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**SPEECH BY FORMER PRESIDENT FW DE KLERK
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THE STORIES OF SOUTH AFRICA

It is a pleasure to talk about South African history in a country with such a long and distinguished history - and at a school whose alumni have contributed so greatly to Britain and to the world.

It is, of course, impossible to understand the past 40 years in South Africa without understanding the preceding 400 years. Britain played a major role in the evolution of that history - as it did in the histories of so many countries throughout the world.

The British first occupied the Cape in 1795 and then annexed it in 1806.

Our history in the 19th century was dominated by the British conquest of the three most prominent peoples of the subcontinent - first - between 1779 and 1878 - the Xhosa - Nelson Mandela's people - in the Eastern Cape; then, in 1879, the Zulu people under King Cetshwayo; and then finally, between 1899 and 1902, my people the Afrikaners.

After the Anglo-Boer war, Britain decided to establish a federation of its principal colonies in southern Africa along the lines of the successful federations that it had set up in Australia and Canada. The crucial difference was that in the other dominions the white populations greatly outnumbered the indigenous peoples - while in South Africa they comprised - at that time - less than 25% of the total population.

Nevertheless, in keeping with the colonial approach of the times, Britain gave white South Africans a monopoly of power in the newly established Union.

For the next 40 years South Africa developed along the lines of the other Commonwealth dominions. Until the mid-50s, in a continent that was still dominated by European powers, white minority rule in South Africa seemed unexceptional. In a world in which racial discrimination was still shockingly the rule, South Africa's segregation policies elicited little criticism.

This is the world into which I was born in 1936 and in which I grew up as a young man. My first memory is of sitting on my father's shoulders at the laying of the foundation stone of the Voortrekker Monument to commemorate the centennial of the Great Trek. Our main concern was the re-establishment of an Afrikaner Republic and our principal opponents were - not black South Africans - but Afrikaans and English-speaking South Africans who favored closer ties with Britain.

However, the world and Africa were changing.



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As the tide of imperialism ebbed from Africa, South Africa found itself floundering in the last pool of white rule. We were glaringly out of step with the new international norms of non-discrimination, equality and self-determination that had been articulated in the 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.

On 3 February 1960 Prime Minister Harold Macmillan told the South African parliament that *“the wind of change is blowing through this continent, and whether we like it or not, this growth of national consciousness is a political fact.”* In the same speech he gave recognition to the nationhood of white South Africans: *“...here in Africa you have yourselves created a free nation. A new nation. Indeed, in the history of our times yours will be recorded as the first of the African nationalists.”*

The next 30 years were dominated by escalating confrontation between what Macmillan had described as this “new” and “free” European-descended nation, on the one hand, and the rising tide of black national consciousness on the other.

Between 1960 and 1989 South Africa was sucked into a vortex of deepening isolation and escalating conflict.

By the mid-1980s we found ourselves on the back of an increasingly angry and fractious black tiger.

The world was shouting at us to dismount - which we dearly wanted to do. However, we had profound existential fears about the tiger dismounting process:

- Firstly, how would we be able to maintain our right to national self-determination? We felt just as strongly about our right to rule ourselves as any other nation. What assurance was there that, having surrendered power, we would be treated fairly by a majority with genuine grievances about the manner in which it had been treated in the past?
- Secondly, how could we be sure that one-man, one-vote would not lead to the chaos, tyranny and economic decline that had characterised the decolonisation process in so many other parts of Africa? Post-independence Africa was littered with torn-up constitutions. By the mid-1980s there had already been more than 80 coups in Africa and there were only two or three genuine democracies.
- Finally, we were worried about the possibility of a communist take-over. This was not a question of “reds under beds”. Throughout the 70s and the 80s virtually all the members of the ANC’s National Executive Committee were also members of the SA Communist Party. The SACP controlled the ANC’s armed wing. The Soviet Union was involved in a major military intervention in Angola, fronted by the deployment of up to 50 000 Cuban troops. For more than 10 years our armed forces had been involved in escalating operations against Cuban and Soviet supported forces in southern Angola.

We searched desperately for solutions.



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During the 1960s and 1970s we tried territorial partition - but it was a complete failure: our attempt to unscramble the South African omelette proved to be impossible and led to even greater injustice.

We tried reform:

- in the early 1980s we extended trade union rights to all workers;
- in 1983 we attempted to include the Coloured and Indian minorities in the same polity as whites;
- by 1986 we had repealed 100 apartheid laws;
- in 1988 we extended substantial powers to black municipalities; and
- throughout the 80s we searched for power-sharing models that could accommodate the political rights of black South Africans without threatening those of our minorities.

However, these reforms simply poured petrol on already inflamed expectations: the battle cry of the ANC was not “Reform!” - it was “Amandla!” - and “Amandla” means “Power”!

Nevertheless, South Africa was already changing. Rapid economic growth during the 1960s and 1970s was impacting economic relationships and political opinions:

- Black disposable income rose from 29% in 1960 to almost 50% in 1994;
- By 1994 three times as many black youths were matriculating as whites - and there were more black students enrolled at university than whites;
- Black matriculants and graduates were moving rapidly into white-collar jobs;
- A whole generation of young Afrikaners had joined the middle class. They no longer shared the fiery nationalism of their parents; they were going to university and were exposed to international influences: as a result, they were becoming increasingly uncomfortable with apartheid.

By 1986 my colleagues in the National Party and I had accepted that the only solution to our problems lay in reaching agreement with the genuine representatives of all South Africans on a new and inclusive constitution.

This was the Rubicon that my predecessor, PW Botha, would not cross.

At the end of the 1980s history opened a window of opportunity for change:

- By 1987 all the principal parties had accepted that they could not achieve their objectives through armed force and that there would have to be negotiations.
- The decisive South African victory at the Battle of the Lomba River in Southern Angola in October 1987 was a turning point. President Gorbachev pulled the plug on Soviet and Cuban military intervention in southern Africa and instructed the Cubans and Angolans to reach an agreement with South Africa.



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- The ensuing Tripartite Agreement of 1988 led to the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola and to the successful implementation of the UN Independence Plan for Namibia - which South Africa had ruled since 1915 under a disputed League of Nations mandate.
- In February 1989, in a surprise move, PW Botha resigned as leader of the National Party. I was elected in his place by a National Party caucus that clearly wanted change;
- In November 1989 the fall of the Berlin Wall signalled the collapse of Soviet Communism and the victory of liberal democracy and free market economics.

We realised that the circumstances for successful negotiations would never again be so favorable. So, on 2 February 1990, in a speech that I delivered in Parliament, we opened the way to constitutional negotiations. We leapt through the window of opportunity that had been blown open by the winds of change from Eastern Europe.

It was 30 years less one day after Harold Macmillan's Winds of Change speech.

The following four years were a roller coaster of negotiations punctuated by escalating violence and recurrent crises.

- Most of the violence was caused by turf wars between the ANC, the Zulu-based Inkatha Freedom Party and the black consciousness movement, AZAPO. In all, about 23 000 died in political violence between 1960 and 1994 - the great majority during the four years of negotiations.
- In March 1992 I called a Referendum among the white electorate to counter claims by white conservatives that I no longer had a mandate to continue with the negotiations. I won with a majority of almost 69%.
- In June 1992 the ANC, fearing that it had made too many concessions during the negotiations, decided to withdraw from the talks. In what it called the "Leipzig Option" it organised massive demonstrations and rolling strikes that it hoped would lead to the fall of the government - just as the East German government had fallen in 1990.
- On 26 September 1992, the ANC's return to the negotiations prompted the IFP and some right-wing parties to walk out of the negotiations.
- On 10 April 1993, Chris Hani, the leader of the South African Communist Party, was assassinated - bringing the country to verge of conflagration. The crisis was defused by the statesman-like intervention of Nelson Mandela.
- The negotiations resumed in 1993 and resulted in agreement on an Interim Constitution in terms of elections would be held on 27 April 1994.
- Crucially, the ANC did not have a blank cheque to write the final constitution. The Interim Constitution required it to comply with 35 pre-agreed constitutional principles.
- Our last hurdle was to ensure that the Zulu-based Inkatha Freedom Party would participate in the elections. We succeeded with only a week to spare.

Nelson Mandela made an indispensable contribution to the success of the negotiations. He was a man of remarkable charm, charisma and integrity. Our relationship was often - from his side - acrimonious. We were, after all, leaders of opposing parties with widely divergent



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political philosophies locked in crucial negotiations over the future of our country. However, whenever crises arose, we were always able to come together to resolve them. After our retirement from politics we became friends

The ANC won our first election with 62.7% of the vote. My party achieved 20.4% and the IFP won 10.5%. Both Mangosuthu Buthelezi of the IFP and I served as Deputy-Presidents in the new Government of National Unity.

That Constitution has served us well. President Mandela worked tirelessly to promote reconciliation and national unity. His successor, President Mbeki, implemented pragmatic economic policies that achieved growth rates above 5% between 2005 and 2007; that balanced the budget and brought national debt to only 23% of GDP.

President Mbeki's orthodox economic policies were, however, anathema to the ANC's Alliance partners, the South African Communist Party; the trade union federation, COSATU and Julius Malema, the firebrand leader of the ANC Youth League. At the ANC's five-yearly National Conference in 2007, they ousted Mbeki as the President of the ANC and elected Jacob Zuma, a Zulu populist, in his place.

The new administration introduced economic policies intended to move South Africa - under the influence of the SACP - toward socialism. Combined with the 2008 global economic crisis, these policies have resulted ever since then in sluggish economic growth, the doubling of the national debt and the discouragement of investment.

To the consternation of the SACP and COSATU, President Zuma turned out to be a far more wily politician than they had imagined.

While they were trying to capture the State for socialism, he succeeded in capturing it for himself, his family and his friends - including the notorious Gupta brothers. In 2008, the Scorpions - an independent and highly successful corruption-fighting unit - were disbanded. The National Prosecuting Authority, important elements in the Police and intelligence services were soon under President Zuma's control.

Fortunately, President Zuma's chosen successor as President of the ANC was defeated by Cyril Ramaphosa at the ANC's National Conference in 2017. In 2018, Ramaphosa replaced Zuma as President of the country.

Now, 25 years after the establishment of our new society, South Africa is experiencing serious problems with sluggish economic growth; unacceptable levels of unemployment, violent crime and inequality - and increasing racial mobilisation.

However, the situation is not all gloomy:

- our courts are independent and do not hesitate to strike down unconstitutional legislation or executive action;



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- we have a vibrantly free media and effective civil society organisations;
- we have a world-class private and financial sector. Few people realise that our automobile industry contributes almost as much to the economy as mining and that we produce more than 600 000 vehicles a year;
- President Ramaphosa is re-establishing the integrity of key state institutions - including the National Prosecuting Authority and State-owned enterprises.

We have enormous economic potential:

- we have the largest mineral deposits in the world;
- we can become a world-beating tourist destination;
- we are one of the principal gateways to Africa - which is one of the world's fastest-growing regions; and
- we have more than 900 000 young people at university.

As always in our history, South Africa continues to be confronted by seminal challenges:

- President Ramaphosa must continue to restore the integrity of State institutions and to repair the damage done during President Zuma's nine lost years.
- We must return to the pragmatic economic policies that were followed by the Mbeki government and that are set out in the government's own National Development Plan;
- We must promote national reconciliation and combat racism from any quarter.
- We must successfully tackle the problems that confront us all, including our shockingly poor education system; unacceptable levels of unemployment, inequality, poverty and crime; and
- Most importantly, we must rally around the foundational values in our Constitution and work for the realisation of its vision of a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights.