

The hit and myth approach

In the closing address to the conference, Van Zyl Slabbert stressed that democracy was an "instrumental value": it could be used by a society to realise or destroy its own potential.

With this in mind, and because of the worldwide desire for democratic systems of government, Slabbert warned that it was necessary to be clear and cautious about some of the myths concerning how to become a democracy and what a democracy could deliver. Some extracts from his address follow:



SLABBERT pursue democracy as means towards unlocking potential

SOME MYTHS ON HOW TO BECOME A DEMOCRACY

- **There is only one reliable political strategy that can guarantee a democratic outcome:** There are many and competing claims about the democratic outcome of elite pacts, mass mobilisation, modernising oligarchies and revolutionary seizures of power.

- **Political tolerance has to be institutionalised before democracy can survive:** This is to confuse cause with effect. Very often people negotiate because they have no choice and deeply distrust each other because of competing interests. Trust may be a consequence of their bargaining but it is not a precondition.

- **Civil liberties have to be respected before there can be democracy:** This is part of the same confusion... Respect for civil rights is part of the democratic bargain – not a precondition for it.

- **Democracy cannot come about in a state of violence and instability:** Not true. Very often democracies are born out of such

actors seem to realise that we have no choice but to bargain for democracy if we hope to avert a catastrophe.

SOME MYTHS ABOUT WHAT DEMOCRACY CAN DELIVER

- **Democracy will bring about growth and economic efficiency:** This is perhaps the most dangerous myth for South Africa. If political groupings are economically illiterate before the onset of democracy there is nothing in democracy per se that guarantees such literacy. That is why the economic debate must be engaged before, during and after democratisation of our society.

- **Democracy will bring about efficient administration:** Very often democratisation can, initially at least, lead to increasing inefficiency because of a wider range of interest groups having access to decision-making. Autocracies/military regimes display great repressive efficiency which very often induces nostalgia in some sections of the population for the "good old days".

- **Democracy will bring about enduring stability:** Groups, parties and movements

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