



*The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor*

**PROF MANDLA MAKHANYA**

**PRINCIPAL AND VICE CHANCELLOR: UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**WELCOME: VOTER EDUCATION SEMINAR**

***TO VOTE OR NOT TO VOTE?***

**SUNNYSIDE CAMPUS**

**19 FEBRUARY 2019**

- Members of the Gauteng Provincial Legislature (GPL) present
- Members of the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC)
- Members of the Department of Home Affairs
- Volunteers, staff and students

A very warm welcome to you all

The theme of this programme is: *"To vote or not to vote,"* which is obviously a play on the opening phrase *"to be or not to be,"* from the

very famous soliloquy in Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*, Hamlet being the famous Prince of Denmark who, after the death (murder) of his father, was pondering the unbearable pain of life, and the fear and uncertainty of death, especially if such death is by choice. He asks himself, should he live or should he die? For him at that stage in his life, both options seem equally disagreeable. He is frustrated and hugely dissatisfied with the torment that he is enduring, but he is afraid that death might bring a fate even worse than that which he is currently suffering. So he finds himself in a dilemma. Neither option provides the outcome he is seeking.

Now if you want to know how Hamlet ends I would suggest you read the play. Suffice to say it is steeped in political intrigue and power plays, literally laced with murder and tragedy.

Now, the reason why I have drawn an analogy between Hamlet's dilemma and that of many young South Africans of voting age, is because many feel that they are *damned if they do and damned if they don't*. They are experiencing the pain and hopelessness of the here and now, and the perceived hopelessness about the future. They feel disempowered, angry and hopeless. They feel forgotten, neglected and unimportant – and so many have decided to *opt out* - of citizenship, of active participation in society and of having a say in the shaping of their own futures, not to mention those of their children and families.

The huge irony of course, is that it is precisely this apathy and withdrawal that is a tragedy and does not mean that not voting is the right option. We see all about us, nationally, continentally and globally what happens when citizens do not exercise the responsible citizenship and the *massive collective power* that is vested in the simple act of voting. Each voting abstinence dilutes and weakens the power and influence of the citizenry. There is a well-known saying: *You get the leaders you deserve*. That much is true. If you do not exercise your vote and your responsible citizenry, you open up spaces for the few to dictate to the many, etc.

You, the youth, hold the agency when it comes to our future. It is your voices that can and must shape our journey. Did you know that 41% of the African population is under the age of 15, and that some predict that our continent's population will reach 2.4 billion by 2050? By 2100, more than half of the world's growth is expected to come from Africa, reaching 4.1 billion people by 2100 to claim *over 1/3 of the world's population*. And the active working age population (25-64 years) has grown more rapidly than any other age group, from 123.7 million (33.3 per cent) in 1980 to 425.7 million (36.2 per cent) in 2015.

In South Africa, our demographics indicate that the citizens in the 0-14 years category comprise 28.27% of the population; 15-24 years: 17.61%; 25-54 years; 41.78%; 55-64 years: 6.66%; and 65 years and over: 5.68%. That means that *45.88*, nearly *half* of our population is under the age of

25! This cohort represents our future. Together with the working population (aged 25 to 54) we find almost nearly 88% of the population represented. There is one absolute certainty in these statistics. If we don't act responsibly and vote for our leaders, we and our continent face catastrophe on an unimaginable scale and a bleak future.

You know that as youth hold the balance of power! So, use it!

This voter education seminar aims to conscientise our young people especially, into the critical necessity of exercising their vote and in so doing, shaping their own futures. I wish the organisers, volunteers and most importantly, the young people at our institutions of higher learning very well as they interrogate their responsible citizenship and make voting choices that will impact on their futures. I would encourage you all to be a part of the solution and not a part of the problem and we try by all means to lift our beloved country out of the doldrums and works for a brighter future for all.