



The

FW de Klerk Foundation

Continuing the miracle into South Africa's second decade

12 January 2005

The Concept of an African Peace Corps

Remarks by Former President FW de Klerk to the Institute of International Mediation and Conflict Resolution

I should like to congratulate you on your initiative to explore possibilities for the creation of an 'African Peace Corps' that would help to train Africans in the military, religious and NGO communities on how they can resolve conflicting interests in a peaceful manner.

In choosing to focus on peace I am convinced that you have started in the right place. The reality is that without peace and stability, there can be no economic and social development; and without economic and social development it is difficult to entrench viable democratic systems and systems of good governance. Without viable democracies and good governance it is often difficult to maintain peace.

These elements – peace, development and democracy - constitute a virtuous circle in which each element reinforces the others. However, if there is any beginning to the circle, it almost always lies in the need for peace and stability, since as we have seen in Africa's war zones, little can be accomplished without them.

In pursuing this initiative you will soon identify the root causes of conflict on our continent. They lie in

- Poverty;
- Tyranny; and in
- The inability of people from different ethnic and religious communities to coexist within the same societies.

Together, these elements comprise a 'vicious circle' which during the past twenty years has led to the deaths of more than 6 million people on the continent and to unimaginable poverty and brutality.

- Most of the countries that have been plagued by civil warfare have also been among the poorest in terms of per capita income;
- They have also had the most oppressive regimes; and
- Nearly all the conflicts have had their roots in hostilities between ethnic and religious communities that had been artificially lumped together in the same geographic areas by European imperialists.

The way to address the vicious cycle is accordingly to promote democracy and good governance; economic development and the circumstances necessary to enable different communities to coexist in the same societies.

President Mbeki deserves praise for his tireless efforts to promote peace and development in Africa. NEPAD has quite rightly identified the need for democracy, good governance and economic growth. This prescription must, however, be energetically followed throughout the continent. Conferences and expressions of good intentions are not enough. In particular, the proposed peer group review mechanisms should be rigorously and honestly used to identify progress and failure. Unfortunately NEPAD will be seriously undermined if blatantly undemocratic governments are given a clean bill of health – as has too often been the case in Zimbabwe.

Finally, much more must be done to accommodate different religious and ethnic groups within the same societies.

- Such groups should be given maximum breathing space to practise their own cultures and religions and to use their own languages.
- Where practical, governments should ensure that different cultural and ethnic communities can educate their children in their mother tongue.
- Steps should be taken to ensure that ethnic and religious communities should feel included in all the processes by which they are governed.
- They should enjoy the greatest possible autonomy with regard to the management of their own communal, cultural and educational affairs.
- They and their identities should be included in new overarching national identities and loyalties that unite all the citizens of the country.
- They should be protected from negative discrimination and should be proportionally represented in the institutions of the state.
- National and community leaders should refrain from actions and statements that might sweep up ethnic antagonism.

There will be plenty of work for the proposed African Peace Corps – but if the initiative is correctly structured and managed, it could well make a very positive contribution to the achievement of President Mbeki's dream of promoting peace and of making this the 'African Century'!