critical choices that the voting delegates to the DA Federal Congress need to make.

Do they vote for John, a candidate that is part of the existing establishment and wishes to maintain the status quo? **OR** do they vote for a candidate that wishes to reimagine what politics in South Africa can be; who will give our young people a voice, and has a bold vision that can take South Africa into the future?

Do they vote for John, an influential and key member who sat on a Federal Executive & National Management Committee that saw the DA lose three metropolitan governments? **OR** do they vote for a candidate who led electoral growth, and actually grew the party in last year's national election?

Do they vote for John, a candidate who has not had a constituency in years? **OR** one that created new DA branches where there were none in the furthest reaches of rural Kwa-Zulu Natal, and helped win new electoral seats?

I believe that I can bring bold, transformative, and visionary leadership at a time when we need it the most. If given the chance, the party under my leadership can show South Africa how amazing things could be under a caring DA government.

In the next few months, we are going to be fighting the toughest local government elections we have ever fought. In order for us to ensure we return as many councillors as we can, and win more seats, we are going to have to inspire voters that have never voted for the DA before. We are going to have to capture the imagination of our youth who live in despair. If we do that, even those who stayed home and did not vote for us may finally do so. I want us to work together towards this goal. I want us to do the hard work of nation-building.

I believe that we can achieve this by accepting that coalitions are a reality of South Africa's present and future in the quest to realign politics in the interests of our people. The DA has struggled to fully embrace coalitions, as evidenced by the disintegration of the three metro governments we won just 4 years ago.

We need to be an equal partner, and stand by the agreements we make with honour, not hubris and arrogance, and our word needs to mean something.

I will approach those negotiations with an open-mind and good-will, the kind which has been sorely lacking, and whose absence has only begot mistrust and hostility to the detriment of our residents. It is important for delegates and our councillors to know that given that I have good relations with many opposition leaders, including those who have left our party to start new ones, I am probably the best suited leadership candidate to reach across the divide. I have no baggage in that regard.

We have a governing party that has failed us in every way possible. A party that has used this Covid-19 public health crisis to loot and pillage the state to the point that they have all but destroyed our immediate economic future. A governing party who has willingly and knowingly overlooked an urgent Climate and Ecological Crisis which threatens us all, along with future generations to come with immense catastrophe which will hit this country harder than most places on earth, and it simply cannot be ignored any longer.

This is one of many issues I believe is long overdue for the DA to be bold on and to stand up for our natural environment in general. As the official opposition the DA has a fundamental obligation to take the lead in holding our government accountable on its Climate Change commitments and its disastrous environmental track record.

Living in KZN where there is constant lack of water, erosion of habitat, wide scale pollution and living environments that make our poorest people sick. The governments' egregious and continued violations of Section 24 of the Bill of Rights, must be challenged. These violations have normalised and made acceptable a culture of environmental destruction which has placed ecocide at the heart of our economics.

This is why I am formally challenging Mr. John Steenhuisen to bring into sharp focus the differences that exist between us which the voting delegates to the Federal Congress have a right to know.

I trust that Mr Steenhuisen will accept my challenge to debate our visions for the Democratic Alliance as a legitimate platform to showcase our respective offers to the delegates and the people of South Africa. The idea of a debate was one actually championed originally by Mr Steenhuisen as the Campaign Manager and former right-hand man for the Former DA Leader, Mmusi Maimane, ahead of the 2015 Congress. Today I maintain that those reasons for debate still apply. I look forward to hearing from Mr Steenhuisen and will await his answer a week from today.

Finally, I wish to speak directly to the DA Federal Congress Delegates and the South African people. You are the reason why I am here today. I know all too well how many of you are feeling. About our party. About our country. And about the state of our world. When we look for leadership all we seem to find is self-interest and entitlement. Precisely when we need to all be pulling together many of our leaders have used the COVID-19 crisis for political opportunism, to protect their personal interests, to consolidate their long tentacles of favour, and access, and political patronage. And their end goal is simply to ensure our political process is one that maintains the status quo, that only works for them, and not for us. That their voice is always the loudest, and that yours and mine does not count. And this cannot continue.

We do not need political strongmen in South Africa. We have had far too many of those in our history already. That will only take us backwards. What we need is empathy. What we need are leaders who can set aside their own egos, and who can authentically listen to the people within this party and this country. And for once not think about themselves and what's in it for them.

This pandemic has also unfortunately laid bare for us all to see very clearly how deep the systemic injustice and inequality which exists within our society runs. Poverty is a terrible thing, and it is still far too prevalent. We remain the most unequal

country in the world. And it is of our own making. It is not a crime to be poor, but for so many it is a life sentence of destitution and misery. And it's destroyed, and continues to destroy many millions of lives, especially children. As a mother this is an especially difficult reality to come to terms with, but it is the daily life for so many of our young ones.

We have also been sold the idea countless times by our political snake-oil salesman that we need to destroy one part of our economy in order to lift up another. This is a lie. This is what leaders tell you when they are too lazy to do the hard work of building that which does not exist. When they have no ideas or viable solutions. It's time for them to step aside and let the rest of us get to work.

We need an entirely new economy, an economy that works for everyone, not just the few at the top, or those with capital, we need an economy that houses the homeless, that feeds the hungry, and educates our young people, and which is sustainable, and which cares for our natural environment. I am proposing that we need to rethink the ethics of our economy and move to one where all stakeholders have equal opportunities to thrive. An economy not solely built for profits but one where the state and business can work together to forge a society that takes care of everyone and we need it now.

Nation-building is no easy task. I look at this room and at the press gathered here who bravely keep our democracy accountable and open, and I thank them for their hard work, for keeping democracy alive, for coming today. And I am here to promise you that my campaign will renew that compact of nation-building across our entire society and instill it within the DA.

To those DA Federal Congress Delegates who are still unsure about who they will be voting for, and especially to those that have already endorsed John simply because they think there is no option or that they have no choice, I am here to tell you today that there is another way. **A new way.** We can genuinely save the DA. And more than this. We have to. Or we cannot take this great liberal project of the Democratic Alliance and our dreams of leading South Africa to prosperity forward. Our country needs us to do this.

I am ready to roll up my sleeves and get to work. To build a collaborative, powerful and dynamic party which embraces our diversity, which listens to our people with empathy and humility, and which genuinely cares. Our best days are not behind us, they are still to come. The time to stand up for what you believe in is now. If you still believe in this nation. Then join me. Everyone is needed. Everyone is welcome. We are all South Africans, and we will all rise or fall together. We all share a common destiny. And we are at our best when we all work together. So let us now boldly forge **a new way** forward to honour the inherent human dignity of all our citizens, to secure jobs and justice, peace and prosperity.

Whoever you are, wherever you are, I invite each and every DA member, and each and every South African to join me and my campaign.

I thank you.

Media enquiries:

Samkelo Mgobozi
Campaign Spokesperson
078 231 5977
media.mbalintuli@gmail.com