



LAUNCH OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN SURVEY 2007/2008

TUESDAY, 6 NOVEMBER 2007

Good evening ladies and gentlemen.

It gives me great pleasure to make some remarks on the occasion of the launch of the 2006/07 *South Africa Survey*.

Allow me to start some sixty years ago with the 1946/47 *South Africa Survey*. This was the first publication of the *South Africa Survey*. The Institute itself dates back even earlier to 1929.

The 1946 *Survey* records under the heading **Policies and Methods** that:

The cause for which the Institute stands is peace, goodwill, and practical co-operation between the various sections and races of the Union. While approaching the racial problems of the country in a spirit of objective enquiry the Institute realizes that the theoretical approach is not enough. In a multi-racial society with such diverse historical and racial traditions the Institute is to achieve its primary purpose of practical cooperation, it must pay due regard to opposing views which are earnestly and sincerely held, and it must try to carry with it on any issue the greatest volume of progressive opinion in the country. The Institute has in fact chosen the harder path; it is easy to voice extreme opinions, to advocate extreme policies but it is seldom that such

extremists are called to put their policies to the test in a practical context...However difficult the future may be the members of the Institute and their representatives will continue to uphold the ideals upon which our civilization was built and seek a just solution to our problems.

These comments were written at a time when South Africa was still monarchy. The seeds of the Cold War that was to shape the globe for the next 40 years had only recently been sown on the battlefields of Europe. The sweeping decolonisation of Africa was yet to take place. Grand apartheid lay in our future.

The sweeping global changes in the aftermath of the WWII and South Africa's own formal adoption of apartheid provided the impetus that formed the Institute's own policy positions in the post WWII period. These positions saw the Institute speak out strongly and unequivocally against racial discrimination and lobby hard for equality of opportunity. Many of the positions adopted remain relevant today.

That the Institute survived all these events with its original ideals intact and that we are now more than a decade into South Africa's democracy is a great achievement and one of which its members can rightly be proud.

Many of the issues in 1946 appear to have remained issues today:

The 1946/47 *Survey* reported that of 105 967 Africans living in Johannesburg's municipal areas only 101 owned radio sets, while only 27 houses occupied by Africans had electricity. Advances in telecommunications

technology over the past six decades allow the writers of the current *Survey* to go into much more detail. We now know how many households of each race group, in each province, have access to what kind of housing and how that picture has changed year on year over the past 10 years.

Crime was a concern to the writers of the 1946/47 *Survey*. Under the subheading 'crime wave' the 1946/47 *Survey* records that:

“there has been public agitation, particularly in the Witwatersrand, for greater police protection and for stricter methods in dealing with criminals. An increase of 16 000 serious crimes over the period 1943-46 is a matter of great concern.”

The current *Survey* reveals the statistical detail of how South Africa's crime rates have peaked, and in some cases begun to decline, although they remain very high.

This mix of progress tempered by vast social and economic inequalities is the story told by the 2006/07 *Survey*. It is the story of a country which, while rightly proud of progress made since 1994, confronts great developmental challenges:

- The current *Survey* records that levels of education around the country have improved over the past decade. The number of tertiary awards made to African students have improved by over 300%. That success is, however, tempered by the fact that only 3% of grade 10 pupils go on to pass higher grade maths in grade 12.

- The household incomes of all race groups also continue to improve on the back of stable economic growth. This successful management of the macro-economy has, however, only somewhat eroded the vast economic gulf that exists between black and white South Africans. The *Survey* shows that black and white remain crude terms for rich and poor.
- More households have access to formal housing and to basic water and electricity services. But the proportion of households with access to certain services has in some cases declined as household size fell by 25% over the decade thereby contributing to unexpected demand.
- Levels of poverty have been on the decline since 2002. The successful role-out of social grants is attributed as a reason, as is a slight decline in unemployment. But poverty levels remain twice as high, in terms of the number and proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day, than was the case a decade ago.
- Unemployment which has risen to unacceptable levels has leveled off and shows a slight decline in recent years. The level of unemployment remains amongst the highest in the world and is four times higher than the global average recorded by the International Labour Organisation.
- Projected HIV/AIDS figures have been revised downwards. In real numbers this means that 3 million and not 5 million people will die of AIDS by 2010. The trend, while positive, is hardly good news.

- Most levels of violent crime reached their peak years in around 2002/03. But some types of crime such as murder are on the rise again. By international levels murder rates distinguish South Africa from other developing nations not at war.

Overall the 2006/07 *Survey* is perhaps best described as a brutally honest assessment of South Africa. It mixes the good with the bad without passing judgment. It offers very little of its own opinion and forces the reader to come to his or her own conclusions. Whether the balance of reader opinion will be positive or negative will depend very much on where the reader finds himself. As the Institute said earlier in the year in its own direct manner, *'It depends where you sit – in the board-rooms of Sandton or on a bucket latrine in the Eastern Cape'*.

You would be mistaken in thinking that the Institute's role is that of simply doing the accounting of South Africa's progress over the past several decades. The accounting and detailed publication of statistics are rather the means through which the Institute carries out its bigger role of supporting the growth of South Africa as a free and open society.

Always speaking from a position solidly entrenched in published fact, the Institute is able to play a unique role in benchmarking and tracking South Africa's performance as a young democracy. It is uniquely positioned to cut through the swathes of myth and legend.

Impervious to populist rhetoric and romantic delusions of South Africa as a nation born of the 'miracle' of 1994, the strength of the Institute's research is that it forces both its supporters and detractors to confront the reality of what South Africans experience in their daily lives – be that for better or worse. It places our successes and failures firmly in the public domain and restricts the scope.

The Institute has not been without its detractors, both black and white – this has been the case throughout its history. There have been those whites who have seen its progressive stance as a threat to the historical status-quo. Similarly there have been those black and white groups who discomfited by its conciliatory stance.

When consistently positioning itself at the forefront of controversial national debates the Institute will attract controversy. Such an organisation will never please all groups and all divergent views. That is fortunately not its aim.

It has remained true to its 1946 commitment to take the '*harder route*' while paying due regard to alternative views '*earnestly and sincerely held*'.

It has perhaps, and again by its own admission, not done as well as it might have to reach out to new constituencies beyond core constituency. This is a challenge that lies in its future.

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