

Freedom, Fairness and Opportunity is coming to the North West Province

My fellow Democrats,

It's great to be in the North West Province, and I am honoured to speak to you here for the first time as the DA's Federal Leader.

I am currently in the middle of my Freedom, Fairness and Opportunity Tour, where I'm engaging in conversations with communities in every province about the DA's values and its vision for South Africa.

So far, my tour has again brought to the fore the enormous challenges that South Africans face every day. But I've also been struck by an incredible wave of optimism.

Despite facing real hardships daily, people are simply not giving up hope. South Africans are determined to work together to build a better future.

This province has had its fair share challenges in recent years. The people of the North West have suffered for too long under a chaotic, corrupt and uncaring government.

As the ANC government here has stumbled from crisis to scandal, they have failed the people of the North-West in just about every single aspect of government delivery.

The list of failed municipalities under Section 139 intervention just gets longer and longer, and already includes Tswaing, Madibeng, Ventersdorp, Matlosana, Maquassi Hills, Ditsobotla and Ngaka Modiri Molema District Municipality.

Across the province, many communities don't have running water, and bucket toilets are still widely used. The province's roads are in a shocking state. Schools are under-staffed and under-equipped.

But the biggest failing of the people of the North West is the spiralling unemployment numbers.

Last week, Stats SA released their quarterly employment data, and it made for grim reading indeed. Along with the Eastern Cape, the North West province has the highest broad unemployment rate in the country, at a staggering 43,2%.

Almost half the working-age population in the province don't have work – many of whom have simply given up looking. And national figures have shown us that two-thirds of South Africa's unemployed are under 35 years old. This is a tragedy.

But the days of an uncaring, ANC government sitting pretty here in the North-West are over.

Change is coming. Change that brings freedom, fairness and opportunity for all.

Three weeks ago, we held our Federal Congress in Nelson Mandela Bay. Those of you who attended will know what I mean when I say: Change is coming to our country.

The political ground is shifting beneath our feet, and it is the DA that is driving this change.

The atmosphere at Federal Congress was electric. Belief was tangible. Real belief that the DA is busy building a better tomorrow for all South Africans.

Our project of building a strong, prosperous, non-racial South Africa is gaining momentum every day.

Because we are the only party that has a vision for a future South Africa that is better for every person who lives here.

Finally the DA is setting the agenda. We are telling our own story. We have the opportunity to share our vision of the country we want to build without getting caught up in what the ANC is doing, or what they're saying about us.

It is now up to us to make the most of this opportunity by spreading our message as far and wide as we can.

One of the most important things we did at Federal Congress was to adopt our Values Charter as the preamble to our Constitution. These values describe exactly what the party stands for, and how this connects us to the millions of South Africans who want the same things for themselves and their country as we do.

When you strip away all the stereotyping and all the classification that has been used to divide us for so many years, you realise that most, if not all of us, want the exact same things in life.

We want to live a life that feels meaningful and valuable. We want to be able to take care of those we love. And we want to feel safe. These are things that unite us all, regardless of where we're from, what we look like or which language we speak.

At the heart of our new Values Charter lie three concepts: Freedom, Fairness and Opportunity. And under these three words, we describe the society that we all want to live in.

A South Africa where people are free from poverty and unemployment, free from the constant threat of crime, free from the shackles of a failed education.

A South Africa where people are fairly rewarded for their efforts, and where past injustices are addressed and, in time, eradicated.

A South Africa in which a capable state – a DA-led national government – provides real opportunities for people to better themselves and get ahead.

I urge you to please go and read this Values Charter, and understand what these values mean in the lives of regular South Africans. Because this is the message that you must tell everyone you come across, every day.

If we all put our energy into doing this, Election 2016 will see radical change in municipalities across the country.

And I'm not just talking about the three big metros where the DA is knocking on the door. I'm talking about municipalities in every single province – towns and regions where, ten years ago, the DA wouldn't have dreamt of governing.

This includes Tlokwe here in the North West.

In 2009, the ANC took over 60% of the vote in Tlokwe. The DA took 21%. Five years later, the ANC dropped to 51% and the DA climbed to 32%. Change is coming.

Since last year's election, the ANC has done nothing in Tlokwe to convince voters to return to it. All the momentum is on the DA's side. And Tlokwe is key to the North West Province.

But it's not only Tlokwe. The DA's growth in many other municipalities in the province has been phenomenal. In fact, if you compare 2014 with 2009, the DA has grown in every single municipality, while the ANC has shrunk in almost every one.

I can't mention them all here, but municipalities like Madibeng, Rustenburg, Matlosana, Tswaing, Moses Kotane, Mafikeng and Moretele have really cemented the DA's growth in the province.

From 2009 to 2014, the DA grew by almost 43% in the North West. This is the momentum we must build on for the next year.

We owe it to the people of the North West.

Just 50km west from here is a community that stands testament to arguably the biggest evidence of an uncaring government.

The families, friends and co-workers of the miners killed in the Marikana tragedy are still waiting for closure, and they're still waiting for justice.

But our president doesn't see the urgency. He says he needs another month to apply his mind. This after he's been applying it for over a month already.

And when you ask him what's happening with the report, he mocks you. He stands up in the National Assembly and he mocks people who dare ask him uncomfortable questions.

This is what it means to him that 34 miners were murdered and another 78 injured by his police force. To him, it's an inconvenience. An irritation.

But luckily I have some good news for him: He won't have to put up with the irritation for too much longer. Because his days are numbered.

In every single province, in every single municipality, in every single ward, the DA is closing the gap on the ANC.

We probably have just over a year to go to the 2016 elections. It is a year in which we are going to have to work like we've never worked before.

We are going to have to ensure that every person in every community knows about the DA's values of Freedom, Fairness and Opportunity, and how these can help shape their lives.

And we're going to have to ensure that every person in every community knows about our vision for a better future for all South Africans.

A future with access to opportunities for all.

A future where the barriers of the past have once and for all been removed.

A future where people are safe from crime.

A future where South Africans can thrive in a growing economy that creates a millions of jobs.

A future where South Africans take pride in their country as a beacon of hope in the developing world.

If we do that, we will be unstoppable. It's time to bring freedom, fairness and opportunity to the North West.

Let's make it happen!