



Chairman's message for *Engineering News*

As we celebrate 20 years of democracy in South Africa, each individual and organisation should consider what that means for us, how things have changed in those two decades and where we would like the country to be in 20 years' time.

An important part of that is remembering where we were. We are already taking for granted the hard-won freedoms that were denied to the majority of people in this country - not only the freedom to vote, which is the heartbeat of democracy, but freedom of movement and residence, freedom to marry anyone you choose, freedom of speech. South Africa today enjoys all of these freedoms, and we have a fortunate younger generation that has no experience of living without them.

Together with freedom has come an improvement in the living standards of millions of people through the provision of education, housing, water and electricity. Eskom has been directly involved in this through the government's electrification programme. Since 1995 we have electrified some 4.4 million households, and we have seen how this changes lives as people have clean heat and light in their own homes for the first time. Universal access to electricity must remain a priority, as 14% of South Africans are still without it.

One of the opportunities for South Africa and Southern Africa is to harness and share the bountiful energy resources with which the region is blessed - coal, hydro-electric power, sun and wind energy and increasingly exciting reserves of natural gas. Countries in the Southern African Power Pool are working towards the goal of an interconnected regional grid that would ensure that no country or area need be without power - and no child without electricity to study by - in years to come.

Democracy has multiple benefits. It has not only broken down barriers at home, it has reconnected South Africa to the world, and in particular to our own region. We must use those links to help make Southern African energy secure and then to bring electricity into as many homes as possible. This will raise living standards and boost economic development throughout a region of more than 200 million people.



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