



The FW de Klerk Foundation

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Beyond Prosperity: The Search for Identity, Justice and Sustainable Development in a Globalising World

Speech by former president FW de Klerk to the Academic Society of Lund University, Sweden

It is an honour and a pleasure to be able to address the Academic Society of Lund University. I always find it fascinating to visit new places - new towns and cities of which I have had very little awareness before my arrival. One receives an invitation; one flies to the nearest major city. One travels by road or rail to a new destination. From nothing more than a name on the invitation, a dot on the map a new community coalesces into reality - a community, like your own, with its own history, its own traditions, its own fine university, its own citizens, all searching in their own way for purpose and happiness. I come from another dot on another map at the bottom of Africa; from another community with different traditions and perceptions with its own citizens who, in their own way, are also trying to find purpose and happiness. Although our communities are far apart I believe that increasingly we are being brought closer together by the challenges and opportunities of globalisation.

The question that I would like to address today is what lies ahead of us, now that many of the people in the developed world have achieved levels of prosperity and material well-being beyond the dreams of our ancestors only a few generations ago.

It is probable that the average European worker already enjoys greater real well-being than the Emperor Charles V did 450 years ago - if one takes into account his total package of health care; access to information and education; travel and entertainment. He doesn't suffer the terrible toothache and pain that the old Emperor would have had to endure. His Volkswagen or Volvo is certainly a more wonderful vehicle than even the most magnificent of the Emperor's coaches. He might not live in a palace, but his home is full of more wonders - including his TV, microwave oven and personal computer - than could ever have been imagined in the draughty halls of the Estoril Palace.

The last few decades have witnessed dramatic progress not only in the area of material prosperity. We have also achieved most of mankind's ancient political and social goals.

- After centuries of repression and struggle, the citizens of first world countries have achieved their goal of political freedom. They live in universal democracies and are free to participate at all levels in the processes by which they are governed. Their political and civil rights are protected by impartial courts.
- After generations of religious conflict and persecution, they have achieved their goal of religious freedom. They enjoy freedom of expression, religion and thought.

- They have also broken free from the fear of poverty and disease and now enjoy high levels of social and medical security.

We have also made significant advances in our social and political attitudes since the beginning of this century:

- On the eve of the First World War, soldiers parading through the streets of London, Paris, Berlin and Moscow were cheered by enthusiastic crowds as they marched off to war. Many people still glorified the idea of war and the ideals of military conquest and martial valour. Eighty-six years later, hardly anyone believes that there is any merit in war of any kind. Any delusions which mankind had at the beginning of the century about the romance of war were swept away by its experiences in the trenches of the First World War; the devastation of the Second World War and in the jungles of South East Asia.
- At the turn of the century the role of women was restricted almost totally to the traditional tasks of home-making. Families were large and many children - and mothers - died in childbirth. Now, only a few generations later, the equality of men and women is accepted almost everywhere in principle - although still not sufficiently in practice.
- In 1900 Europe was the unquestioned master of most of the world. British, French, German and Dutch imperialists firmly believed that they had some special right and responsibility to rule over distant peoples - many of whom had civilisations older than their own. It was a time of unabashed imperialism and racism, of the unquestioned assumption of European superiority. Now, a century later, all the former colonies have gained their independence and racism and imperialism have been cast onto the ash-heap of history.

All these developments are indications of the enormous and unprecedented progress that we have made during the past century. However, our successes are, in turn, creating new and substantial challenges.

The times in which we live coincide with one of the most profound developments in human history, the process that we have come to call globalisation - and it is toward globalisation that much of the change that we are experiencing is leading.

During the past decades we have begun to lay the foundations of a new supranational global community:

- Mass jet transportation has brought every corner of the earth within the reach of a single day's travel.
- Satellite telecommunication now makes it possible to communicate with anybody, anywhere at any time and has enabled us to view breaking news and sports events on the other side of the world. Over 1.4 billion people now have cell-phones.
- The internet and the world-wide-web - perhaps more than anything else - represents the most recent and most exponential development of extremely complex global systems. After only a few years it already enables more than 600 million people all over the world to communicate with one another instantaneously and gives them immediate access to a virtually limitless universal data base.
- We can expect that during the coming years - as Moore's Law continues to run its course - the internet will have a growing impact on many aspects of our lives - on the

way we do our shopping; on the way we receive information and entertainment; on the way we communicate; and even on our ability to work from home.

The fascinating thing is that the internet was neither planned nor foreseen. It developed and grew exponentially and organically – driven, perhaps, by the universal tendency for systems to evolve into ever more complex forms.

In the economic sphere globalisation is creating a single global market and is opening doors to rapid economic growth for competitive economies all over the world. It is changing patterns of production and distribution and is opening markets to global competition. In so doing, it is creating opportunities for emerging markets to join the global march to prosperity and well-being.

Apart from these economic implications, globalisation is impacting on other key aspects of our lives:

- on our cultures;
- our personal identities; and
- on our search for personal meaning and spiritual fulfilment.

The rich cultural diversity of our planet is one of our greatest communal and personal heritages.

The culture into which we are born provides the framework within which we later develop our own personal identities. It provides us with the language through which we first communicate with our family and friends and the concepts by which we first begin to understand our universe; it is the source of many of our core values and attitudes toward life and sometimes even our sense of humour.

However, as a result of globalisation a new international uniformity is developing in many areas which had previously been characterised by cultural diversity:

- New generations are growing up all around the world who watch the same TV shows as children; who adulate the same pop music and movie idols as teenagers and who follow the same soap operas as adults.
- Their understanding of the world is increasingly influenced by the same global news networks and commentators.
- They follow the same fashions and buy the same globally marketed products - whether they are the toys and T-shirts spawned by the latest Disney feature; jeans and perfumes from the fashion houses of Paris, Milan or New York or the most recent electronic consumer items from Japan or Korea.
- They do their shopping in the same malls; buy hamburgers from the same fast-food chains, and work in shiny office buildings which look the same from Shanghai to Buenos Aires; from Stockholm to Singapore.

The result is the development of a new generation of global citizens whose attitudes, tastes and aspirations are increasingly uniform. They are all in search of the good life depicted by the global advertisers; the BMWs and Mercedes-Benz's; the fashionable clothes; the comfortable suburban homes and the vacations beside tropical beaches or on the ski slopes.

Everywhere regional and national cultures and identities are under pressure. It has been estimated that half of the world's 6 000 languages will disappear during the next century. Our cultural diversity is now under greater threat than the bio-diversity of our planet.

Globalisation presents us with another great challenge: the challenge to preserve and enhance spiritual meaning in an increasingly materialistic and secular world. Many of the moral and religious values upon which our families and societies were traditionally based are under serious threat.

- Throughout much of the Western world, churches are empty and society has entered what has been described as the 'post Christian era'.
- In Europe, a large proportion of couples no longer go through the process of marriage. Everywhere the traditional concept of the nuclear family is under threat. In Germany, Italy, Russia and much of Eastern Europe populations are beginning to decline as more and more people opt for smaller families - or for no families at all.
- The advent of the pill in the 'sixties; the wide acceptance of sex outside of marriage and changing attitudes toward homosexuality have all contributed to a revolution in society's attitudes to sexual morality.

The reality is that the driving forces behind globalisation are economic, technological, materialistic and rational - and that these forces are often inimical to our search for spiritual meaning.

We must remember that human beings first came together in larger groups, not primarily for mutual protection or to improve their hunting and gathering potential, but because they depended on society for their very identity as humans. As Aristotle pointed out more than two thousand years ago, outside society man is either an animal or a god. Since then, one of the prime functions of society has been the generation of meaning and identity for its members. It fulfilled this task by providing them with language and culture and by generating myths, ritual and religion.

The religious impulse of our distant ancestors often had its root in their awe of the unknown; in the mysteries of the changing seasons and the movements of the sun, moon and stars; and in the eternal riddle of the beginning and end of life. But now, science has provided answers to many of these ancient mysteries. We now know why the seasons change and how the stars themselves were born. Scientists are unravelling the genetic secrets of life itself.

Our sense of the divine was underpinned by ceremony and taboo; by the strict observation of the Sabbath; by prohibitions in some faiths against uttering the name of God; and in others against depicting His image or even the image of men. In our age, our sense of the divine has been seriously eroded by our appetite for rational analysis and the familiarity bred by Hollywood epics and the mass commercialisation of religion.

Only a generation or two ago, our moral orientation was fixed by immutable commandments, of black and white notions of right and wrong. But in a world of relativistic and situational morality, most of these commandments have been swept aside and reduced to the proposition that we may do whatever we like provided we do not harm anyone else.

In the past we derived so much of our meaning and purpose in life from the rich soil of our regional and national culture; from our myths and from adherence to the religion into which we were born and raised. These factors inspired our art, our music and our literature and left us with a treasure house of meaning and beauty. Does the globalised culture have the capacity to do this? Is human society still fulfilling its primary function of generating meaning for its members?

Thus, as we stand at the threshold a new and globalised world. It offers us improved well-being and technological and material advances beyond our imagination. It brings with it the prospect of a new era of global democracy and human rights. But it also has profound implications for our cultural and personal identities and for our search for meaning and spiritual fulfilment.

I believe that mankind is now confronted by three great challenges:

Firstly, in our globalised world it will be less and less possible to ignore the reality that a large part of the human population still lives in unacceptable poverty, misery and repression. Although, the portion of the world's population living in absolute poverty has declined from two thirds to one third in the past forty years, the total number of people living below the poverty line has stayed about the same - because the world's population has doubled since 1960. What is more serious is that the disparity per capita between the poorest and richest fifths of the world's nations has widened from 30 to 1 in 1960 to 78 to 1 forty years later.

Most of the poorest fifth of the world's population live in my continent, Africa. They do not have the luxury of worrying about the problems that lie beyond prosperity. Nine million of them are refugees inside or outside their own countries. 20 of their 45 countries are - or have recently been - at war.

One of the first challenges that lie beyond prosperity for the citizens of the first world should be to mobilise their societies to close this growing gap between rich and poor. I do not believe that this is simply a question of altruism. The reality is that the first world cannot marginalise an entire continent or relegate its problems and conflicts to 30 second sound bites on the evening news.

In a shrinking world, the problems of one region will inevitably become the problems of other regions and ultimately of the whole world:

- Diseases like AIDS do not observe international boundaries;
- Instability in one region can lead to instability in others. A few years ago Western leaders believed that it was moral for their countries to intervene in Kosovo. But do the same moral principles apply when intervention is urgently required to save Africans from repression, massacre or famine? I think that voters in developed societies should not permit their governments to stand idly by while hundreds of millions of people continue to live in misery and conflict.

During the new millennium the world will have to join hands with Africa to ensure that the continent takes its rightful place among the other successful regions of the world. In particular:

- More attention needs to be given to the debt burden of the world's 41 highly indebted poor countries - 34 of which are in Africa. Some steps are now being taken by the IMF to address this problem, but more needs to be done.
- Steps should also be taken to increase the third world's share in global trade. For example, Africa, with almost one-sixth of the world's population accounts for only one fiftieth of global trade. Third World exports need more favourable access to first world markets. The unacceptable reality is that the world's most developed nations spend US\$ 300 billion on subsidies to their own farmers and only US\$56 billion on foreign aid. What is worse is that first world's agricultural subsidies often make it impossible for developing countries to compete in global markets for agricultural products - the one area where they have a competitive advantage.
- The poor countries also require higher levels of foreign and domestic investment. They have to achieve at least 5% per annum growth levels if they are to break out of the grip of poverty. And they are simply not getting the investment required to achieve this.

Our second great challenge will be to preserve our rich regional and national cultural heritage against inundation by the new rampant and all-pervasive globalised culture. The existence of the Dutch and Swedes, Finnish and Bavarians, Scotsmen and Cypriots, Afrikaners and Zulus has made the world a fascinating place. It has also created a vast and creative diversity of experience which has contributed to the remarkable progress that humans have achieved in the last few centuries. The future of our own identity as individuals is intimately linked with the preservation of the cultures in which we have been nurtured.

We are, in effect, beginning to experience the 'clash of cultures' predicted by Samuel Huntington. Nearly everyone wants the products and prosperity that globalisation brings - but conservative societies fear that these factors are undermining their cultures, traditions and religious values

We will have to develop approaches to enable societies all over the world to enjoy the fruits of globalisation without having to surrender their cultural and religious identities and values.

Our third great challenge will be to achieve sustainable development by reasserting our control over the technological forces that we have unleashed. In the period that lies ahead I believe that there will be growing acceptance that material prosperity alone is not enough.

We shall have to ask ourselves whether we want our economies to grow for ever. Are we going to seek comfort, pleasure and the accumulation of material possessions without any limit? Can such growth be sustained by our fragile environment? At what level will we be satisfied?

Our environment is sending us signals that we cannot ignore.

Finally, our globalising world is confronted with the pressing challenge of learning to live in harmony with our global environment.

- In 1999 the human population finally exceeded six billion - four times greater than it was in 1900;

- In 1998 the hole in the ozone layer above the Antarctic reached its largest size ever;
- The 10 warmest years in this century all have occurred in the last 15 years. Of these, 1998 was the warmest year on record.
- The snow cover in the Northern Hemisphere and floating ice in the Arctic Ocean have decreased and the sea level has risen 4-10 inches over the past century.

We dare not ignore these warning signals. We must ensure that our governments move beyond declarations and lip service in their efforts to protect the global environment. Our future and the future of our children depends more on this than perhaps on any other factor.

We must remember that the central characteristic of our species has been its ability to control its environment to suit its own needs. We must not allow ourselves to become the slaves of the technological and consumer forces that we have unleashed. We must reassert our control over these forces and harness them to create a value-based, culturally enriching, and humanity-centred environment in which we and our families will be able to live rich and meaningful lives.

The greatest challenge which globalisation and our rapidly changing world present will be to ensure that there will still be a place for cultural diversity, individuality and faith in an increasingly uniform, materialistic and secular world. It will also be to promote peaceful and harmonious relations between all the diverse ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious communities that will be brought together in the new global village. It will be to ensure that all of humanity shares in the prosperity and freedom that first world societies have achieved.

We must ensure that our purpose in life will be more than the mere pursuit of comfort and pleasure and the accumulation of material possessions. Globalisation cannot and should not be stopped: But we can all work to make sure that it unfolds in a manner that will not threaten our rich cultural heritage; that will be fare to all the peoples of the world; and that will ensure balanced and sustainable development.