



FW de Klerk
FOUNDATION

**SPEECH BY FORMER PRESIDENT FW DE KLERK
TO THE INTERNATIONAL FORUM ON MARKET LEADERS AND SCENARIOS FOR THE 21ST
CENTURY**

**VILLA D'ESTE
CERNOBBIO
24 MARCH 2018**

**THE ACCOMMODATION OF CULTURAL, RELIGIOUS AND ETHNIC DIVERSITY: A CORE
CHALLENGE FOR THE 21ST CENTURY FOR SOUTH AFRICA, FOR EUROPE AND FOR THE
WORLD**

Everywhere people are on the move.

One of the inescapable implications of globalisation is an enormous increase in the interaction between people from different backgrounds, cultures, languages and religions. The management of the resulting cultural, language and religious diversity will be one of this century's greatest challenges.

Throughout the world populations are becoming more cosmopolitan: the world's 200 countries now include more than 6 000 different cultural communities. More than 130 countries have cultural minorities comprising more than 10% of their populations.

As you in Europe know all too well cultural diversity is being augmented by new waves of migrants seeking economic opportunities and freedom. Everywhere people are on the move - and everywhere they are confronting once homogenous societies with new challenges.

The inability of countries to manage diversity has now become by far the greatest source of conflict in the world. The simple reality is that in the 21st century, the main threat to peace no longer comes from wars between countries: it comes from the growing threat of conflict within countries between ethnic, cultural and religious communities.

Nearly all the world's conflicts have their roots in the inability of countries to manage diversity. Examples include the recent civil war in Sri Lanka between Tamils and Sri Lankans; the ongoing tensions between Israelis and Palestinians; conflicts involving the Kurdish minorities in Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran; continuing ethnic warfare in South Sudan and Darfur; recent conflicts in the Ivory Coast and Mali; recurrent tensions between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria. Chechnya, Dagestan, Georgia, Kashmir and the Philippines have recently - or are still - experiencing ethnic or religious conflicts. The current civil war in Syria is being seriously exacerbated by long-standing tensions between fundamentalists, Shi'ites, Alawites, Kurds and Christians.

The preservation of cultural diversity is also one of the central issues in the debate on where globalisation is leading us. Many people believe that the identity, purpose and dignity that they derive from their cultural heritage are being threatened by the global tidal wave of



FW de Klerk
FOUNDATION

English-language mass culture. The pervasive media, entertainment and communication influences that it broadcasts are brashly consumerist and often respect few boundaries or traditional values.

South Africa - which is one of the most multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic societies in the world - has plenty of experience in managing - and mismanaging - diversity. Our population comprises:

- 80% black South Africans with nine ethnic groups - each speaking its own language - but increasingly conversant in English;
- 9% Coloured South Africans - most of whom still speak Afrikaans - but who also include a strong Muslim community descended from Indonesians who were brought to the Cape by the Dutch East India Company;
- 2% Indian South Africans - including Muslims and Hindus - most of whom speak English as their home language;
- 9% white South Africans - including my own community, the Afrikaners, who speak Afrikaans and white English-speaking South Africans.

Our population also includes anywhere between two and five million refugees from the rest of Africa - most of whom are illegally in the country.

How did all this come about?

Modern South Africa was forged in the wars of conquest that the British fought during the 19th century against the three dominant peoples of the sub-continent - the Xhosa, the Zulus and the Afrikaners. At the beginning of the 20th century Britain found itself in possession of an assortment of vexatious territories in Southern Africa.

What to do with these troublesome and expensive possessions? The solution was to create a union or federation along the lines of the recently established British federations in Canada and Australia. And so the Union of South Africa was born - a mere 108 years ago - with artificial borders encompassing widely different peoples, often with diametrically divergent interests.

The question that confronted South Africa following the end of colonialism in the early 60s was how full political rights could be extended to black, Coloured and Indian South Africans without at the same time threatening the rights of the white ethnic groups?

One must remember that white South Africans did not regard themselves as a minority or community - but as a separate nation with its own right to self-determination. My people, the Afrikaners, twice defended this right against the most powerful empire of the time. The Second Anglo-Boer War was the biggest of the 80 or so wars that the British fought between the Napoleonic Wars and the First World War.



FW de Klerk
FOUNDATION

For 20 years the National Party government tried to unscramble the omelette that had been created by the establishment of the Union of South Africa in 1910. Each of the black nations would have its own ethnic state in the areas that it had traditionally occupied and would, in time, advance to full independence as members of a multi-ethnic 'Commonwealth of Southern African states'. Indian and Coloured South Africans would be brought into the same polity as the whites - along the lines of the consociational arrangement between the Flemish and Walloons here in Belgium.

The proposed solution - like most such ventures in social engineering - was a complete failure. The territories set aside for blacks comprised less than 14% of the territory of South Africa; the South African economy was becoming more integrated with every year that passed; there was no region where whites comprised anything near a majority. More seriously, the policy was strongly rejected by the overwhelming majority of black, Coloured and Indian South Africans. In the end it led to manifest and unacceptable injustice.

As we discovered, the challenge was not how South Africans from different ethnicities should live apart - it was what we needed to do to enable them to live together in mutual respect and harmony.

After 10 years of reforms initiated by my predecessor, President PW Botha, it became increasingly clear that only a common constitutional system would be able to accommodate the rights, interests and aspirations of all South Africans.

By 1989 - when I became President - the situation was suddenly ripe for change:

- All sides had agreed that there could be neither a military nor revolutionary solution;
- 50 000 Cuban troops had been withdrawn from Angola;
- the UN plan for the independence of Namibia had been successfully implemented; and
- the fall of the Berlin Wall had created entirely new geostrategic and economic realities.

We were ready to embark on fundamental constitutional transformation - but in so doing how would we be able to ensure that none of our ethnic groups would be submerged by the new majority?

We believed that this question could be dealt with by negotiating a strong constitution.

My party favoured a power-sharing model - similar to that of Switzerland - in which there would have been maximum autonomy for our constituent communities. We wanted mechanisms that would have assured inclusivity - but not a veto - for minorities in the processes of government - such as the idea of a rotational presidency and a multi-ethnic state council. Unfortunately, we were not successful and ended up with a majoritarian system.



FW de Klerk
FOUNDATION

Our new Constitution nevertheless made full provision for the accommodation of diversity. It recognised our 11 official languages and proclaimed that they should enjoy parity of esteem.

- It required us to strive for unity within our diversity.
- It prohibited discrimination, *inter alia*, on the basis of race, language and culture.
- It enjoined the state to take special action to develop our indigenous languages.
- It stated that government at national and provincial levels must use at least two official languages.
- It recognised the right to receive education in the language of one's choice in public educational institutions, where such education is reasonably practicable.
- People belonging to cultural, religious and ethnic communities would be able to enjoy their culture, practise their religion and use their language.

Unfortunately, virtually every one of these provisions has been ignored or diluted since the adoption of the Constitution in 1996.

- English is increasingly the single *de facto* official language.
- The supposed official status of the remaining 10 languages is increasingly an illusion.
- Little or nothing has been done to develop our indigenous languages.
- Afrikaans, as a language of public education, is under enormous pressure.
- The cultural identity of white South Africans is routinely denigrated by government leaders and their heritage is being progressively excised from the national identity.

During the past 24 years South Africa has been moving further and further away from the ideal of cultural, religious and language diversity.

The accommodation of diverse immigrant groups has also become one of the most controversial issues in Europe. It has played a vexatious role in recent elections in a number of European countries. It has led to ugly reaction and riots and was a major factor in the British decision two years ago to leave the European Union. As you Italians understand, the arrival of indeterminate numbers of refugees is creating unsustainable human and logistic problems.

The European Union is confronted by the challenge of striking a balance between core humanitarian values on the one hand and citizens who fear that their cultural identity is under threat on the other. It must also take into consideration the need to facilitate the immigration of sorely-needed skilled workers - necessitated by the expected decline of its workforce by 20 million people by 2030.

Immigration and demographics also played a central role in the 2016 election of President Donald Trump. Trump supporters fear that the traditional European-descended dominance of the United States is under threat from changing demographics - and particularly from the emergence of Hispanic Americans as the country's largest ethnic minority. Hispanics will



FW de Klerk
FOUNDATION

include more than 100 million people - or one in four Americans - by 2050. Already they make up more than a third of the populations of Texas and California and more than 40% of the population of New Mexico. But should they accept the convention that all migrants should eventually become English-speaking - or will the United States increasingly have to accept bilingualism and multi-lingualism?

These are all core questions for the 21st century.

As we in South Africa have discovered, the answer to diversity is not secession, partition and devising ways for communities to live apart. It is to adopt approaches and to establish norms that will enable different cultural and ethnic communities to live together peacefully and in mutual respect within the same states. To achieve this, we must reach broad agreement on the cultural, linguistic and educational rights that such communities should enjoy. We need to do much more to define and protect the rights of cultural, ethnic and religious minorities throughout the world:

- We need to establish an international norm for these rights, just as we have already done for individuals, for women and for children.
- We need to promote acceptance of the role that education can and must play in the preservation of religious, cultural and language diversity. We also need to establish the principle that states have a duty to support and finance such education.
- We need to measure the behaviour of governments against these norms. If we do so, I am confident that we will soon discover that the societies that are the worst afflicted by inter-communal violence are also those that have the least respect for the rights of their constituent communities.
- We need to develop overarching common values based on toleration and respect for all fundamental rights.

We have entered the global village. It is exciting; it is often very confusing; and sometimes a little frightening. Increasingly, people from different cultural backgrounds will be rubbing shoulders in the streets, market places and international companies that make up our global village. The presence of people from so many different cultures is one of the most enriching aspects of our new world. But it will also require us to observe new codes of behaviour and to respect the multi-dimensional cultural, religious and linguistic identities and rights of people.