

## **PRESIDENT RAMAPHOSA, THE PALESTINIANS AND ISRAELIS - AND SOUTH AFRICA'S DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION**

The FW de Klerk Foundation agrees with President Ramaphosa's recent statement that South Africa's democratic transition presents an example for the resolution of intractable problems everywhere - including the current conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians. As he observes: "As Citizens of a country that was able to turn its back on race-hatred and bloodshed and build a society rooted in human rights for all, it is our collective hope that the people of Israel and Palestine will follow a similar path: that they will find each other, and that they will find peace."

South Africa's transition to constitutional democracy is one of the most notable examples in recent - or perhaps any - history of how "intractable conflicts can only be solved through peaceful negotiations". It was based on the idealistic premise that conflicting parties could put their trust in solemn agreements and constitutions for the long-term assurance of their fundamental rights - rather than having to descend again and again into the uncertainty, irrationality, and brutality of armed force.

Our entirely home-grown process developed approaches and mechanisms that could assist other conflicted societies - particularly in its inclusivity; its apparent ability to reconcile bitterly opposed parties; its opening Declaration of Intent; the various working groups at CODESA and the involvement of technical experts in the constitution drafting process. Finally, in December 1993, we emerged with an interim constitution that opened the way to our first fully democratic election and laid the foundations for our present constitution - that includes a universally admired and justiciable Bill of Rights.

Unfortunately, many of the rights and freedoms in the 1996 constitution have since then been eroded, diluted - or have simply evaporated - possibly as part of a 25-year gradualist programme. The cultural and language rights that minority parties insisted on in the 1996 constitution have not been honored; the crucial prohibition of unfair racial discrimination has been swept aside by legislation and by the courts; the history and culture of our minorities are being progressively excised from the national identity; and the courts imply that some minorities do not have a right to culture rooted in their histories and traditions.

At the same time, the economic sphere in which minorities are permitted to operate is being progressively constricted to the declining percentage of the population that they represent - and they are now confronted by the very real threat that their land and property might be expropriated with little or no compensation. Their President tells them that they "are not the rightful owners of land" to which they hold title; that they are "the bearers of the original sin" of their ancestors and that they are not really part of "our" people. Their government no longer makes them feel welcome in the country of their birth - and the land of their ancestors.

President Ramaphosa's statement on Palestine is, alas, filled as much with invective arising from South Africa's conflicted past - as it is with invective against the Israelis over their conflicted present. 10 of its 26 paragraphs revert to the ANC's passionately nurtured - and



incessantly repeated - grievances arising from its struggle against white governments of the past. They call into question the degree to which we have actually “found each other” and are building “a society rooted in human rights for all”.

The greatest contribution that South Africans can make to international peace would be to show the world that the solemn agreements on which our democratic transition was based are being faithfully honored in letter and spirit by all the parties involved. Unfortunately, when the Israelis look at South Africa’s experience, they are unlikely to be convinced that our unraveling national accord is the best model to follow.

This is tragic - because, in the final analysis their problems can be solved only by credible agreements that assure justice for all - just as our own mounting crisis can be resolved only by reverting to the faithful implementation of our constitutional accord and by honoring the values on which it was founded.

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