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**SPEECH BY FORMER PRESIDENT FW DE KLERK
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RESPONSIBLE LEADERSHIP IN A RAPIDLY CHANGING WORLD

It is a great pleasure for me to address the youth delegates at this Nobel Peace Laureate Summit in Mérida.

I have no doubt that one of the central challenges that your generation will confront will be the management of the enormous changes that you will experience during your lifetimes.

You will need very special leadership skills to deal with change - because:

- It is accelerating;
- It is unpredictable; and
- It is fundamental.

During the past century - and particularly since World War II - there has been an exponential acceleration in the pace of change. Our society has changed more during the past 10 years than it did in the first 10 000 years of our development as a species. It is interesting to note that the flint hand axes that were made by our ancestors - *homo erectus* - 1.5 million years ago were indistinguishable from the hand axes that they were still making half a million years ago - for a million years there was no advance in our technology.

Today it is impossible for any single individual to keep track of the technological progress that we make in just one year. And any of these changes might affect our future as dramatically as the hand axe did one and a half million years ago.

Change is also unpredictable. Some of the main developments that have fundamentally transformed the world were entirely unforeseen only 35 years ago: think of the internet and mobile phones; the collapse of the Soviet Union and international communism and AIDS.

The change that we are experiencing is also fundamental. It affects virtually every aspect of our lives.

- It is changing the relationships between men and women, husbands and wives and parents and children.
- It has profound implications for the traditional family. 40% of mothers in Europe are now unmarried.
- More than half Europeans state that they do not belong to any religion.
- Change is affecting our value systems and traditional conceptions of morality.



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- It will continue to transform the way we work; the way we spend our free time and the way we communicate and obtain information.

I would like to share some perspectives with you about the historic change process that we South Africans have had to manage during the past 29 years. I would also like to talk about the leadership qualities that change management requires.

I am often asked whether the decision that I took after I became President in September 1989 to end apartheid and transform South Africa was the result of some or other Damascus Road experience.

It wasn't. Neither was it a sudden change of direction. It was, in fact, the culmination of a long process of introspection and reform that started in 1978 when my predecessor, PW Botha, became Prime Minister.

Introspection and acceptance of the need to change are the first steps in the process of transformation.

Resistance to change is deeply ingrained in us. We fear the unknown and dread the prospect of moving into uncharted waters. In our case, in South Africa, the whites and other minorities had well-grounded reasons to fear change.

We feared that change would end our right to self-determination which had been the driving force of my people - the Afrikaners - for more than 150 years. We were deeply concerned about our place as a minority in a new non-racial South Africa.

Nevertheless, by the beginning of the 80s it was becoming increasingly clear that we were on the wrong course. We realised that we were being drawn inexorably into a downward spiral of conflict and isolation. We spent a great deal of time coming to terms with the realities of our situation and wrestling with the need for fundamental change.

For me the key point was simply the realisation that the policies that we had adopted, and that I had supported as a young man, had led to a situation of manifest injustice.

I was a member of a cabinet committee that wrestled with the need for transformation. By 1986 we had accepted that all South Africans - regardless of race - would have to be accommodated within the same constitutional system.

Having accepted the need to change, the next challenge was to avoid the temptation of *pretending* to change. Very often countries, companies and individuals who know they must change, pretend to change.

For years we white South Africans also fooled ourselves that we could 'reform' apartheid and thereby avoid the traumatic decisions and risks that real change always involves. It was only



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when we accepted that we would have to take extremely uncomfortable decisions and risks that real change could begin.

The next challenge was to articulate a clear and achievable vision.

In my first speech after my surprise election as leader of the ruling National Party in February 1989 I made it clear that we intended to embark on a process of transformation. I said that:

*“Our goal is a new South Africa, a totally changed South Africa;
a South Africa which has rid itself of the antagonism of the past;
a South Africa free of domination or oppression in whatever form;
a South Africa within which the democratic forces - all reasonable people - align themselves behind mutually acceptable goals against radicalism, irrespective of where it comes from.”*

On 2 February 1990 I presented a new vision to the South African Parliament, of a peaceful and democratic solution to our problems. I set goals that included:

- a new and fully democratic constitution;
- the removal of any form of discrimination and domination;
- equality before an independent Judiciary;
- the protection of minorities, as well as of individual rights;
- freedom of religion; and
- universal franchise.

By 1994 - after very many crises - we South Africans had adopted a new Constitution that achieved virtually all of these objectives.

The first requirement of leadership is actually to become a leader - and this is never easy.

History awards no prizes to people who have the right answers. The world is full of armchair experts. The art, in the first place, is to succeed in the very arduous process of becoming a leader. Only then can you really have an impact on events and steer them into what you believe is the right direction. History recognises only those who have the ability to translate their vision of what is right into reality.

A leader must have a weather eye open for changes in political tides and currents. He must also be ready to ride the wave of history when it breaks. After I became President, my hand was greatly strengthened by the historic events that were occurring in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. The collapse of international communism helped to allay fears of Soviet expansionism in Southern Africa. By February 1990 we were ready to launch our transformation process.

Change leadership also requires calculated risks.



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We realised that our decision to embark on a process of transformation would involve enormous risks and unleash a chain of events with far-reaching and unpredictable consequences. At times it was rather like paddling a canoe into a long stretch of dangerous rapids. You may start the process and determine the initial direction. However, after that the canoe is seized by enormous and often uncontrollable forces. All that you can do is to maintain your balance, avoid the rocks and steer as best you can - and right the canoe if it capsizes. It is a time for cool heads and firm, decisive action.

By following this approach, we South Africans were able to manage the very difficult transformation of our society.

But what about your generation?

What changes will you encounter on your journey to the future?

Strangely enough, the best way to predict the future might be identify the broad factors that have driven the history of our species in the past.

The first of these factors is climate change. Our species really came to the fore when it had to survive recurrent ice ages - the last of which ended a mere 12 000 years ago.

Today we are confronted with irrefutable evidence of global warming, which, if left unchecked, could contribute to catastrophic climate change. We must face the undeniable reality that the present rate and nature of human development is unsustainable: there are simply too many of us and too few resources to go around. A series of only three or four bad harvests caused by global warming could plunge much of the world into famine.

Whatever else happens, future human development will take place within a framework that will be created by our deteriorating environment. The environment might well prove to be the single most important determinant of our future during the coming century.

Your generation is absolutely right to be deeply concerned about climate change and to raise your voices for concerted action by governments to protect the world and the environment that you will inherit.

The second factor that will determine our future will be demographics. Much of human history has been driven by the movement of people.

- The first successful migrations from Africa between 100 000 and 70 000 years ago led to the population of most of the planet; to the extinction of our main competitor, the Neanderthals, and, in effect, to the beginning of history.



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- Much of mankind's history during the past 3 000 years has been driven by migrations: migrations of tribes from central Asia against the ramparts of the Roman Empire; migrations of the Huns and Mongols across the Eurasian landmass; and
- the huge migrations from Europe after the 16th century, which dramatically changed the history and demography of much of the planet. These migrations shaped the history of my country - and also of Mexico and all the countries of the America's and Australasia.

Populations in many parts of the first world have started to shrink. People are living longer and longer with fewer and fewer productive workers to sustain them. Fertility rates in Europe - at only 1.5 children per woman - are way below sustainability. To maintain its present population, it is estimated that Europe will have to attract tens of millions of immigrants by 2050. Current fertility rates mean that in some countries, by the time your generation is in its sixties, children may comprise only one-tenth of the population.

At the same time, there has been a substantial increase in life expectation. A girl child born in Japan today can expect to live until 107. However, rapid advances in medical technology could well extend life expectation beyond 110 - with enormous implications for the nature of the societies in which your generation will live.

Everywhere immigrants and refugees are on the move and populations are becoming more diverse. The dominant image of our times may be the hundreds of thousands of people who are desperately trying to sail across the Mediterranean Sea in search of a better life in Europe - and those who are crossing Mexico in their attempt to enter the USA.

The days of the single nation state are gone. Two-thirds of the world's countries now have minorities comprising more than 10% of their populations.

One of the central challenges in the emerging multi-cultural world will be the accommodation of diversity. Already, nearly all the conflicts in the world are within countries between ethnic, cultural and religious communities.

The distribution of the world's population is also changing rapidly. Before World War II, Europe accounted for more than 20% of the global population. In recent decades its population has remained static. Now it represents only 10% - and is shrinking - while the population of its predominantly Muslim neighbours in the Middle East and North Africa have quadrupled since 1950.

Africa's population will double to 2.5 billion during the coming decades. In 2100 - when many of you will still be around - Asia will account for 46% of the world's population and Africa for 40%. North and Central America will represent only 7% of the human population.

Yet another factor that has traditionally driven human history is technology.



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Technology is developing at an unprecedented rate. Each new technology - the further expansion of the internet and information technology; nano-technology; our ability to decode the human genome and artificial intelligence - can have fundamental implications for your generation and for the future of mankind.

During the coming 15 years the world will be changed by new technologies as dramatically as it was by the entirely unforeseen advent of the internet and cellphones during the past 25 years. Now, more than half of the people of the world have access to the internet and to the global information and communication resource that it represents. Every day we now send more than 130 billion emails - probably far more global communication than occurred during the entire period before the 18th century.

We do not know what the game-changer technologies will be - but they might include breakthroughs in the provision of cheap and abundant energy - or the ability to desalinate sea water at a very low cost.

They will probably include developments in medical science that might eliminate many of the deadly diseases and prolong life for decades.

They will include advances in virtual reality that will make entertainment virtually real - and provide an escape from reality for billions of people. The interface with the internet might no longer take place through flat screens - but in three dimensions with the use of holograms.

Robots will carry out most jobs far more effectively than humans. Already computers can often give better and cheaper diagnoses than experienced doctors. They can also write contracts and provide legal opinions more effectively than lawyers.

As Elon Musk warns - robots will be able to do everything we do - and more. His greatest fear is that artificial intelligence may quite soon pose a mortal threat to humanity.

This geometric expansion of human knowledge and technology leaves us increasingly with one disturbing conclusion: Virtually nothing is impossible.

A fourth historic determinant has been the competition between different systems of organising human society. If there was any point to the long and tragic story of war and conflict it may have been to illustrate which approach to government works best in advancing human wellbeing.

In the 17th and 18th centuries - at the very time when it was conquering much of the rest of the world - Europe produced only 12% of the global GDP, compared with the more than 45% generated by China and India. By 1913 - following its emergence from the industrial revolution - Europe's share of global GDP had risen to almost 30% while the combined share of China and India had dropped to only 15%. In 2011, the Euro area's share had shrunk to 17.1% - and the OECD projects that it will decline to only 11% by 2030.



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Asia is once again resuming the dominant economic role that it has played throughout most of recorded history. One of the main change factors during the coming decades will be growing competition between the emerging Asian giants - China and India, on the one hand - and the USA and Europe on the other.

The question is whether the West's individual freedom-based market system will be able to compete with China's authoritarian state capitalism.

So, the world which your generation will inherit will probably be dominated by:

- a make or break struggle against climate change;
- radically shifting demographics - with older and far more multi-cultural populations;
- unimaginable new technologies - that will change virtually every aspect of our lives by solving many of mankind's problems - and perhaps, in so doing, create new ones; and by
- increasing competition between the West and the East - with far-reaching implications for Western notions of democracy and individual freedom.

To sum up: We are being swept along by an unprecedented tide of change that is accelerating, fundamental and largely unpredictable.

The future will be determined by the factors that have driven human development in the past:

- By climate change;
- By demographics;
- By technology; and
- By competition between different systems of organising society.

Your generation will have to manage unprecedented change - and in doing so it will have to develop very effective leadership skills.