



# Event Review

**Helen Zille**

16<sup>th</sup> of October 2012  
at the Johannesburg Country  
Club in Woodmead

At a Dinner recently held at the Johannesburg Country Club in Woodmead, Members of SwissCham Southern Africa – South Africa Chapter had the privilege of being addressed by **Helen Zille**, Leader of the Democratic Alliance (DA).



SwissCham President Thomas C. Hippele welcomed the 120 guests who had come to hear Helen Zille's message on the topic:

**“ Perspectives on South Africa (economy & politics) “**

After a delicious starter and main course, Thomas Hippele introduced the guest speaker, Helen Zille.

Before Helen Zille began her career in politics she worked as a political correspondent for the Rand Daily Mail, where she covered key political stories, such as the death of black consciousness activist Steve Biko. In 1977 she was able to prove that Biko had been tortured to death and that the official version of the story, which claimed he had died of natural causes, was false.

From the 1980s onward she became involved in NGOs and activist organizations, including the Open Society Foundation, the Independent Media Diversity Trust, and the Black Sash. She also campaigned against vigilantism and repression in the Cape townships, and was part of the peace movement that worked to bring warring factions in Crossroads together.

She obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Witwatersrand and joined the former Democratic Party in the mid 1990's, where she was asked to reformulate the party's education policy and stand as a candidate on its election list for the Western Cape legislature.

She also acted as Technical Adviser to the party at CODESA in the early 1990s.

Helen was elected to the provincial parliament in the 1999 general election under the banner of the Democratic Alliance.

From 1999 to 2001 she served as Minister of Education in the Western Cape Province. During this two and a half year period she made 500 school visits in a campaign to encourage discipline among teachers and improve teaching conditions.



When the ANC gained power in 2001 she became leader of the opposition in the Western Cape legislature, where she remained until she was elected as a member of the National Parliament in 2004.

As a Democratic Alliance MP she sat on the Portfolio Committee on Education, and acted as the DA's National Spokesperson. Her constituency included Langa, Gugulethu and Khayelitsha.

On 15 March 2006 she was elected as Mayor of Cape Town, and resigned from parliament.

On 6 May 2007 she was elected as the Leader of the Democratic Alliance at the party's Federal Congress in Johannesburg.

I would like to start with the State of the Nation, as to where we are now, and I think it would be apt to describe our current situation as one of collective depression. Having been around long enough in South Africa to understand the Roller Coaster of public sentiment, we steer from elation to depression in very short order, and while we're elated we can't imagine we could ever be depressed, and when we're depressed we can't ever believe that we'll get through this tunnel onto the other side. At the moment I'm feeling rather positive about South Africa's future, and of course this doesn't mean that the positivity will be automatic or the solutions are obvious, but the prospects of the future I think are very positive, if a whole lot of things come together, and that is what I will be talking about tonight.



There is a wonderful saying "never waste a good crisis" and I've always lived by that saying, if there is a major crisis, I look at the opportunity that arises out of it, and you will often find that the people who have been most successful in life are those who understood how to see the opportunities in a crisis and use it well.



Recently I have had a long chat with a very old associate and colleague of mine Mamphelle Ramphele, and she was saying to me that no liberation movement ever in the history of any country has made a good democratic government, and why should we be the exception. I think that many people who know that, are quite depressed about the prospects that will arise from it, but in fact, I really do believe that we can make a transition successfully, not with the current government, but it will well be on our way to achieving a benchmark which is critical to any transition to a successful democracy, and that is a change of government through the ballot box.

I know that very few people take me seriously when I say that, but what they often forget and certainly not take for granted, is that we have had a couple of transitions through the ballot box, in cases where people never thought it would be possible, and the party that I lead is no longer just a party of opposition, we are now a party of government as well, we have 27 municipalities throughout South Africa and an entire province. And so the argument is that we can exempt that from local government onwards without creating a little vortex of how I foresee things developing over the next couple of years, and the outcome that I think is likely. Irony is, that when everyone felt elated in South Africa after our first democratic election in 1994, it was one of my lowest points. It was after that election people



were to see we could have a democratic election, there wasn't any violence, we could have a peaceful transition, the army and the police could salute a new President, they could subject themselves to civilian rule, we can become a successful democracy, and I looked at the election outcome and I said, this vote is very ill. Because the greatest gift for South Africa is the entrenchment of racial nationalism through the neglect of a former white nationals party versus a black nationals party, entrenching automatic demographic majorities and minorities which would mean, that it would never be possible to change governments through the ballot box peacefully. If every election challenges your racial senses, if every election serves your full blown conclusion, if one party represents one racial group and another party represents another racial group, demography becomes your destiny and the outcome of every election becomes predictable.

Unless you can have a change of government through the ballot box, you can't have a democracy, you can't have accountability, and you can't have a transparent and democratic government. That was the landscape of politics with the National Party always hovering around 15%, the ANC would grow stronger and stronger. Within a Shrinking economy the battle would be over access to a shrinking number of jobs as the political island dripped over the distinction of the disbursing of patronage and became retrenched, and as the economy increasingly became controlled by the political elite, I felt that if it was ever really going to be challenged so that we wouldn't be able to salvage democracy. The party that I served at the time, the Democratic Party had 1.7% of the voters, and we were the party that stood very firmly for the values of the constitution. The great risk that the value settled layer beneath the constitution, would never



be implemented in South Africa, because a race based identity would always be super imposed on the people and no one would be free to choose their own identity and protect each other's rights, to choose their own identity whether that was a religion a cultural or any form of affiliation in an open opportunity based society. And at that time when we argued that we could become the official opposition in 1999 from a position of 1.7% of the votes, people thought we were crazy. But we delivered within 5 years. Being the opposition you have to become a part of government, and we did that too, and not only in one city, which is Cape Town, but eventually in a province, and in 27 local authorities. And today people simply take that for granted as a given, they do not look back to see how absolutely impossible that law was when we set it, and how we managed to turn that vision into a plan and then into practice. We are always thinking towards the next election and how to expand our work today, to identify what the next challenge is, and what the next possible prospect of voters support may be, we communicate with those voters, we hold on to our existing base, we campaign between the elections and bring people to vote for us. In the last elections, you will probably all know we got one out of every four votes cast in the local caption. And that gives us an extraordinary platform on which to build. I think it is very important to look back and not to take for granted where you are, but to be able to understand how different it might have been, and what a long way one has actually come, and over how many hills one has to burst to get where we are today.

Let us look at the economic crisis first, and there is no doubt that it is the most serious crisis in the face of democracy. We have a very high rate of unemployment, and particularly an extremely high rate of youth unemployment with 50% of all young people not being actively employed and many of them unlikely ever to get a productive job during their lifetimes, many of them without the education to enable them to get a job and to get a foothold in the economy, and that is the greatest and most serious crisis, the level of youth unemployment and lack of education. We have a situation of economic stagnation, we have profound inequality, and labour unrest in the





conflicts with trade unions who hold the economy to ransom, in which it is very difficult to negotiate agreements, that would enable more people to come into the economy and the resistance to measures that make



access easier by the trade unions. And so we have a very serious situation as far as the economy is concerned, there is a massive negativity about the prospects in South Africa and the general sense that the major interest and growth in a developing economy is declining across the rest of Africa, and the developing world. And why are economy places of potential crisis while politics is hardly caring better. We have the ANC elective conference in Mangaung in December, we have the ruling party paralyzed by its internal divisions, and oblivious to anything outside its internal power, and we understand that it is not just for power's sake, but its powerful money sake. We see the looting of the state coffers.

see the abuse of power, we see endemic corruption and all of these issues collectively make South African's very depressed and make our trading partners and investors very depressed. I'm not depressed because I see the massive opportunities arising out of this situation.

I've known since I was a source reporter of the ANC in the 1980's, that the ANC would not be able to govern South Africa. Not only have we built effective checks and balances for the free media, but we've also managed to take many cases to the constitutional court that has prevented the ruling party from colonising institutions of state, such as the National Prosecuting Authority and various other critical institutions that we've defended with everything that we have successfully with the constitutional court. And the next case we've got coming up is the question of whether the withdrawal of 700 corruption charges against



President Jacob Zuma was a rational decision, or whether it was taken under political duress, and it looks as if that case is going in a very interesting direction. I do not think that anybody imagined that the decline of the ANC was going to be quick, predictable or easy, it was always going to be highly complex because of the enormous power of that organisation. The ANC is becoming more and more brittle and vulnerable and the crisis is now irreversible and the un-governability almost complete. What does that mean for us? Obviously that's a major risk, but also a major opportunity, because ironically there's a plan. Trevor Manuel produced an excellent plan, the "National Development Plan" and it aligns almost 100% with the DA's own plan that we call the 8% growth & jobs plan. So there's a core plan with the heart of Government and the opposition that aligns on informal bases on the regeneration of our economy and the social compact around economic developments growth and jobs. The biggest obstacle we face is that people who support and believe that plan, are currently in different parties. There's a solid core in the ruling party that believes in that plan, but because trade unions and the Communist Party and various other people oppose it, it hasn't got a chance of implementation in the current line up, and everybody in the DA supports that plan, as do many others. And so the biggest challenge we will face in the years ahead is to bring together those people who will back the National Development Plan, and who will then together, build a new majority at the non-racial centre of South African politics, to defend the constitution, to build non-racialism, to grow a market economy, and to ensure our institutions of state, and particularly our civil service becomes independent and professional and not controlled by any political party.



In conclusion, Helen Zille said; I have no doubt, that we can build a new majority in South Africa around that core of values and principles. And my key job in the next two to three years is to get that right, and I'm now more optimistic than I have ever been, that it is achievable. There are many people at the heart of the ruling party who agree with me, but we have to make sure it happens, and it is very difficult to predict exactly how, because catalytic events by their very nature are difficult to predict. What I have to do is read the developments well, steer the boat correctly, build on the base we have already built to the point now, that we have got one in every 4 votes in South Africa, and

ensure that we draw together the high profile people to launch a movement which will win an election. I have no doubt that that will happen in the next couple of years. There are going to be many crucial developments which will show that people are not trapped in the political alignments of the past. We are rallying very hard for Gauteng in 2014, which is the next general election, as well as in the Northern Cape. And in 2019 we're rallying to win the national election. People smile at me when we say that, but I really do believe that it is possible and it's certainly much less out of the bounds of possibility than it was to imagine after 1994 that we could be the official opposition by 1999. No one ever thought that South Africa was going to become an established democracy without going through some very difficult adolescent years. We are in those adolescent years right now, but because they have arrived reasonably early, because there is still a core



of principled people who have power in key places, because we have preserved institutions like the media, the Constitutional Court, the Public Protector, because we've defended institutions like the National Prosecuting Authority, and because of the growing alternative, the people now believe we can become an alternative government and we will make this transition, as turbulent as the process may sometimes be. We need to keep



faith, we need to keep investing in and growing new businesses, because the most important thing is to fix education and to grow the number of jobs, and if we can get these two things right especially where we're going to show the difference between our political philosophy applied and those of the ANC, we will make South Africa a success, I hope that many of you who are a lot younger than me will look back and remember tonight and know that we went through a couple of difficult years, but we emerged out of the other side in a stable democracy in which it is possible for government to change path through the ballot box, because emotions have the power.





Daniela Maurer for  
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