

Celebrating the South African brand, as Freedom Day approaches

 By [Manusha Pillai](#)

21 Apr 2016

South Africa will commemorate the 22nd anniversary of the first non-racial, all-inclusive, national election in its history on 27 April 2016. Freedom Day carries many memories and emotions for all citizens.



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For some it was the culmination of years of struggle for freedom; for others it brought wistfulness for those who would not know this day because they had paid the ultimate price for freedom; for yet others it brought hope, promise and relief. The future was bright; the price had been worth it, the country stood intact.

In that moment of our country, the heady, euphoric ones that followed as South Africa's democracy was being built and equally those which highlighted the magnitude of the challenges that the new political dispensation had inherited, what always stood out was the great resilience of the South African citizenry.

The citizens of this country – both the oppressed and the privileged – worked to embrace the new texture of South Africa.

The citizens of South Africa – at the southern-most tip of Africa – showed the world the power of forgiveness and tolerance. The citizens of South Africa give the most expression to the South African story. The citizens of this country gave birth to the concept of South Africa as a rainbow nation. It is the citizens of our country who highlighted the depth and width of the South African miracle.

It is easy - in a living, evolving democracy – one characterised by a multitude of political, socio-economic and cultural challenges – to forget the power of citizens as motive forces of change. It is easy to forget that the best agreements and political settlements in the world will have limited, if not, no success without the will of the people to move these agreements and settlements from the pages on which they are written to reality.

This is what the citizens of South Africa were able to do – move the political settlement beyond rhetoric to reality. This is important because the exercise to build a cohesive nation brand is one that requires all hands on deck. Moreover, it will be this approach that builds the most resilient nation brand.

Optimism, pride remains intact

As we commemorate 22 years of democracy and freedom, the headlines suggest that we may have moved away from national pride, optimism and hope.

Research undertaken by Brand South Africa however suggests that the essence of the South African citizenry – its optimism and pride – remains intact. According to its National Perceptions Study, pride and patriotism remains an enduring quality with over 80% of 2536 respondents saying they are extremely proud to be South African. With the social cohesion level standing at 76% and an active citizenship level of 61%, the research also shows that South Africans are committed to the country and will work to ensure it is successful.

As we commemorate the 22nd year of our democracy, this is something all citizens should embrace, nurture and celebrate. All citizens contribute to the South African nation brand and are critical to building a successful and resilient brand. As long as our citizens remain proud and patriotic, active and committed to building a cohesive South Africa, the country remains on a solid footing.

ABOUT MANUSHA PILLAI

Manusha Pillai is currently the Director: Stakeholder Relations and Communications. Prior to this she was General Manager: Communications at Brand South Africa and has also been at the Departments of Foreign Affairs and Home Affairs as well as Government Communication and Information Systems. She was also part of Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma's transitional team as she prepared to take the helm of the African Union Commission.

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