



The

FW de Klerk Foundation

Continuing the miracle into South Africa's second decade

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SPEECH BY FORMER PRESIDENT F W DE KLERK TO THE WPO: PAARL

I should like to take this opportunity – not of welcoming you to South Africa and the Western Cape – but of welcoming you home.

According to the latest research the ancestors of all of the people in the world outside of Africa left our continent around 100 000 years ago. Analysis of mitochondrial DNA which is passed down through the female line – as well as of the Y chromosome – which is passed along the male line – indicates definitively that we all come originally from Africa. The oldest human population are the San - formerly known as the bushmen – of southern Africa - who can now be found only in the desert fastnesses of the Kalahari.

The DNA record also accords with recent archeological finds along the Cape coast that have revealed some of the earliest traces of *homo sapiens* as well as some of the earliest examples of human art.

The number of people who crossed into Asia from Africa 100 000 years ago was also quite small – perhaps no more than one or two hundred. The group that settled in Western Europe fully 65 000 years later was even smaller. So we are all inter-related. Despite our ethnic, class or cultural background we are all members of the human family.

And we all started somewhere here in Africa. Just think about that. Perhaps, 120 000 years ago our common ancestors sat around campfires here and watched the sun set behind Table Mountain – just as it did this evening and just as it will in another 120 000 years. Remember that 120 000 years is no more than the winking of an eye in geological time.

Our species *homo sapiens* has done really well in the intervening millennia. We have created great civilisations and founded highly complex industrial and information societies. In the past two hundred years we have discovered the secrets of nature and are in the process of unlocking the codes of life itself. We have spread to the furthest reaches of the planet; indeed, we have multiplied to the point that our success is now placing unsustainable strains on our fragile environment.

And all this time the rising sun washed the eastern face of Table Mountain with tangerine light and the setting sun gilded the peaks of the twelve apostles before sinking into the Atlantic Ocean.

The Cape may appear to be remote from the principle highways of history – but all the main world developments of the past 500 years have also impacted on us. Our modern history – like that of the Americas – also begins with the voyages of discovery of the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Bartholomew Dias rounded the Cape in 1488 and was

followed nine years later by Vasco da Gama who sailed on to India and laid the foundations of the seaborne spice trade.

As with much of the rest of the world our subsequent history was deeply influenced by the growth of Europe's mercantile empires. Cape Town was originally established by the Dutch East India Company in 1652 as a rest and recuperation station half way between the Netherlands and its empire in the East Indies.

We also were affected by the slave trade and by the movements that finally led to its abolition. The opening of the Americas by pioneers in the nineteenth century was closely paralleled by the settling of the hinterland by Dutch pioneers who by that time had begun to refer to themselves as Afrikaners – or Africans.

Like the Americas, the rest of Africa and much of Asia we also experienced colonialism and domination by distant European powers. We also fought bitter wars of liberation. Indeed, the history of the nineteenth century in South Africa centred on the subjugation by Britain of the three most powerful national groups in the sub-continent – the Xhosas, the Zulus and the Afrikaners.

The wars against the Xhosa – known as the wars of the Axe – were fought eight hundred kilometres east of here along the border between the westward migrating Xhosa and eastward migrating white settlers. They spanned some 80 years and culminated in the annexation of the Xhosa territories by the Cape Colony in 1864. The wars resulted in 1856-57 in the tragic self-destruction of a considerable part of the Xhosa people. Under the influence of Nonqwasi – a young prophetess – the Xhosa destroyed their crops and killed their cattle in the expectation that if they did so their ancestors would rise fully armed from the sea and drive the British out of Africa. Some 25 000 Xhosas died of starvation and even more were forced to flee to the Cape Colony for sustenance.

The Zulus were the strongest and most martial of the black nations. They had been welded into a powerful nation by Shaka – a black Napoleon - between 1816 and 1828. The wars that he unleashed – called the Mfecane – resulted in the deaths of more than a million people and had reverberations as far away as modern Malawi. By the 1870s the Zulus had been confined to the north of the Tugela River in Natal which formed the border with the newly established and flourishing British colony of Natal to the south. The British colonial authorities were, however, ill at ease with their powerful and independent black neighbour and created a pretext for war. After the Zulu King, Cetshewayo, had rejected an impossibly unreasonable ultimatum, a powerful British army invaded Zululand. To their immense surprise, they suffered an initial crushing defeat when part of the army was surrounded and destroyed by the Zulu regiments at the Battle of Ishlandwana in 1879. 800 British soldiers and supporters were killed in what was one of the greatest defeats ever suffered by a modern army at the hands of indigenous forces. This was more than twice the number of soldiers who had been killed with General Custer at the Battle of the Little Big Horn only three years earlier. Despite their initial success, the Zulus were unable to resist the overwhelming might of the British Empire and were finally crushed at the Battle of Ulundi the following year.

The third and most difficult war that the British fought was against the Afrikaner republics. The Afrikaner pioneers who had trekked away from British rule in the Cape in the 1830s had by the second half of the century established two republics – the Orange Free State, north of the Orange River and the Transvaal, north of the Vaal River. In 1867

diamonds were discovered near Kimberley on the border of the Orange Free State. The diggings attracted thousands of fortune seekers and the region was quickly annexed by the Cape Colony. In 1886 gold was discovered in the Transvaal and quickly led to a gold rush and the influx of tens of thousands of miners who soon threatened to swamp the Afrikaans-speaking population. When the Afrikaners – led by President Paul Kruger – refused to grant the settlers the vote on the terms demanded by Britain, war became inevitable. It was, however, a much more costly and expensive undertaking than the British had anticipated. By the time it was over the British had deployed more than 400 000 imperial troops in South Africa and much of the country had been devastated. In their attempts to stop the Afrikaners' guerrilla campaign, the British had burned their farms and had interned Afrikaner women and children in what became known as 'concentration camps'. Some 28 000 women and children died because of the harsh and unsanitary conditions in the camps – leaving another legacy of bitterness. The Afrikaans republics ultimately found it impossible to continue their struggle – which ended with the Peace of Vereeniging in May 1902.

The British were more magnanimous in peace than they had been in war. The Transvaal and the Orange Free State were soon granted self-government and in 1910 joined the Cape Colony and the Colony of Natal to form the Union of South Africa. In keeping with the racial and colonial attitudes of the time little or no provision was made for the political rights of black South Africans in the new British dominion.

For the next fifty years South African politics were dominated to a greater or lesser extent by the jockeying for power between English-speaking and Afrikaners on the one hand who favoured strong ties with the British Empire and Afrikaner nationalists who hankered back to the days of the Afrikaner republics. The competition between these two groups became particularly bitter during the first and second world wars when large numbers of Afrikaner nationalists balked at the prospect of fighting for Britain, their traditional enemy, against Germany which had given moral support to them during the Anglo-Boer War.

The world that emerged from the second world war was very different from the world that had preceded it. The independence of India and Pakistan in 1947 led during the next 15 years to the dismantling of the great European empires in Africa and Asia. The paternalism, segregation and racism that had characterised the relationship between white Europeans and their black and brown subjects before the war were, quite rightly, increasingly repugnant in the post war world. With the collapse of Portuguese rule in Angola and Mozambique in the 1975 and the end of white rule in Zimbabwe in 1981 South Africa found itself almost totally isolated and out of step with the rest of the world.

In the early 60s the National Party government under Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd had thought that it could meet growing demands for black political rights by launching its own internal process of decolonisation. The idea was that the nine black nations of South Africa would be given full political rights in the tribal areas that had been their traditional homelands. The homelands would be developed and would be granted self-government and independence. They would then form a 'commonwealth of southern African states together with white South Africa'. Black South Africans living in the white areas would be able to exercise their political rights in their homeland.

Of course, in retrospect, this vision turned into a pipe dream. South Africa's economy was becoming more integrated with each year that passed. Instead of returning to their

homelands as Dr Verwoerd had predicted, the flow of black South Africans into the white areas increased – despite harsh efforts to limit the movements of black South Africans by making them carry much hated passes.

In 1983 the NP Government attempted to address the demands for political rights of the coloured and Indian minorities by including them in a tricameral parliament. Although Coloureds and Indians enjoyed real control over their own affairs, the new constitution fell far short of demands – and further incensed black South Africans. Between 1984 and 1986 the country experienced serious internal unrest and conflict - which was controlled only by the declaration of a harsh state of emergency.

For some time the National Party had realised that its policies had failed and that it would have to make a paradigm shift if it wished to achieve a peaceful solution. In 1986 it decided to abandon apartheid and to search for a negotiated solution that would accommodate all South Africa's people in a single democratic state. When I became President in 1989 I was able to take the first steps toward the creation of such a state. My task was greatly facilitated by the collapse of Soviet communism which for years had posed a serious strategic threat. The South African Communist Party was in close alliance with the African National Congress and, with the support of the Soviet Union, was committed to a process that would have culminated in the establishment of a communist state in South Africa. However, after the destruction of the Berlin wall this was no longer a serious threat.

We entered into negotiations with representatives of all the significant political parties in South Africa which culminated in the adoption of an interim constitution in 1993 and in our first universal democratic election on 27 April 1994. Our new constitution guaranteed the fundamental rights of all South Africans and created a model constitutional democracy which has now been entrenched by three free and fair elections. We South Africans have astounded our critics by solving our problems through peaceful negotiations.

Since 1994 the ANC government has - to the surprise of its critics - implemented exemplary economic policies. It has slashed our budget deficit and has reduced inflation and interest rates to the lowest levels in decades. Consumer confidence is at an all time high and we are well positioned to achieve economic growth of 4% – 6% in the coming years. We have greatly increased our manufactured exports and have in recent years been earning more from the export of luxury cars and from tourism than we have earned from gold. Our middle class has grown rapidly and is growing to become predominantly black.

At the same time we continue to face serious challenges:

- 57% of our population live below the poverty line;
- Ironically – under an ANC government – our society has become even more unequal;
- We have unacceptably high unemployment – between 25% and 41% depending on the definition that is chosen. Unemployment is particularly high among black South Africans and is the main cause of continuing poverty.
- The AIDS pandemic represents our most serious crisis – already, six years ago, 22.4% of the population was HIV positive.
- We continue to experience unacceptable levels of violent crime.

Also at the same time, the government has embarked on an ambitious policy of social and economic transformation based on black economic empowerment and affirmative action. The objective is to increase substantially black ownership and control of the economy and of land. The government also wants to ensure greater representivity of black South Africans at all levels of management and employment in the private and public sectors

Some of these policies are experienced by many as posing a direct threat to the interests of white, coloured and Indian South Africans. Inevitably, this is beginning to cause new strains in race relations. My Foundation supports a balanced process of black economic empowerment and is trying to engage the government in dialogue on how its goal can be achieved without at the same time alienating minorities, or unfairly harming their reasonable interests.

The currents of world history continue to affect South Africa – as they have for the past 500 years:

- Like the rest of the world, our future success will depend on our ability to take advantage of the opportunities presented by globalisation – and to limit the threats;
- South Africa continues to be a microcosm of the world. We must deal within a single country with many of the developmental problems that confront the world as a whole – particularly with regard to the need to bridge the gap between rich and poor;
- We are also well positioned to provide answers to another question with which the world is wrestling: the question of how to manage cultural diversity in a globalising world in such a manner that all communities will feel secure and will work together to achieve common goals;
- South Africa holds the key to the salvation of the rest of Africa. If we can succeed in becoming the first African country to attain first world status, we shall be able to provide the example and the locomotive power for the rest of our continent.

Accordingly, what happens in South Africa will continue to affect the rest of the world.

The reality is that in our globalising world all the members of the human family are increasingly interdependent, just as we were 120 000 years ago when our common ancestors faced the challenges of this continent together.