



FW de Klerk
FOUNDATION

THE OLD SOUTH AFRICAN FLAG

The FW de Klerk Foundation has taken note of today's decision of the Equality Court in Johannesburg to declare that the "gratuitous display" of the old South African flag, constitutes "hate speech."

The raising of our new flag over the Union Buildings was one of the proudest moments of South Africa's long and troubled history. It became a symbol of national unity, reconciliation and the values in our new constitution. Under such circumstances, the FW de Klerk Foundation and the great majority of white South Africans have long accepted - and continue to accept - that it would be insensitive and inappropriate to fly the old flag - particularly because of the painful memories that it symbolizes for many South Africans.

The old flag encompassed and reflected the history of white presence in South Africa since 1652, including as it did the flags of the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, the Transvaal Republic and the Orange Free State. Between 1910 and 1994 it was the flag of white South Africans who regarded themselves as one of the nations that had been included within the artificial borders that the British had arbitrarily drawn on the map of southern Africa in 1910. They believed axiomatically that they - like all the other nations of the world - had a self-evident right to national self-determination.

Following the decolonisation of Africa it became increasingly apparent that whites would not be able to continue to exercise their right to national self-determination without depriving black, Coloured and Indian South Africans of their equally legitimate right to self-determination and equality. In February 1990, after decades of escalating conflict, the National Party government under President FW de Klerk accepted that justice could be achieved for all South Africans only by negotiating a new and inclusive non-racial constitution that would protect the rights of all South Africans.

In December 1993 we reached a national accord that we hoped would assure the rights of all South Africans and that would prevent new forms of racial domination.

The maintenance of positive relations between communities in multicultural societies requires sensitivity, toleration and the avoidance of actions that might be hurtful to other communities. So, although it would be inappropriate to fly the old flag, it would be equally inappropriate and insensitive to denigrate the historical and human experience that it represents - much of it replete with suffering, sacrifice and courage.

Although it is painfully true that it was under the Union Flag that the depredations and humiliations of apartheid occurred - it was also under that flag and the flags that it incorporates, that:

- the Transvaal Republic and the Orange Free State fought one of the greatest - and most tragic - anti-Imperialist war in the history of sub-Saharan Africa;



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- South African soldiers and airmen fought and died in the First and Second World Wars and in Korea;
- impoverished Afrikaners lifted themselves up by their own bootstraps during the great depression;
- succeeding generations developed South Africa into by far the most advanced state in Africa; and that
- white South Africans, in the early 1990s, reached out to their compatriots of all races in historic venture to establish a new, non-racial constitutional democracy that would ensure the rights and protect the human dignity of all our people.

We should all be proud to fly our new flag - but when we do so we should remember the values that it represents. They include non-racialism, the need to heal the divisions of the past; respect those who have worked to build and develop our country; and the foundational proposition that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity. That diversity must include respect and toleration for our diverse and often conflicting histories.

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