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## Transcript

# Unlocking South Africa's Potential: The Challenge for New Political Parties

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### **Mamphela Ramphele:**

Thank you. Thank you very much for having me in this wonderful institution. I have been a frequent visitor to London for many, many years and I used to walk past here, and only occasionally got inside. So it's great to be here.

I just want to use this opportunity to talk to you about the country of my dreams, and what we believe is a pivotal moment that South Africa is in. We believe that as citizens we need to take very serious note of this moment and the imperatives for action that the moment demands.

Many of you would identify with the fact that we are talking here about a country of immense potential, blessed with abundance – natural resources, mineral resources, human resources. Our society is based on one of the most highly respected constitutions, which protects the very fundamental human rights and enshrines the respect for the rule of law. Importantly, it enshrines the rights of all people in our country and affirms the democratic values of dignity, equality and freedom, and creates the prospects for a great nation, unified in its diversity.

South Africans will never forget the many countries who supported us and we are reminiscing on the contributions of the Anti-Apartheid Movement, the Christian Institute and others – and the joy that we shared with the international community when we got our freedom in 1994. We will never forget the iconic picture of Mandela with his defiant fist in the air when he came out of prison. In the midst of this very extraordinary change President Mandela inspired South Africans, particularly with the words at his inauguration – I would like to just quote them because they set the context for what I'm about to say. He said, 'Our daily deeds as ordinary South Africans must produce an actual South African reality that will reinforce humanity's belief in justice, strengthen its confidence in the nobility of the human soul, and sustain all our hopes for a glorious life for all.'

Today, while Mr Mandela is in the evening of his life – and I'm sure all of us would like to wish him well – his noble entreaties are needed more than ever in our country, for it pains me to have to say to all of you that we have failed to honour his legacy, and the legacy of many who fought and died so that we can be free. The truth is that the current government has seriously underestimated what it would take to walk the journey from being passive citizens of undemocratic governments, denied the right to make our own choices, to becoming citizens of a constitutional democracy. Nearly 20 years after our first democratic elections, it is with great sadness and indeed anger

that many South Africans feel our leaders have failed to deliver on the promise of freedom that so many generations fought and died for.

In the last four months since I launched the political platform Agang SA – which means ‘build’ in my native language, Sepedi – I have been conducting listening tours across the country. Urban, rural, rich and poor areas, talking to women, to young people, business leaders, university students, academics, everybody. Each one of them is united in terms of identifying what has gone wrong. The message that keeps coming back is that our schools are not delivering the education that our children deserve. People willing to work hard cannot find decent jobs to support their families. Crime is growing and people no longer feel safe in their neighbourhoods. Most of all, a massive failure of governance and accountability has allowed corruption and a culture of impunity to spread throughout government and society.

There are those who say: be patient. Change is coming. The full promise of our nation is just around the corner. But in our hearts, a voice says no. Twenty years is too long for people to wait for decent jobs, decent education, decent health, safe and secure places to live. The South African auditor-general tells us that in 2012 alone, over \$2.5 billion of public money was wasted through corruption, negligence, incompetence – robbing citizens of vital services and denying our economy the investments it needs for us to thrive. This is having a catastrophic effect on the current government's ability to provide vital services for citizens, to develop our economy, to create incentives for the public sector to invest and create jobs, and to enable people to lead dignified lives. Millions of citizens are living like forgotten people. These are the words that they tell me: that their voices don't count, that they feel disrespected.

Let us be clear. These are not just bumps on the road to a better future. These are not inevitable pains of a transitional period. They are a betrayal of the fundamental principles of our democracy; a betrayal of what our brothers and sisters, our mothers and fathers, fought and died for.

Take South Africa's state of education. The failures of provision of school infrastructure, textbooks, having teachers in classrooms where they should be – these are all failures of governance, not failures of policy. It may be unsurprising that in terms of our performance, even compared to the poorest African countries we are only ahead of Yemen in terms of overall educational performance. Let me give you some facts and figures about the cohort that was registered in Grade One, 1.1 million students, in 2001. They all had this bright future ahead of them. But by 2012, 66 per cent – 745,000 of them –

had either dropped out or failed their matric at the age of 18. So all that was ahead of them was destroyed. Only 10 per cent of that original 1.1 million were eligible to go to university. In the same year, when Grade Six learners were tested at age 12, only 43 per cent was the attainment that the cohort averaged in terms of literacy tests. In terms of numeracy tests: 27 per cent, that's what they could attain. Where in the world are these young people going to live, with that kind of educational preparation?

Many young people today in South Africa have got education worse than Bantu education, if you can imagine it. But that's what it is. I'm a product of Bantu education. Many of the young people today can't find jobs because they can't read, they can't write and they can't think logically.

That this is happening 20 years into our democracy is a betrayal. The reality is that our economy is underperforming largely because we don't have the skills to run a modern, 21st-century country. We have huge vacancies, something like 800,000 vacancies, for skilled work alongside something like 600,000 graduates who can't find work, because there is no match between them. So we have to realize that we are a society at serious risk. South Africa is a young country and it is appalling to learn that an estimated 71 per cent of young people between the ages of 15 and 34 are unemployed, in a country where that age cohort constitutes 60 per cent of the population. This is a national disaster. The impact of this underperformance is felt most by 80 per cent of the country's citizens, with the rising cost of living. The substitute of social grants is not really one that gives dignity to people who want to work.

So we are in a situation where our economy is underperforming the rest of the continent. In fact, we are in a continent that is the fastest-growing region in the world, averaging five per cent. We will be lucky to get two per cent growth this year, because the first-quarter results already tell us that we are under one per cent growth. So we are dragging the continent down, as the largest economy, rather than being a contributor.

So we have to find another way of addressing our issues. They are also compounded by our foreign policy performance. We have not demonstrated an ability to link our foreign policy with the human rights constitution that we have. So our stance on Zimbabwe, on Darfur, on Myanmar, are at variance with the human rights principles of our constitution. So it is quite clear that our government has departed from the fundamental principles that should be governing our society.

Unchecked, the current governing party, the government, the president and the state have merged into a monolith that acts with impunity. The most

staggering and blatant example of a conflation of conflicting interests is the cutting of deals through the ANC's investment arm – called Chancellor House – that merrily conducts business with contractors to various departments. I mean, what a massive conflict of interest! Which democracy would tolerate this kind of behaviour? But it happens in my country.

Why is it possible for politicians in my country to act with such arrogant disregard for the people that elected them? To steal, to act with such brazen impunity and to abuse the resources of the state for party and personal enrichment? Again, I say it is because of the lack of a focus on good governance and the arrogance of the majority party, whose representatives no longer serve the people who elected them.

I fully understand the risk of painting our country in such a negative light. But the truth is that South Africa has arrived at a crossroads. We must change course now or rampant corruption will rob the country of its full potential and our citizens will be robbed of their future.

It is precisely because South Africa has reached this potentially defining moment that I decided to enter into politics. Some of you who are here know that I have never been a member of a political party. I never aspired to political office. I am doing what I'm doing because my country is at risk. The country of our dreams is at risk of vanishing into the dustbowls of history. The results of the 2009 election, in which millions of registered voters could not bring themselves to vote for the existing offerings then, and the response that Agang has received since our launch as a political platform in February show that there is a huge desire in South Africa to have a political party that represents those people who have given up on the current political players.

I have myself seen the highs and lows of my country. Many of you know my background. What we all understand is the critical importance of good leadership. We know that as shareholders of a company that is underperforming chronically for 19 years, the CEO would be history, otherwise the shareholders will take their money and go elsewhere. That's exactly what South African citizens are feeling. As the shareholders of our democracy, they are saying: it's time for change.

The time has come to restore the promise of a free South Africa for all, a vision that offers hope for the future and the prospect of dignity for every one of us. Agang believes in the restoration of the founding principles of our democracy. We believe in placing people at the centre of the democratic process. So we are developing a whole range of policies, which will be floated in a manifesto at our launch on 22 June. But the main focus will be on

empowering people to govern – that was the rallying cry of our struggle. Building an effective public service that is professional and unconflicted. Building a restructured economy that can create jobs and make the economy competitive, productive and inclusive. Building a 21st-century education and training system, and building a health care system that will stop the carnage of women dying in childbirth in the 21st century. Building a better safety and security system so people can trust the police again.

So we are building a campaign strategy that will engage and mobilize the 5 million people who were registered in 2009 but chose not to vote. We are also targeting the 'born frees', who are unencumbered by the legacy of the past. Ultimately we believe it is possible for South Africa's people to stand up and elect a government that will treat them with respect. Agang is building a formidable machine to fight a disciplined, well-funded, scientifically informed campaign to mobilize South Africans to change the political landscape.

We believe this is the time. This is the time to restore the promise of freedom in South Africa, to build the country of our dreams, so that South Africans can have hope and dignity and live in a country they can be proud of, because we will be known again for being a country with integrity in the public and private spaces. Thank you.