



FW de Klerk
FOUNDATION

RECENT ATTACKS ON FW DE KLERK, THE CHAIRMAN EMERITUS OF THE FW DE KLERK FOUNDATION

The participation of former President FW de Klerk in the meeting of the National Foundations Dialogue Initiative (NFDI) on Friday, 5 May elicited unwarranted and intemperate attacks on him by a number of political leaders, commentators and media personalities. The NFDI includes eight foundations associated with former South African leaders who have come together to initiate a dialogue between South Africans within the framework of the Constitution on the serious challenges that confront South Africa.

The general gist of the attacks - which included vitriolic and unfounded accusations - was that FW de Klerk should not be participating in the national debate because he was “the last apartheid president” and was guilty of gross violations of human rights.

In fact, FW de Klerk dedicated his entire presidency to the abolition of apartheid and to the negotiation of an inclusive non-racial Constitution. To refer to him as “the last apartheid president” is like calling Abraham Lincoln “the last slavery president” of the United States.

The role that he played in initiating and facilitating South Africa’s transition to non-racial democracy is a matter of historic fact - and has been confirmed by no less an authority than former President Nelson Mandela, who made the following remarks at FW de Klerk’s 70th birthday:

“I have had occasion in the past to say that our country does not sufficiently acknowledge the crucial role that FW de Klerk played in bringing us to where we are today.

I am happy to observe that that has changed. There is almost unchallenged recognition and appreciation that without the courageous foresight of FW de Klerk we might well have descended into the destructive racial conflagration that all were predicting ... President Mbeki has acknowledged you in many ways as one of the great contributors to our peaceful transition and to the building of a new nation. Around the world people recognise you as an historic peacemaker and nation builder. What more can I add but to repeat what I have said so often over the last sixteen years? You have shown courage as few have done in similar circumstances.”

The allegation that De Klerk was involved in gross violations of human rights is baseless. Despite its diligent investigation of all the evidence before it, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was unable to link him with any such action. The TRC’s attitude was accurately described by John Allen - who was closely associated with Archbishop Tutu and the TRC process - in his book *Rabble Rouser*. He confirmed that there was an agenda in the TRC to incriminate De Klerk. He writes of the TRC’s “frustration” at its failure to “pin responsibility for violations of human rights” on De Klerk and acknowledges “the embarrassing weakness” of its finding against him. He also acknowledges that “no evidence was ever forthcoming implicating De Klerk in violence.”



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Why then the attacks on De Klerk for participating in a spirit of goodwill in a national initiative to discuss the challenges facing South Africa?

One possible reason is that he has not hesitated to speak out against violations of the Constitution by anyone - including the government of the day.

A second possibility is that it is unacceptable, within the context of the divisive racial stereotypes that are increasingly being propagated by radicals and by some elements within the government, that anyone from the past could possibly have acted in good faith in seeking a peaceful and negotiated solution to the problems of South Africa.

Finally, De Klerk - more than anyone else - is a reminder that our non-racial constitutional democracy was the co-creation of South Africans from all our communities - including the 69% of white South Africans who supported him in the referendum of March, 1992. For many radicals it is unacceptable that white South Africans also played an honourable role in the establishment of our new society.

Ironically, FW de Klerk is attacked with equal bitterness by his critics on the right who accuse him of having “sold out” their people. These critics often share the view of radicals at the other end of the spectrum that a devastating racial conflict would have been preferable to the negotiated constitutional democracy that De Klerk helped to achieve.

The problems that confront South Africa do not arise from any shortcomings in the Constitution - but rather from the failure to abide by its foundational values. The mounting threat to race relations does not come from the great majority of South Africans from all our communities - but from bitter radicals on the right and the left. For these reasons FW de Klerk - and the FW de Klerk Foundation - will continue to do everything they can to support the Constitution, dialogue and national reconciliation:

- they will continue to oppose abuses of power and breaches of the Constitution whenever they occur - including the capture of important state institutions and state-owned enterprises to promote private political and financial agendas;
- they will continue to monitor, discuss and defend all the constitutional rights and freedoms of all South Africans;
- they will continue to call for practical and achievable action to address the enormous challenges that confront us - including unacceptable inequality; unsupportable unemployment; unsustainable poverty; shockingly poor public education; and economic stagnation;
- they will continue to defend the cultural, language and education rights of all our communities; and
- they will continue to work for positive relations and understanding between South Africans from all our communities - *inter alia* by supporting initiatives such as the NFDI.



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In particular, FW de Klerk and his Foundation will oppose at every opportunity the New Racism that is being openly propagated by President Zuma, by some elements in the government and by radical organisations and the divisive and unfounded racial stereotypes on which it is based.

Dave Steward
CHAIRMAN

Theuns Eloff
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR