

# Preface

---

Growing inequality, rising poverty and a sense of faltering leadership have left South African citizens feeling disillusioned after 20 years of democracy. The question is asked: 'Is such ongoing injustice the fruit of reconciliation?' Today, many South Africans wonder if the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), the one institution most associated with post-apartheid reconciliation efforts, made any difference at all to how the country is governed. They ask whether the vivid and bitter 'truth' that emerged during and through the TRC process, was ever really taken as seriously as it ought to have been by those entrusted with the leadership of our fledgling democracy. Despite these doubts, I believe that reconciliation is an idea whose time has indeed come, perhaps again, and perhaps more so than ever before. Indeed, we need more, not less, reconciliation in the years to come. Lingering social injustice and social exclusion, the thematic focus of this year's *Transformation Audit*, is not the result of too much reconciliation, but of too little reconciliation of the right sort – the kind that fosters solidarity across South Africa's historically entrenched divides. However, we need to be much more explicit about what this will demand of us.

While reconciliation has always required reflection on how we relate to and communicate with each other, it is becoming increasingly evident that meaningful interaction alone is not enough to sustain a process of national reconciliation. Perhaps it has been this emphasis on relational issues, underpinned by the idea that the country's central challenge is primarily a racial one, that has made us underestimate the task at hand over the past 20 years. Race has not ceased to be relevant to understanding exclusion, but what the IJR's own research shows is that most South Africans regard class inequality as the primary source of division between South Africans. Vast differences in income determine our mobility and make it possible for citizens to co-exist in parallel universes, oblivious to the circumstances that affect the other; and, when they interact,

such encounters are more often than not characterised by unequal power relations and occur in spaces that are not neutral.

As much as economic inclusion is imperative for national reconciliation, it would be naive to believe that it is possible to undo historically entrenched inequality overnight. Indeed, our low economic growth trajectory postpones the prospect of more conducive circumstances. Nevertheless, what we can focus on right now is pressurising those who hold sway over the shaping of economic policy, be it the government, business or labour, to show the urgency required in finding joint solutions to the challenge of economic exclusion. They need to be held accountable by the nation and not only by those whose vested interests they represent. We need inclusive, rather than dogmatic winner-takes-all responses.

As we mourned the passing of our beloved former president, Nelson Mandela, at the end of 2013, it is worth bearing in mind that this was also his approach towards the stabilisation of South Africa's post-1994 political settlement. Mandela, despite his political loyalty and convictions, prioritised a winning South Africa, above any single winning faction. He has often been criticised for this approach, but I believe that alternatives producing one winner and a multitude of countervailing forces would have been far more destructive. It is this sense of shared vested interest that has held us together in the two decades following our political transition.

Still, if we are honest, we have to acknowledge that this sense of cohesion is fading. If anything, one should hope that Nelson Mandela's death will serve as a catalyst for renewed focus on the need for inclusive solutions. South Africans have been blessed with the likes of Mandela, but one gets the distinct sense that we will not have the luxury of another 20 years to relearn the critical lessons of our recent history.

Fanie du Toit  
*Executive Director: Institute for Justice and Reconciliation*