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**SPEECH BY FORMER PRESIDENT FW DE KLERK
TO THE NATIONAL FOUNDATIONS DIALOGUE INITIATIVE**

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WHY DOES SOUTH AFRICA NEED A NATIONAL DIALOGUE? A CALL TO THE NATION

I regard our conference here today as one of the most important and hopeful developments in recent years. It is enormously significant that Foundations that were established by former national leaders from across the political spectrum have come together today to discuss the future of our beloved country.

The timing could also not be more appropriate: South Africa is in the grip of the most serious challenges that have confronted it since the establishment of our non-racial constitutional democracy 23 years ago:

- Our economy is in a more parlous condition than at any time since 1994.
- We are experiencing an unprecedented constitutional crisis;
- We are also beset by serious social challenges.

There is no doubt that we need a new national dialogue to discuss these pressing challenges. We need a dialogue that will include South Africans from across the political, ethnic and economic spectrums of the nation - because a few things are certain:

- the future of *all* South Africans - and of *all* our children for decades to come - is being threatened by the current challenges;
- there will be no solutions if we do not achieve win-win outcomes for *all* South Africans - and particularly for the most disadvantaged 40% of our population; and
- our problems can be resolved only if we work together.

We need to discuss our economy:

Here, surprisingly enough, I agree with President Zuma that we need radical economic transformation:

- We need to transform radically the situation where almost 40% of the population languishes in unemployment and hopeless poverty;
- We need to transform radically our approach to investment. Instead of frightening off local and foreign investors with undisguised attacks on property rights, we should be doing everything we can to persuade them to help us create jobs and to unlock South Africa's enormous economic potential;
- We need to transform our attitude toward the appointment of people to key positions in the state and parastatals: in the appointment and promotion of people, merit needs



to be taken into account properly, while moving forward as rapidly as possible to the representivity required by the Constitution;

- We need to transform radically our approach to endemic corruption that is draining our resources and inhibiting growth and investment. We need to re-establish effective corruption-busting units like the Scorpions. We need a National Prosecuting Authority that will prosecute those who break the law without fear, favour or prejudice.
- We need to transform radically the current situation in which our labour relations are regarded as among the worst in the world. We must ensure a fairer balance between labour, management and government and work together to produce greater value for all.

What we don't need is the type of racially-divisive and economically catastrophic "radical economic transformation" that is being touted by Prof Chris Malikane - the advisor of our latest Minister of Finance. He wants to apply in South Africa the same policies that the Chavistas imposed in Venezuela - and that have led not only to the collapse of Venezuela's economy - but also to the erosion of its democracy.

We need to discuss the constitutional crisis in which we find ourselves.

There is nothing wrong with our Constitution. The problems that confront us do not arise from the structure or framework of the Constitution - but from our failure to observe its guiding values and principles:

- The core problem is that our President is not carrying out his duties in terms of section 83 of the Constitution: he is not upholding, defending and respecting the letter and spirit of the Constitution "as the supreme law of the Republic" - and he is not promoting "the unity of the nation and that which will advance the Republic."
- The President has undermined the independence of the Chapter 9 institutions and organs of government, including the intelligence services, the National Prosecuting Authority and the "Hawks". He has not ensured their impartiality or their duty to exercise their powers and perform their functions without fear, favour or prejudice.
- There are persistent reports - supported by the former Public Protector and the courts - that State Owned Enterprises are being routinely abused to promote the personal and financial interests of some leaders and their families and associates.
- All this has become known as "state capture". However, as Mcebisi Jonas recently pointed out, it goes further than state capture: it is a coup. As he put it: "you have a country being stolen in front of our own eyes. We are facing a coup via the very capture of the state".

Apart from Chapter 9 institutions and government agencies, Parliament was supposed to provide another safeguard against abusive and unconstitutional executive action. However, it has failed to carry out its oversight role, primarily because MPs are accountable to their political bosses and not to the electorate.



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Accordingly, we need to discuss the implementation of the recommendations of the Van Zyl Slabbert Commission to ensure that MPs owe their first loyalty to the electorate and not to their political bosses. This can be done by adopting appropriate national legislation and would not require any change to the present Constitution.

Finally, we need to discuss the serious social challenges confronting South Africa:

- We need an emergency national strategy to turn our education system around - to ensure that future generations of our children are not condemned to lives of unemployment and poverty;
- We need to discuss the best ways to address unacceptable inequality - particularly by achieving the levels of inclusive economic growth that we attained between 2005 - 2007 under the leadership of President Mbeki and Trevor Manuel. We should set a national goal to reduce our GINI index from the present 68 to 50 within the next generation.
- We need to address the deteriorating tone of the racial debate in South Africa. Negative racial stereotypes are being widely propagated and politicians are consciously stirring up racial animosity in their efforts to gain support:
 - We must speak out against the widespread propagation of negative racial stereotypes;
 - We must reject efforts to denigrate the cultures, languages and traditions of any section of the population;
 - We must oppose attempts to whip up support by demonising sections of the population on the basis of their race;
 - We must oppose racism and unfair discrimination from any quarter and should recommit ourselves to the vision of unity in diversity in the Constitution.

There is nothing new in these proposals. Many of them are included in the National Development Plan - to which government still gives lip service - but which in reality is gathering dust on some forgotten shelf. The National Planning Commission presented us with a vision of the future that all South Africans of goodwill could share. It included

- Constitutional democracy;
- Unity in diversity;
- High quality education;
- Health and social services providing security to all those in need;
- Sustainable and equitable economic growth;
- Fair employment for all;
- An environment in which business can invest, profit and contribute to national goals;
- An effective state and public service;
- Mutual respect and human solidarity; and
- A South Africa that contributes to Africa and to the world.



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The NPC had also warned against the factors that had caused “civilizations, empires and countries” to experience “dramatic decline rather than progress”. These included

- Corruption;
- The weakening of state and civil society institutions.
- Poor economic management.
- The danger of skills and capital flight;
- The politics of ethnicity and factionalism; and
- The lack of maintenance and standards of service delivery.

Sadly, these factors perfectly describe the situation in which we now find ourselves.

This is the crisis that our National Dialogue should address.

This is the reason why my Foundation and I so strongly support this initiative. We do not do so in the expectation that we will agree on all the matters that we discuss. We do so because - as the Constitution says - South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity. It is only through honest and open discussion that we will be able to find workable and acceptable solutions to the challenges that confront us - just as we did 24 years ago.

So, I would like us to make the following call to the nation:

“Stand up and defend our Constitutional democracy!”

“Work together to build a strong economy that will bring greater justice and equality to all!”

“Oppose racism from any quarter - and move forward as a strong nation, united in our diversity!”

“Let us reason together about the future of our beloved country!”