



The

FW de Klerk Foundation

Continuing the miracle into South Africa's second decade

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Learning from the Example of the Jewish Board of Deputies

Speech by Former President FW de Klerk, Cape Town.

I can think of few audiences with whom I would rather exchange ideas at this time in our history than the Jewish Board of Deputies.

This is because you and similar organisations throughout the world have a great deal of experience of dealing with diversity - experience of the problems encountered by cultural and religious minorities in a wide range of environments and times. Many White, Indian and Brown South Africans are still adjusting to the challenges of their minority status in our new 1 person 1 vote democracy. All of us can no doubt learn a great deal from you. I believe that we also share a common goal in supporting our constitution; in working for a South Africa that will be truly democratic, non-racial, just and safe for diversity.

There can be little doubt that the second decade of the new South Africa will present minorities with difficult challenges. Our first decade was dedicated to the constitutional transformation of our society. Our second will focus on the much sharper issues of social and economic transformation. In my mind there is no question about the urgent need for such transformation. It is when we come to the "how" that I see some yellow lights flashing.

It would be a mistake to underestimate the depth of the ANC's commitment to its particular interpretation of social and economic transformation. In its view, the establishment of a fully democratic government in April 1994 was not the culmination of its National Democratic Revolution - but merely a milestone along the road to a non-racial, non-sexist and egalitarian society. After 1994 the ANC was, however, in a position where it was able - as it put it - to "*transform the state machinery to serve the cause of social transformation.*"

Most of the levers of state power are now firmly in the hands of ANC - with the exception of the judiciary - which has now also come under intense pressure. The road is accordingly open for the ANC to tackle the principal outstanding task on the agenda of the National Democratic Revolution - which is the creation of a "non-racial" society through the elimination of the property and social inequalities that were created by apartheid.

Once again I have no problem with this principle. However, if it is interpreted as some influential voices in the ANC interpret it, I do foresee serious problems.

The ANC's idea, or at least the idea of some leading figures in the ANC, is that in a perfectly non-racial society all institutions in the public and private sectors should reflect the ethnic composition of society at all levels. Accordingly, the owners, the boards, top management, middle management and employees of all companies and organisations

should ideally be 76% black, 12% white, 9% coloured and 3% Indian. The same should hold true for all aspects of government and all state, provincial and municipal institutions – and ultimately for all sports teams as well.

As I told the Cape Town Press Club on 28 February this year, at first glance this would seem not to be unreasonable. However, on deeper examination it becomes clear that in a multi-community society ‘representivity’ would mean that minorities would be subject to the control of the majority in every area of their lives - in their jobs, in their businesses, in their schools, in their universities and in their sports.

In effect, the concept of across the board representivity is irreconcilable with the constitutional principle of cultural diversity. Diversity requires an environment with numerous centres of cultural, social and economic activity - all existing in mutual toleration and respect. It presupposes a degree of community autonomy and acceptance that there are important spheres of life that should be free from majority interference and control. The right to freedom of association also means that there is nothing intrinsically wrong if cultural groups tend to associate with their own kind in business, recreation and cultural pursuits - as they do, indeed, all over the world.

I stressed that all this is, of course, predicated on two key principles: Firstly, that none of these institutions should exclude people on the basis of race and secondly, that in their diversity, all our citizens should give their first and overarching loyalty to South Africa and to the constitution.

The question is, how should our minorities react to all this? This is especially problematical for white South Africans, because they are constantly addressed by government as a group. They are, in fact, *not* a group! The Afrikaner community is fragmented into dozens of splinter groups and tendencies. English-speaking white South Africans would much rather simply think of themselves as South Africans. And important immigrant communities concentrate on their own particular needs and interests. There is no ‘White Caucus’ - thank heavens. No political party claims to - or even wants to - speak as the representative of white South Africans. The same is true of our coloured and Indian communities as well.

However, if the ANC consistently addresses and treats white South Africans and black South Africans as groups, there will be a tendency for them to start to organise and to react as groups. This is a tendency that I believe we should resist.

How then should we react?

Firstly, we should be fully engaged in our communities and our country. Our response to criticism and disempowerment should not be to withdraw into our own communities or to educate our children to leave South Africa. On the contrary we should redouble our efforts to help our fellow South Africans to wrestle with the enormous challenges that confront our society. We must be in the front lines in the battles against AIDS, poverty, unemployment and crime.

We must also engage our fellow South Africans from other communities in an ongoing debate on potential problems and on ways and means of working together to achieve the vision contained in the constitution.

In particular, we need to talk to the ANC about how we can all contribute to a balanced and workable process of economic and social transformation. Black Economic Empowerment is creating real opportunities for black South Africans: it is stimulating the development of a whole new generation of black entrepreneurs and managers and is rapidly expanding our consumer market. It is helping to create a fairer, more prosperous and more representative economy.

However, it is equally important that BEE deals should be pursued and negotiated in a balanced manner and within the framework of the constitution. In particular:

- they should not undermine or dilute the property rights;
- while making full provision for the appointment and promotion of qualified black South Africans, they should not constitute a virtual bar to members of minority communities;
- they should concentrate - in particular - on education, training, mentoring and fast-tracking of black South Africans;
- they should not result in the appointment or promotion of people who simply do not have the skills or experience to carry out the responsibilities assigned to them - whatever their race;
- they should concentrate on giving black workers and managers a stake in the businesses in which they are employed - rather than in enriching a handful of billionaire tycoons.

As I mentioned to the Cape Town Press Club, there are, at the same time a number of reasonable questions that need to be debated and resolved:

- What are the goals of transformation with regard to institutions that have a special cultural identity - such as churches, clubs, newspapers, cultural organisations, schools, universities, old-age homes, ethnic restaurants, etc?
- What is the bottom line? Charters generally have a ten-year horizon for ownership, employment and other targets - but what are the final goals? If an industry achieves its target of 25% black ownership in the first ten years will it have complied with all of its black ownership obligations - or will it then have to meet another set of ownership targets during the following ten years?
- Is it possible to peg ownership levels in a free market? What happens when a black empowerment partner decides to sell his or her share of a company to white or overseas interests?
- When does affirmative action become racial discrimination? President Mbeki recently pointed out that 182 000 white households now fall in the lowest income group which earns less than R 9 600 per annum while 440 000 black households are now in the highest income group earning more than R153 000 per annum. On what moral and constitutional basis will members of the advantaged black households now be able to claim precedence over members of disadvantaged white households when it comes to affirmative action appointments?

These are all reasonable questions that require reasonable answers within the framework of a constructive national debate

Secondly, I believe that minorities must be vigilant. They should carefully monitor developments and legislation that might threaten inter-community relations or undermine the principles in the constitution.

Your community, more than any other, is aware of the danger of negative racial stereotyping and the tendency of demagogues to cast unpopular communities in the role of scapegoats.

Unfortunately, too much of this is now happening in South Africa. It is becoming commonplace for senior government spokesmen to rehash negative racial stereotypes drawn from our extremely divided and complex past. In terms of these stereotypes most whites are depicted as being indelibly stamped with the sin of apartheid - regardless of their political orientation in the past or of the contribution that they might have made to the creation of the new South Africa. They owe their present privileged position solely to the exploitation of black South Africans and are responsible for all of the problems that the country continues to experience even now, eleven years after our transition to democracy. Unfortunately, this analysis provides the bedrock for hardening racial attitudes.

For example, in his Robert Sobukwe memorial lecture last week at the University of Fort Hare, Dumisa Ntsebeza said the following:

“White South Africa collectively owe the blacks so huge a debt that no one member should automatically expect to escape the blanket condemnation that needs to come from the black world.

“It is not as if whites are allowed to enjoy privilege only when they declare solidarity with the ruling party. They are born into privilege and are nourished by, and nurtured in, the system of ruthless exploitation of black energy.

“For a 20 year-old (white) liberal to expect to be accepted with open arms is surely to overestimate the powers of forgiveness of the black people.”

Dumisa Ntsebeza received a standing ovation from his audience of 600 people. Ironically, he was one of the commissioners of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission - an organisation supposedly dedicated to the pursuit of truth and reconciliation.

Thirdly, we must react to racially motivated propaganda, defamation and breaches of the constitution

We cannot allow racially motivated tirades - such as the one I quoted - to go unanswered.

We cannot allow the erosion of the constitution by continuously failing to insist on our rights.

We should not remain silent when fundamental provisions of our constitution - such as the independence of the judiciary - come under threat.

Finally, I believe that we should rally around the constitution. Our constitution guarantees all the rights that any South African needs to live a free, prosperous and meaningful life. It entrenches the full spectrum of individual and communal rights. It makes provision for us to practise our religions, to educate our children in the language and culture of our choice, to speak our languages and to cherish our cultural traditions. It also lays a firm foundation for freedom and democracy. It requires separation between the executive, the

judiciary and the legislature. It makes provision for freedom of speech, association and assembly; for multi-party democracy and for free and regular elections. It creates institutions that are intended to enable ordinary citizens to claim their rights. Theoretically, it prohibits racial discrimination and lays down clear tests and limits for justifiable affirmative action. It entrenches our property rights.

However, we need to obtain the resources and develop the mechanisms that will enable South Africa citizens – whatever their background or race – to claim their rights. We need to work together to achieve the vision of a just, democratic and truly non-racial society that is enshrined in the constitution.

To sum up:

- Constructive engagement in our communities;
- open and frank communication with government and fellow citizens;
- vigilance and awareness of the development of possible threats;
- measured and balanced defence of non-racialism and core values;
- commitment to non-racial constitutional democracy -

are urgently called for.

All these concepts are well-known to the Jewish Board of Deputies - since it seems to me that they have guided its activities in the representation of the interests of Jewish South Africans for more than a hundred years. I believe that all South Africa's minorities can learn from your example –and can benefit from your continued active commitment to your principles.