

We are going through one of the bleakest times in recent memory - MTN CEO

By [Godfrey Mtsa](#)

15 Jul 2021

In the face of overwhelming adversity and strife, it is a natural human emotion to withdraw from the crisis. Last night, as my executive team and I at MTN ended yet another crisis update, a wave of despondency hit me, and I said out loud, to no one in particular, "I have no more words". But that doesn't help, does it? It doesn't help to have any words. It doesn't help to remain quiet, to focus only on what matters to my family and the business I happen to run.



MTN CEO Godfrey Mtsa

As I write this, MTN South Africa has closed over 100 stores mostly in Gauteng and KwaZulu Natal. Over 100 base stations are currently down, and our technicians can't safely reach the sites for repairs, due to the ongoing unrest. Over 1,000 MTN employees can't get to work and millions of calls and queries from our customers cannot be attended to, as our primary call centre remains inaccessible.

MTN South Africa directly and indirectly creates employment for over 20 000 people but we are obviously not the only business going through this. The negative multiplier effect of halted business is further crippling our economy, which was just starting to show some small green shoots of recovery, from the pandemic.

Solace found

While the outlook has been bleak this week, I've found some solace reflecting on our roots, as MTN and as a nation. Our company was born out of South Africa's democracy, which prioritised peace, diversity and inclusion over a history of division and hatred. We are a resilient people and while it might seem trite to say, "this too shall pass", it's true because we have been through tough times before.

We have confronted the most terrible of situations. We have emerged on the other side, battered and bruised, but having survived because South Africans made the conscious decision to choose peace over violence and dialogue over discord.



Radio stations and communication infrastructure destroyed by protestors

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Consider some of the bleak situations we faced in the not-so-distant past. I look back at the political violence of the early 1990s as apartheid was crumbling and we were trying to usher in our hard-fought democracy. The townships were in flames, 500 people were dying every month, security forces were patrolling our streets inflaming the situation and neighbours fought neighbours. Yet we kept our eyes on the prize and ensured that democracy was not derailed. Against the expectations of the whole world, we patiently stood in the voting queues and vanquished apartheid. It was hailed as the 'peaceful revolution'. We did that.

Consider how close we came to civil war when Chris Hani was assassinated one fateful Easter Saturday. But instead of heading over the precipice driven by anger into violent insurrection, we weathered the storm and ensured the peace process held firm.

One of the bleakest times in recent memory

We are currently going through one of the bleakest times in recent memory. We need to focus on what is important for us to survive as a nation. We cannot destroy all that we have fought so hard for. We cannot undermine the achievements of our democracy.

The future of all South Africans, rich and poor, big business and small business, profit for not-for-profit, can only be built on that ethos of democratic resilience and fortitude that repeatedly ushered us away from the precipice of ruin.

Now is a time for us to urgently reflect on what has gone wrong and how, as individuals and as one of the biggest companies and most respected brands in South Africa, we can ensure that we never fall into this pit of lawlessness and anger again.

South Africa's future must be a country that belongs to all. We cannot be a nation of winners and losers, players and spectators. Education and digital infrastructure for all must be the foundation for a Mzansi that works for all its people.



Food supply to 675,000 people cut off after Durban food bank ransacked

Marecia Damons 14 Jul 2021



We cannot afford to be complacent. This time we must look at the devastating economic and social conditions under which the vast majority of South Africans are forced to survive and, instead of tut-tutting about the situation, embark with purpose on a strategy and actions for meaningful and sustainable change.

I have lived in many countries across this continent. I have witnessed the scourge of violence and have seen the long crippling effects thereof. But I have also seen countries that have chosen peace, dialogue and inclusive growth, emerge stronger. We have that. Whether it is communities clearing up debris or delivering food parcels to the needy, the relentless optimism of South Africans is already visible.

South Africa will survive. It always does. But as we emerge on the other side, battered and bruised, we must pledge that this will not happen again. Not on our watch. The time for action is now.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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