

25 years later: Freedom is a gift - and a responsibility

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This year Freedom Day marks an important anniversary for South Africa. As we celebrate 25 years of democracy, it is incumbent on all of us to stay vigilant in protecting our right to freedom.

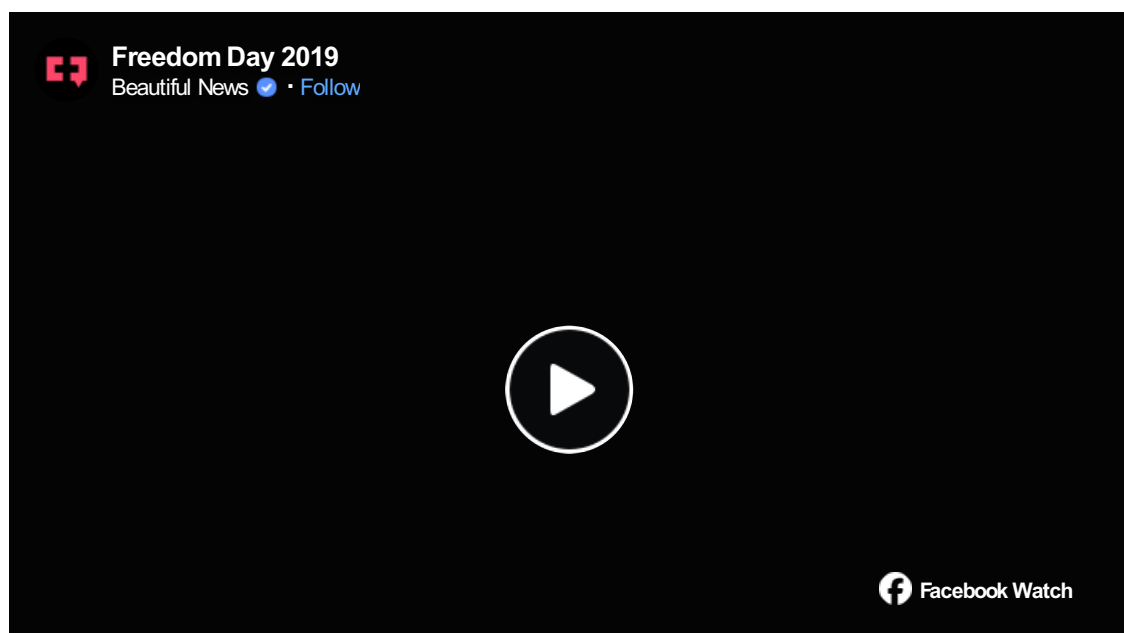


We can't take freedom for granted. Steve Biko, Chris Hani, and countless others lost their lives in the fight for liberation. It's been just 25 years since we held our first democratic elections on April 27 1994. We've come a long way in the two-and-a-half decades since. Today the right to freedom is enshrined in our constitution. But that right is meaningless unless we exercise it. Being free today means that we have a duty to protect it for tomorrow.

Freedom: more than a vote

In a week and a half South Africa will vote for the sixth time since 1994. Voting is a small gesture with enormous meaning – but democracy, as with any other system of governance, can be [vulnerable to exploitation and destabilisation](#). Our society will only continue to function effectively if we remain engaged and committed to enforcing the values our constitution is built on: human dignity, equality, and freedom.

As much as freedom is legally protected in South Africa, rights on paper are just the foundations of a robust democracy. It's up to us to construct a diverse, vibrant, and liberated society on those principles. We [can't rely on official structures of power](#). We need to guard against injustice and abuses of power. Ordinary citizens taking a stand earned this country's freedom, and the onus is on us to stay vigilant in defending it.



Protecting the right to be recognised

There isn't a South African alive today who is unaffected by the consequences of our past. And that's particularly true for those who are working for freedom in this era. South Africa's storied tradition of active citizens taking the initiative and driving positive change is as strong as ever – and they are doing it in ways that reflect the diversity of our country, with the

goal of securing a fair and inclusive future.

Examples are everywhere. [Lukhanyo Calata](#) lost his father to apartheid. A member of the Cradock Four, Calata's father was killed by agents of the apartheid state. Calata inherited his father's fire, and established himself as a fiercely independent journalist defined by his fearlessness in the face of unjust wielding of authority. [Farieda Abrahams](#) was a child when District Six was declared a whites-only area. She thought all it meant was that the government would paint the houses white. After living through forced removals, Abrahams grew up to become a social worker and author. Her first book is a fictional account of her childhood in District Six. By sharing her past with the children she protects, she is helping them learn from history to build a better future.

[Albie Sachs](#) was nearly killed by an apartheid-government car bomb that claimed one of his arms. Sachs survived to help write South Africa's constitution, playing an instrumental role in shaping the document that defines democracy in this nation. Today he remains an icon and a powerful voice against injustice. [Omar Badsha](#) is an award-winning photographer and activist who played a vital role in documenting the struggle years. After 1994, as a celebrated member of the movement for democracy, he could have gone into politics. He chose to stay true to his roots, founding [South African History Online](#) to keep our past accessible. The site offers a wealth of information for anyone wanting to learn about our past – an immensely valuable resource for all young South Africans.

These stories have a strong common thread. From activists and storytellers to photographers and jurists, South Africa is teeming with people who understand that freedom means the right to be recognised. Protecting that right doesn't always have to mean marching in the streets. It can be as simple as expressing your truth – being honest, authentic, and powerful in telling the world who you are and where you come from.

Calata, Abrahams, Sachs, and Badsha aren't outliers. Every day, South Africans across the country are using their freedom to have a positive impact. These stories, and hundreds of others like them, find a home on [Beautiful News](#). Our nation's energy, creativity, and potential is on full display – which is precisely why Mercedes-Benz has lent its support to the platform.

We have the power to shape our future

If you choose to vote on May 8, remember that having freedom goes beyond participating at the polls. In our country in particular, it's something that we need to nurture and protect. It's a serious responsibility, but also an enormous opportunity. Today we have power. Power to vote. Power to choose how we want to be represented. And power to decide how we want to present ourselves to the world – who we want to be in society.

Holding that responsibility isn't a burden. It's an incredible gift. And people like Calata, Abrahams, Sachs, and Badsha represent the fullness of that potential being realised. If we learn from their stories, recognise their achievements, and emulate their contributions to society, we'll continue celebrating our freedom for years to come.

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