



Continuing the miracle into South Africa's second decade

The FW de Klerk Foundation

26 August 1997

Statement by Mr F W de Klerk

After careful consideration, and in deep awareness of my responsibility to the supporters of the National Party and to our country South Africa, I have decided that the time has come for me to retire from active politics.

In his book *Afrikaner-volkseenheid* the late Dr D F Malan wrote the following:

"There is a time to come and to go. This is a truth that is particularly applicable to public life. Where the limit is set by legislation the task is easy enough. However, where it is left to one's own choice, the exercising or non-exercising of the choice is often to one's own detriment - or more frequently to that of others. In each particular case where it is not otherwise determined, the person concerned should also act with a sense of responsibility and unselfishness toward the public. He should himself know when he should retire and faithfully act accordingly."

I know that the time has come for me to go. I must now faithfully act accordingly.

I am retiring in a spirit of deep gratitude. The National Party has presented me with wonderful opportunities and I am deeply grateful to everyone who made it possible for me to play a leading role in the dramatic transition to a new democratic South Africa. I have experienced great career satisfaction during my 25 years of service to the National Party. It was a privilege to have been able to lead our party. And I am grateful that I can retire at a stage when there is no pressure from within the National Party. I am retiring because I am convinced that it is the best interest of the Party and the country.

Throughout my career, but especially since 1990, I have been carried and motivated by the warmth and love I have experienced from my supporters from all language and colour groups. I say thank you to them for their prayers and for the strength they have given me. And I say to them: Please do not stop supporting the National Party. There is no other party that can take care of your interests better than the National Party. Give the new leader a chance, support him or her, and continue to work with me for a party that can make a difference.

My particular motivation for the decision to retire at this specific time is as follows:

- I entered politics twenty-five years ago, I am 61 years old and have served for eight and a half years as leader of the National Party. It is a recognised principle of good management that a manager cannot be effective for much longer than eight years in the same position as the chief executive of a company or undertaking. Continuous rejuvenation and renewal of leadership is required. This also applies to politics. The time has come to hand the baton to a new leader who will, during the next eight years, be able to take the party to new heights with fresh ideas and dynamic energy.

- The approaching election in 1999 makes it necessary that a change in leadership should take place timeously, with a view to giving a new leader the opportunity of establishing and proving himself - or herself. Together with this, the National Party has, at my instigation, just decided to move away from centralism and to give greater content to the autonomy of the party's regional structures. The role of the national leader will have to be amended accordingly and it is desirable that this internal process of reform should be managed by a new leader within a new dispensation.
- There is an urgent need for the realignment of the political scene in South Africa. The National Party has, under my leadership, accepted the challenge of enthusiastically promoting this realignment. Our party has also committed itself to continuing process of its own internal renewal.
- A significant obstacle for the National Party in this process is the perception that - despite the far-reaching internal and external changes we have brought about - it is still linked to a guilt-laden past. Regardless of how unjustified this perception might be - and it is unjustified - it remains a problem for our party. With my retirement I wish to open a door for the National Party to provide further proof of its dynamic break with the past, with a view to best enabling it to play its full role in the realignment process. It is my hope that my retirement will be seen for what it is: the last remaining high profile link with the old National Party and its so-called baggage, withdraws himself from the active party-political scene. With this, the National Party once again enters a further phase as a future-orientated non-racial party, focused on the challenges and problems of today, tomorrow and the day after tomorrow.

I wish to emphasise that my decision to retire from active politics has nothing to do with my and the National Party's current dispute with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Indeed, one of the reasons for my having decided to announce my decision now is that I wanted to finalise my retirement before the court reaches a decision on our dispute with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

After my retirement, I shall continue to be a loyal and enthusiastic supporter of the new National Party. I shall be happy to serve the Party in any way that I can - outside its formal party structures. I remain deeply committed to everything for which the new National Party stands:

- To the building of a strong, united, peaceful, non-racial and democratic South Africa based on the principles of a *Rechtstaat* and the maintenance of basic human rights;
- To the creation of an environment where all our communities will be able to practise and develop their own cultures, languages and traditions as part of our vibrant multi-cultural South African nation;
- Uplifting and developing the people of South Africa through good education and training;
- To building a strong and dynamic economy, based on the humane implementation of market principles, that will generate the wealth that we need to improve the standard

of living of all South Africans - but especially of those South Africans who are most in need;

- To the good management of the country through an effective civil service; and
- To the successful combating of crime and corruption.

I shall continue to promote these goals, after my retirement, from platforms inside South Africa and overseas.

Immediately after my retirement I shall devote a substantial percentage of my time to the writing of my autobiography. It is crucially important that the events of our recent history should be placed in their correct perspective. I shall also, from the perspective of an elder statesman, continue to take an active interest in political questions here and abroad, without treading on the toes of my successor.

I should like to take this opportunity of thanking the millions of South Africans who voted for the National Party in the last election, for the confidence they placed in me.

I should also like to thank my colleagues at all levels in the National Party for their loyalty, friendship and hard work over the years. Finally, I should like to thank my wife Marike and my family for standing by me during these historic and tempestuous years.

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CAPE TOWN