

Pregs Govender is pictured in Cape Town as part of photographer and film maker Adrian Steirn's 21 Icons South Africa series

PHOTO: GARY VAN WYK



I think the ability of each of us is enriched by one another and the best collective comes when you have strength in each person that belongs to that group. It's the idea of human dignity and the belief that humanity is inherent

— PREGS GOVENDER

This week, 21 Icons season two pays homage to its 11th icon, **Pregs Govender**, a human rights and gender activist who is widely respected as an individual committed to the development of South Africa as a fair and humane democracy. Her 30-year career has been devoted to women's emancipation and equality, and to the human rights of the poverty-stricken in our society.

The portrait features Govender standing on a rock in a stream offset perfectly against a forest backdrop. The image is a reflection of her ability to have accomplished so much in one life while remaining balanced and maintaining stability.

Govender is a brave woman who has triumphed in a political and social climate that once undermined South African Indian women, and she continually fights against racism, the ills of capitalism, prejudice and gender inequality.

In an intimate conversation with photographer Adrian Steirn, Govender talks about how she was very aware of injustice, poverty and inequality from an early age. "I wanted to end poverty by the time I was 40 years old and I want to reach nirvana by the time I turn 60."

She believes there are many women like herself, as well as young girls, who innately understand that inequality is wrong and unjust, and that the perpetuation of gender stereotypes restricts our freedom to be fully human.

At the inception of South Africa's democracy in 1994, she served as an ANC MP, where she convened the gender and economic group of the finance committee and chaired Parliament's committee on women. She is widely respected for her role in advancing gender responsive budgets. In Parliament's

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1994 debates, she initiated South Africa's Women's Budget and led the Women's National Coalition, which mobilised 2 million women to influence the drafting of the Constitution. As chair of Parliament's portfolio committee on women, she ensured that most of its priorities aimed at advancing women's rights and gender equality were enacted.

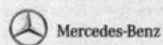
Govender resigned in 2002 and on leaving the ANC, she reflects there was too much silence on the grave issues of HIV/Aids and the party was losing the ethos of what it had embodied. She was the only MP to register her opposition to the arms deal in the budget vote, and after asserting that her party had to address the horrific impact of HIV/Aids on women and girls, she comments: "You need to recognise when you can no longer make a difference in the space you're in and find another space where you can do that - to continue to contribute."

She believes South Africa has a bright future ahead. "I think there are many organisations and people in our country who are connecting all the dots.

"Being South African to me means understanding our shared humanity as a part of the whole world," she concludes.

Govender is the author of *Love and Courage: A story of insubordination*, which traces her origins from the poverty she experienced at the hands of apartheid, her role as a mother, wife, outspoken activist against HIV/Aids and a determined advocate of women's rights.

- Watch Pregs Govender today on SABC3 at 8.27pm
- For more information, visit 21icons.com
- Download Zappar for free from your app store, zap the thunderbolt icon, watch the trailer, and see all the portraits that have been done so far



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