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SPEECH BY F W DE KLERK TO THE CONFERENCE TO COMMEMORATE THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF HIS SPEECH OF 2 FEBRUARY 1990.

“TWENTY YEARS LATER: LOOKING BACK, LOOKING FORWARD”

Historians will regard the beginning of February 1990 as the watershed of South Africa's modern history. There were many events that opened the way to the speech that I delivered to the South African Parliament on 2 February 1990. However, the nine days between it and the release of Nelson Mandela on 11 February changed South Africa forever. Those crucial nine days set the country irreversibly on the road to a different and, I believe, a much better future.

This afternoon I would like to look back over the 20 tumultuous years since then and express some views on the factors that led to my speech - and developments since then.

My predecessor President P W Botha clearly understood the need for change - or as he put it, to 'adapt or die'. For some years black South Africans and the international community had been vociferously demanding that the South African government should dismount the tiger of white domination on which history and circumstance had placed it.

White South Africans had three concerns regarding the tiger dismounting process:

- Firstly, how would they - and particularly Afrikaners - be able to maintain (in a one man, one vote dispensation) the right to national self-determination that had been the central theme of their history for more than 150 years?
- Secondly, how could they be sure that universal franchise would not lead quickly to the chaos and tyranny that had sadly characterised the decolonisation process in so many other parts of Africa?
- Finally, the government was worried about the possibility of a communist take-over.

P W Botha's response to the question of how one dismounts a tiger - was that one does it quite gingerly - one foot at a time - with as much military fire-power as one can muster. The first foot was the decision to bring Coloured and Indian South Africans into the parliamentary system by means of the tricameral constitution of 1983 - while at the same time dispensing with some of the most controversial apartheid legislation.

By 1986 Coloureds and Indians theoretically enjoyed equal rights with whites; far-reaching labour reforms had been introduced and more than 100 discriminatory laws - including the pass laws - had been repealed. The crucial

process of lowering the second foot to the ground - the question of black political rights - was referred to the President's Council which considered at length all sorts of extensions of the consociational approach.

Reforms nearly always unleash a revolution of rising expectations. One of the results of the far-reaching reforms of the early 80s was the fomentation of widespread unrest led by the newly established United Democratic Front. By the end of 1985 nightly scenes of turmoil in the townships had brought about a collapse of international confidence in the government's ability to control the situation. South Africa was faced with a dire economic crisis as the rand collapsed and foreign banks refused to roll over \$14 billion in short-term international loans. Order was restored only after the imposition of the 1986 state of emergency.

In the winter of 1986 there appeared to be very little hope for the future.

And yet within three and a half years the situation had changed entirely. What factors contributed to the dramatic changes that led to 2 February 1990?

- The first factor was the government's realisation that 'separate development' had failed and held no prospect whatsoever of bringing about a just or workable solution. The partition of the country on which it was based was hopelessly inequitable – with the 78% black majority being allocated only 13 % of the land; the economy – and the supposedly white cities - were becoming more integrated with each year that passed; whites did not constitute a majority in any geographic region of the country; and the solution was vehemently rejected by a vast majority of blacks, coloureds and Indians.
- A critically important factor was the acceptance by all sides that there could be neither a military nor a revolutionary victory – and that continuing conflict would simply turn South African into a wasteland. The security forces had accepted this reality by the early 80s. The ANC did so only after the 1986 state of emergency restored order in the country. Discreet contacts between the ANC and the government - originally initiated through Nelson Mandela while he was still in prison - enabled both sides to explore possibilities for negotiated solutions.
- Sanctions were, of course, also a factor. By the mid-80s our economy was increasingly isolated and we had to deal with the crisis caused by the refusal of international banks in 1985 to roll over our short term loans. Sanctions caused enormous distortions in the economy and probably cost us 1.5% growth per annum. Nevertheless, the economy actually grew at an annual rate of 2.7% between April 1986 and February 1989. Sanctions were often counter-productive. They increased opposition to foreign interference – and hobbled two of the greatest forces for change – economic growth and exposure to the world.
- Economic growth of the 60s and 70s was a major change factor. Between 1970 and 1994 the black share of personal disposable income increased from 28.9% to almost 50%. Millions of black South Africans moved to the cities and improved their standard of living and education. By 1989 they had

begun to occupy key positions in the industrial and commercial sectors. Increasingly they were becoming indispensable in the white-collar professions. By 1994 there were more black South Africans at university than whites.

- Similar changes were taking place in the Afrikaner community. In the decades following 1960 a whole generation of young Afrikaners moved from the working class to the middle class. They graduated from university and travelled abroad – and were inevitably influenced by global values. The new generation of university educated Afrikaners no longer shared the fiery nationalism of their parents and grandparents. By the early 'eighties they were becoming increasingly uncomfortable with many aspects of apartheid – and wanted the NP leadership to find some way of dismounting the tiger of growing black resentment without being devoured. By 1989 they were ripe for change.
- A further factor was the successful conclusion of a tripartite agreement in 1988 between South Africa, Cuba and Angola. This resulted in the withdrawal of Cuban forces from Angola, the implementation of UN resolution 435 and the independence of Namibia. The negotiations with the Angolans and the Cubans and the subsequent successful implementation of the UN independence plan during 1989 reassured the government that it could secure its core interests through negotiations with its opponents.
- The final – and critically important - factor for change was the collapse of global communism in 1989. At a stroke, it removed the government's primary strategic concern. The demise of international expansionist communism and the manifest success of the free market economies also meant that there was no longer any serious debate with regard to the economic policies that would be required to ensure economic growth in a future democratic South Africa

By the time I became president in September 1989 the National Party was already committed to fundamental transformation. After my election as leader of the National Party in February 1989 I had made it clear that our goal was "a new South Africa, a totally changed South Africa". I told my supporters after the September 1989 election that "the main issue was not whether all South Africans should be accommodated in future election, but how this should be done". However, the collapse of Soviet communism enabled us to accelerate the process. When history opens a window of opportunity it is important to jump through it. We knew that the circumstances for a reasonable constitutional settlement would never again be so favourable. So we jumped.

There are a few points that emerge from all of this:

- Firstly, it would have been virtually impossible for us to have done in 1980 what we did in 1990. White public opinion would not have tolerated it. As late as 1986 only 30% of whites supported the idea of negotiations with the ANC. Also, what we regarded as our main strategic threat - the SA Communist Party supported by the Soviet Union - was still a dominant factor throughout most of the 80s;

- Secondly, it would have been very difficult for us to initiate successful constitutional negotiations in South Africa if we had not been able to hold the line along the Namibian/Angolan border in the period after 1975. Our negotiating prospects would have been severely weakened if Cuban forces had not withdrawn from Angola and if Soviet-backed SWAPO forces had been permitted to achieve a military victory in Namibia.
- It would have been equally impossible for us to initiate successful negotiations had we not been able to restore order after the unrest of the mid 80s.

The late Chris Louw was wrong: the sacrifices of the security forces were not in vain.

In my speech of 2 February 1990 I spelled a vision that included "a new, democratic constitution; universal franchise; no domination; equality before an independent judiciary; the protection of minorities as well as of individual rights; freedom of religion; a sound economy based on proven economic principles and private enterprise..." In the end, we succeeded in achieving all these objectives - including some additional goals such as our quasi-federal system of provinces.

Despite the fact that the 1993 and 1996 constitutions succeeded in securing many of the National Party's core objectives there are still many whites who are critical of the process.

Some believe that the former government could have continued to rule in perpetuity regardless of the clear threats that had developed during the 1980s. The reality is that, had we not grasped the transformation initiative when we did in February 1990 South Africa would soon have been completely isolated in the international community. Our international trade would have ground to a halt; we would have been confronted by escalating conflict on our borders and in our townships.

We would, no doubt, have been able to maintain control for many years but under increasingly grim and unacceptable circumstances. Our young men would have spent half their time in military service; many more white South Africans would have left the country; and there would have been pervasive white poverty and unemployment among those who remained. Worse still, the prospects for a satisfactory negotiated settlement would have diminished with each successive cycle of revolution and repression.

There are also many whites who accept that we had to change but believe that Roelf Meyer and F W de Klerk bungled the negotiations and allowed Cyril and his colleagues to run rings around them. They insist that the National Party should have negotiated some or other minority veto. Let me assure them that this would have been neither politically feasible nor internationally acceptable.

The one main area where the National Party failed to achieve its negotiating goals was in respect of power sharing at the executive level. I felt - and still feel -

that there should be constitutional mechanisms in multicultural societies that ensure the involvement of all communities in a consensus seeking executive model - particularly in respect of issues that affect them.

We proposed a state council in which leading minority parties would be represented and which would have considered a range of national and communal issues. It would not have had a veto - but it would have ensured much greater inclusivity in our approach to national issues. Unfortunately, the ANC was not prepared to consider even this modest proposal and the other opposition parties were not prepared to make a stand.

The failure of the ANC to accept some ongoing form of power-sharing or consultation at the executive level was the main reason for the New National Party's withdrawal from the Government of National Unity in 1996.

The 1996 Constitution - with all its faults - is the result of the genuine give and take process inherent in all negotiations. Indeed, the ANC, in its documentation admits that "the elections of April 1994 entailed a degree of compromise, some concessions and postponements, many of which took account of the enemy's real strength and untapped power." They add that "there were also compromises forced upon us because we could ill-afford to jeopardise the larger prize - majority rule - in pursuance of a few uncertainties".

The outcome of the negotiations was at least as close to our original negotiating position as it was to that of the ANC. It contains all the basic rights that we need to maintain a free and prosperous society. The Constitution has also served us well for fourteen years. South Africa is a free, multiparty, democracy. We enjoy freedom of expression and belief. The full range of basic rights is guaranteed. Until last year we had experienced seventeen years of uninterrupted economic growth which had been facilitated to a large extent by sensible and orthodox macro-economic policies.

The problem is not the Constitution - but that, on the one hand, the government fails to implement some of its provisions; and on the other, that citizens do not claim the rights that are safeguarded by it.

At the same time, there are those at the other end of the political spectrum who regard important elements of the Constitution, not as part of a solemn social contract, but as temporary compromises that were necessary because of the power balance of the time. They believe that such constitutional provisions should not be allowed to impede their progress toward the attainment of the ideological objectives of the National Democratic Revolution. Some even regard the Constitution and many of the rights and values that it espouses as a Western construction with little relevance for Africa. They accordingly show little compunction in ignoring or circumventing provisions that they do not like.

Let me disabuse those who harbour such views:

- The proposition that governments should be subject to the rule of law is not a western concept. It is the *sine qua non* for effective governance everywhere in the world.
- The recognition of cultural and language rights is essential for the promotion of harmony and national cohesion in multicultural societies everywhere. Failure to accommodate such rights is the greatest single source of conflict throughout the world - whether it is in Africa, south Asia or South America.
- Independent judiciaries are as essential for the maintenance of justice in Africa as they are in any other part of the world;
- The protection of private property is the essential foundation for economic growth and development everywhere. There are no exceptions.
- Sound macro-economic policies do not work only in Europe, North America and East Asia. They bring benefits wherever they are implemented.

Looking back over the past twenty years it is clear that South Africa has done best when it has followed these benchmarks - and it has done worst when it has ignored them.

The historic developments between 2 and 11 February opened the way to a new and much better country.

- It is accordingly appropriate for us to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of 2 February 1990 – not to honour my role or the role of any other individual or party, but because it prevented a catastrophe.
- For white South Africans, the announcements of 2 February 1990 and their support for continuing negotiations in the referendum of March 1992, signaled their decision to lay down the burden of guilt and alienation that had been laid on them by centuries of white domination.
- For black South Africans the events of February 1990 heralded the dawn of the new age of dignity, equality and full political rights for which they and their ancestors had struggled for so long.
- For the world, these historic events showed that even the most intractable disputes could be resolved peacefully by negotiations and goodwill.

All South Africans can be proud of the example that we have set since then. All of us should be equally determined to ensure that we will continue to provide inspiration to divided societies throughout the world.

As we face the next 20 years, we should rededicate ourselves to the process that we South Africans initiated during the first two weeks of February 1990 and that culminated in the adoption of the 1996 constitution. We should rededicate ourselves to that Constitution and to the vision of equality, human dignity and justice that it articulates.

The Constitution is the foundation of our national unity and the guarantor of our fundamental rights. The future happiness, prosperity and the security of all our children depends directly on the preservation of all the carefully balanced rights and guarantees and the values that it contains.