



THIRTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE RELEASE FROM PRISON OF NELSON MANDELA

The release of Nelson Mandela from prison 30 years ago was the first momentous consequence of the announcements made by President FW de Klerk in Parliament nine days earlier. As Mr De Klerk observed in his autobiography: as he watched Nelson Mandela walking through the gates of Victor Verster Prison, he was struck by an inescapable truth: "...an irreversible process had begun and nobody could predict precisely how it would end."

Now 30 years later we can answer part of that question:

- the constitutional democracy that FW de Klerk and Nelson Mandela took the lead in negotiating during the following six years is still intact;
- South African has rejoined the international community;
- it has rid itself of the albatross of minority racial domination;
- all South Africans enjoy nominal equality;
- the new multi-racial middle class has flourished.

On the other hand:

- the great exercise in reconciliation and nation-building to which Nelson Mandela dedicated so much of his Presidency has come to a grinding halt;
- the language and cultural rights that were entrenched in the Constitution have been broadly ignored;
- our new society has failed dismally to promote many of the values on which our new Constitution was founded - particularly with regard to human dignity and the achievement of equality and non-racialism;
- too many South Africans are afflicted by inadequate education, health and municipal services and by unacceptable levels of inequality, poverty and unemployment;
- our non-racial democratic Constitution and our economy are under enormous pressure from fundamentally racial and totalitarian ideologies;
- we are now a more racialised society than we have been at any time since 1994 - a society in which the prospects of individuals are once again being determined by their race and not by the content of their character;
- ugly racial stereotypes are once again being propagated by government and political leaders engage in inflammatory rhetoric inciting harm against minorities.

As Mr De Klerk pointed out on Friday, 31 January "... South Africa in 2020 is emphatically on the wrong road: it is heading - not toward a 'New Dawn' - but toward very dark and threatening storm clouds". He called on South Africa to "return to the road of freedom, toleration and non-racialism that we charted in our Constitution with so much hope and goodwill 24 years ago."



FW de Klerk
FOUNDATION

The FW de Klerk Foundation is sure that this is also the road that Nelson Mandela - 30 years after his release from prison - would have chosen.

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