

# #IAM CONSTITUTION

Read it. Embrace it. Live it

## South Africa's constitution is a roadmap for the future

By Ivor Ichikowitz, Chairman of the Ichikowitz Family Foundation

As we approach the twentieth anniversary of the South African constitution, I am reminded of the timeless wisdom that 'those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it'. When it was adopted in 1996 our constitution boldly envisioned a democratic and open society, built on the recognition of past injustices. Though we have worked hard towards realising this vision, the long walk to freedom is not yet complete. If the next generation of South African leaders are to determine our future, they must first understand the struggle of our past.

I write this acknowledging my privilege of having lived to see the birth of our nation's constitution. As a student at WITS University in the 1980s, when it was a hotbed of political activity, I participated in the early days of the 'Unban the ANC' movement. I experienced firsthand the power of the collective in the struggle and the euphoria of our success when the ANC graduated from the grassroots to government.

Having since matured into a father and a philanthropist, I now ask myself how I can impart these experiences to my children. How to make them realise that the opportunities they so freely enjoy were only so recently fledgling and fragile? Without this understanding, I fear they will not be able to progress our vision of a truly democratic nation.

The arts provide a unique opportunity to show, not just tell our nation's past to the next generation of leaders. Through the Ichikowitz Family Foundation I have had the privilege of supporting the exhibition, It's A Fine Line, which celebrates the men and women who fought against apartheid and inspired our constitution. These canvases and the accompanying online campaign, #IamConstitution, provide an opportunity for young people to learn about their nation's history and the struggle which defines it.

My ambition is that the exhibition inspires our children to ask what they can do in return for the freedoms which they enjoy. How can their generation further advance the democratic ideals which started our long walk to freedom? Just as the struggle against apartheid defined my generation, the great challenge facing today's youth is inequality. South Africa consistently ranks as one of the world's most unequal nations on the Gini coefficient.

What can hasten the end of inequality is the collective will of our children. If they are aware of the rights enshrined in our constitution then equality is theirs for the taking. It is a fallacy to believe that you have a better chance of getting a job as a young black person than you have as a young white. I speak to some young people who have the perception that there is no future for them in South Africa. Skilled, qualified engineers, accountants and doctors who say 'I have failed already because I'm white'. Had they read our constitution and understood the collective struggle it represents I bet they would create opportunity, instead of waiting for it to come to them.

In this ongoing struggle for equality and opportunity we find ourselves time and again a nation united. As Deputy President Mbeki said in 1996, the constitution invites all citizens to "assume their place in society as equals with their fellow human beings without regards to colour, to race, to gender, to age or to geographic dispersal." In this invitation to "define ourselves as one people" we reaffirm our proud identity as South Africans, creating our own future from our own hands and minds.

Ultimately the value of our constitution lies in the will of the citizens that it empowers. We cannot take its freedoms for granted, rather we must evolve into a society that pays them forward to realise the democratic dream of our forefathers. As responsible citizens, we should be equally obliged to vote and ensure the constitution is upheld. If we ignore these responsibilities, we risk repeating the mistakes of our past.

