

# 'Cry for freedom' from Cape Town's black professionals – Nomvuyo Xabela



Attendees at a recent gathering in Cape Town to address concerns about the erosion of black professionals in the city. (PHOTO: Facebook).

Although the word freedom is used, rightfully, in different contexts today, it is a biblical concept.

Freedom (of being and doing) is a central theme and value of Christianity (Kingdom citizenship), with Christ redeeming us and setting us free from sin (Galatians 5:1).

We see “freedom” demonstrated well in the journey of the Israelites, when they were led out of bondage after a period of about 430 years.

Similarly Africa has been held in bondage by greed, poverty, deception, oppression and misconception, and racism, among many other slave masters.

No discussion about freedom can be complete without a clear understanding of **SEE ALSO:** [‘Heal Cape Town, make](#)

the nature of slavery. The late Myles Munroe in his book *Burden for freedom* says “a slave is always an excommunicated person. He or she does not belong to the legitimate social or moral community; he has no independent social existence, he exists only through and for the master” [her a better place’ – Clementia Pae](#)

Moreover any attempt to limit, control, hinder, restrict, inhibit, prevent or stop the fulfillment of God’s purpose and will in another’s person’s life, is a rebellion against God. This is also called wickedness in biblical terms.

In every case of oppression the cry for freedom is eminent!

At a recent weekend gathering entitled “Redressing the Erosion of Black Professionals in Cape Town, a Socio-Economic Issue” the cry for freedom surfaced in the dialogue hosted by Voice of Africa Global Media (VOA) at the SMG BMW pavilion in Cape Town.

The theme of the gathering was highly topical as it is one that has created wide interest in media and among different organisations, leading to headlines such as:

- Where are all the black professionals? – *Leadership Online*
- Where are Cape Town’s black professionals? – *Destiny Magazine*
- An inclusive corporate culture makes economic sense – *Cape Times*
- Call for action after black professional shared why she quit Cape Town – *Financial 24*.

According to the Department of Labour, the percentage of black African professionals in Cape Town has increased by a mere 4% in the past 10 years.

VOA operations director Clementia Pae said research by different individuals and organisations reveals a common trend of “diminishing black professionals in Cape Town”.

Indeed, a cry for freedom for young and mature professionals at the event was released as some shed tears as they expressed deep hurt at being intentionally marginalised by a dominating, discriminatory, racist and dividing system.

In a 2-hour session they shared their heartbreaking experiences of isolation, racism, rejection and fear as professionals in Cape Town boardrooms and work spaces.

### **Public and private sector general view**

During the event two executives and professionals in the private (financial) and public (City of Cape Town) sector were interviewed and these were some of their comments: "As a black professional it is sad to say that once one is perceived as successful, he or she is treated differently by our own people, let alone the general public. It can be a very lonesome the higher one goes up the ladder."

"The reality is that being a black professional and female in the finance industry is very hard to get the support one needs, and you find yourself alone in the boardroom with no one to support you. The reality is also that as the black community we do not challenge the status quo of inverse prejudice enough in Cape Town and it makes it easy then to be victims of the system."

"Unfortunately it has to be said that as black people we have become worst imitators of the colonial mindset.

The strategy in the predominantly white industries has been the same 'divide them and conquer' and this division creates an illusion that most of us need to fight for our place or slice in order to survive."

"It is the result of such challenges and isolation that most black professionals flee in order not stay long in Cape Town."

"The reality is that Cape Town system administration is still very much racially-discriminated-driven, racism is not spoken about but very much alive. As a result, as black

professionals, no matter how qualified you are on any subject matter, your view is not trusted and has to be verified extensively before considered if at all and this is tiresome and exhausting. Instead of working in having impact in society much time is wasted in engaging in workplace war zone, daily losing real-time productivity.”

### **Where to from here**

Arifa Parker, CEO of Western Cape Business Opportunities Forum, who was the guest speaker at the event, said it is time to have these platforms and engagement across the province, to provide everyone with opportunities to give input and to learn cross-culturally, and overcome their fears.

Strategies and insights on a way ahead that were put forward at the gathering included:

1. Intentional and strategic emotional intelligence programmes that are authentic need to be adopted aggressively by companies.
2. Cultural intelligence is also key for the journey of reconciliation and healing for Cape Town’s diverse workforce.
3. The prejudice status quo needs to be challenged by all professionals with dignity and unity.
4. Media should also be used to create awareness, positive dialogue and a move towards economic inclusion.
5. Coaching and mentorship need to be looked into to restore confidence, inner strength, competency needed, and knowing who you are – especially for the Black community
6. Companies that seem to be managing diversity well, need to showcase their successes and be used as an example.
7. More investment and support for entrepreneurship is needed from both the public and private sectors.
8. A platform is needed for professionals and workers to share their struggles and pain openly without judgement or offending others.
9. The Black community need to change their mentality and stop putting down or undermining each other. Greed and selfishness

has been a challenge and it was time to go back to a culture of ubuntu.