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FW DE KLERK TALKS ABOUT CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN THE HISTORIC FRAUENKIRCHE IN DRESDEN

Yesterday evening FW de Klerk spoke at the historic Frauenkirche in Dresden as part of the church's Nobel Peace Prize Laureates lecture series. His topic was the accommodation of diversity as the main challenge to peace in the 21st century.

De Klerk pointed out that much of human history had been driven by the movement of people and the growth of populations. He said that now, once again, people were on the move. "The dominant image of our time might be the hundreds of thousands of refugees who each year are risking their lives in unseaworthy boats to reach Europe."

He observed that all this was happening at a time of the unsustainable growth of the human population and dramatic changes in life expectancy and fertility.

In 1950, global life expectancy was only 47 years - by 2011 it had increased to 70. A Japanese girl child born today could expect to live to 107. At the same time fertility rates in many European countries had plummeted far below the levels required to sustain present populations.

In the coming years, more and more refugees could be expected to seek safety and a better life in the prosperous and secure societies of Europe and North America.

De Klerk warned that the present flow of refugees could become a torrent if climate change caused a succession of bad harvests in the developing world. "How would Europe react if 10 million refugees a year were to knock on its doors and appeal for refuge?"

He asked at what stage would the so-called "lifeboat effect" would come into play: "that is the point when those in the lifeboat stop doing all they can to save and haul aboard shipwreck victims - to the time when they violently fend them off for fear of being fatally overloaded?"

De Klerk observed that the days of the single ethnic group nation state had gone. Throughout the world populations were becoming more cosmopolitan: the world's 200 countries now included more than 6 000 different cultural communities. More than 130 countries had cultural minorities comprising more than 10% of their populations. Cultural diversity was being augmented by new waves of migrants seeking economic opportunities, freedom and security.

He asked how we were going to ensure that all these communities would be able to co-exist peacefully?

In many countries, cultural minorities had arisen through historic processes. They had always lived in the country they inhabited: they often spoke their own languages and had



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FOUNDATION

their own cultural traditions. “Ideally, they should have a right to use their languages; practise their cultures and to have a voice in the processes by which they are governed.”

Other societies had become multicultural through immigration. Here it was often argued that they should accept the values of their host countries and learn their languages.

De Klerk said that the accommodation of diverse immigrant groups had become one of the most controversial issues in Europe. It had played a crucial role in recent elections - and had now become one of the main issues of contention within the EU.

A few years ago, the European Union’s Justice Commissioner, had said that the EU needed to strike a balance between facilitating immigration of sorely-needed skilled workers and controlling illegal immigration and trafficking. The present workforce was expected to decline by 20 million people by 2030 - and the only way of replacing most of them would be through immigration.

All of this is was part of the broader challenge of managing cultural and religious diversity in a world in which inter-communal conflict had become the greatest threat to peace and stability.

De Klerk observed that “virtually all of the 14 major conflicts that currently afflict the world either have their roots in ethnic and religious differences - or have been seriously exacerbated by these factors.”

Too often, minority communities felt that they were not sufficiently accommodated, politically or culturally, in the processes by which they were governed. They complained that their governments were insensitive to their languages and cultures; that they were subject to discrimination, repression and efforts to integrate them forcibly into the majority culture.

This sense of alienation had often led to conflict, rebellion and demands for secession. Present or recent conflicts in Bosnia, Kosovo, Chechnya, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia and Turkey, and in many countries in Africa, were all examples of this phenomenon.

The world would have to pay far greater attention to the accommodation of diversity. Almost one billion people - one in seven of the human population - belonged to ethnic, cultural or religious minorities. Many of them experienced alienation and discrimination.

De Klerk said that the international community needed to devise approaches and to establish norms that would enable different cultural and ethnic communities to coexist within the same states. “To achieve this, we must reach broad agreement on the cultural, linguistic and educational rights that such communities should enjoy. However, it is equally important to reach agreement on underlying values that can provide a basis for co-operation and national unity.”



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FOUNDATION

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) had identified cultural liberty as a vital part of human development. If handled well, it could lead to greater cultural diversity and enrich people's lives. However, if it was mismanaged it could "quickly become one of the greatest sources of instability within states and between them." The answer was to "respect diversity and build unity through common bonds of humanity".

De Klerk concluded by observing that the key to the maintenance of peace and harmony in our shrinking world was the management of diversity:

"We need to do much more to define and protect the rights of cultural, ethnic and religious minorities throughout the world. We need to establish an international norm for these rights, just as we have already done for individuals, for women and for children. We need to promote acceptance of the role that education can and must play in the preservation of religious, cultural and language diversity... We need to measure the behaviour of governments against these norms..."

De Klerk observed that were entering a global village:

"The presence of people from so many different cultures is one of the most enriching aspects of our new world. But it will also require us to observe new codes of behaviour and to acknowledge the multidimensional rights of people - as citizens, as members of organisations and communities, and as individual men and women."

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