

The growth and development of the individual is made possible by the security of living in community – a person is a person through other persons – ubuntu. The aim of democracy is to provide the security that allows for maximum individual freedom.

Democracy from demos (people, awethu) and kratos (power, amandla) – amandla awethu – government of the people, by the people, for the people is based on the ideals of liberty, fraternity and equality. Fraternity and equality translate into responsibility and respect for others.

But human beings are self-serving creatures; we often forget fraternity and equality in pursuit of liberty. Without them, freedom remains ambiguous, both positive and negative. Positive freedom leads to beneficial creativity and development; negative freedom leads to exploitation, manipulation, fraud and destruction. In order to provide the security that leads to positive individual freedom, a democratic government, through the rule of law, enforces conformity to fraternity and equality to ensure liberty.

Freedom in democracy means responsible freedom: we cannot simply do as we please; we have to take into consideration how our actions may affect others. And respect for the rights of others translates into respect for the rule of law.

The rule of law, which a Government enforces through its police force and the justice system, is there to foster a culture of accountability. The rule of law makes a government an institution of control – even democratically elected governments, and governance is on a continuum of control. The difference between authoritarian and democratic government is simply the difference in degree of control. And the degree of control determines the degree of individual freedom.

Individual freedom is probably the most significant ingredient in the progress and development of a society. If we look at societies where there is great progress, we see high degrees of individual freedom. The progress that results from such individual creativity and innovation, reaches across borders, bestowing benefits globally.

Where the rule of law does not operate, as in situations of high crime, individual freedom is

diminished. Crime is usually associated with poverty; poor people are desperate people with little individual freedom – the resort to crime is an expression of their freedom. Poverty, itself a crime, reveals a society's repudiation of fraternity and equality. It is an indictment of a government and society that calls itself democratic. Poverty exists where those who are not poor, pursue individual freedom at the expense of those who live in dehumanising conditions. That makes us all criminals whether we are directly engaged in criminal activities or not.

Though we all recognize that poverty leads to crime, we don't acknowledge that poverty is an indication of the failure of democracy. And the situation is exacerbated when the people, mandated to protect democracy, are also involved in crime. Crime at higher levels of society, by people in positions of power and trust – governmental as well as non-governmental -- is far more devastating than the most barbarous crimes committed by the criminals among the poor. Poor people commit crimes against individuals; powerful people commit crimes against society that lead to large scale ruin and destruction.

And when leaders violate the rule of law they give rise to a general culture of lawlessness. When we read daily of bribery and corruption committed by those in power – from the highest levels of government to the street level of the police force, we feel free to repudiate the rule of law or to take the law into our hands. So now in South Africa, we have the world's highest incidence of rape – that includes the rape and murder of children and babies. These crimes as horrendous as they are, do not compare with the fraud committed at high levels that takes the food from the mouths of millions. With the general suspension of the rule of law in the country, we cannot trust the police; we cannot trust politicians, we cannot trust bankers; we cannot trust industrialists and businessmen. Power has replaced the rule of law.

A government that is entrenched, i.e. that knows that it can stay in power for the foreseeable future, will be a government in which the rule of law becomes a plaything to be manipulated. To keep a government somewhat honest, i.e., concerned about the welfare of citizens, is to keep it off-balance.

Once a government becomes entrenched, it has no need to be democratic; there is no challenge to its power – it has the votes of the majority; there is no need to deliver them from poverty.

The only way to keep a government off-balance is to keep it uncertain of its ability to maintain power. If it really needs our votes, it will make more of an effort to improve conditions of living,

especially for poor people. But voting is a problem where race and ethnicity still rule the day.

At this moment (October 2013), there is an interesting development in the US. The Congress has shut down government on the grounds that it cannot endorse President Obama's healthcare legislation. The Congress, presumably consisting of wealthy people, professes that government cannot afford to take care of its poor citizens. In other words, it cannot carry out its mandate of ensuring fraternity and equality – the prerequisites for individual freedom. It is a clear demonstration of democracy's Achilles' heel – it relies on trust.

The words "liberty", "equality", "fraternity" roll easily off the tongue; but they are not guaranteed under "democracy". Most societies with elected governments have to be content with liberty, equality and fraternity as regulated under the law when there is the rule of law; but when it comes to economic and social liberty-equality-fraternity -- the necessary complement to individual freedom -- the individual is on her own.