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HOW WILL DIFFERENT CULTURAL, RELIGIOUS AND LANGUAGE GROUPS COEXIST IN A RAPIDLY CHANGING WORLD?

It is a great pleasure for me to be able to address you today on a topic that is so relevant to so many of the developments that are shaping the world in the 21st century.

People who imagine that ethnicity and religion are artificial hang-overs from a regrettable and unlamented past are deluding themselves.

They are still central to the lives of billions of people throughout the world.

On the one hand, they provide us with much of our meaning, purpose and identity as human beings.

On the other, they are at the root of most of the conflict in the world.

The questions that I would like to address today are:

- How will we be able to maintain cultural and religious identity in a rapidly globalising world?
- How will we deal with the conflicts arising from clashes between diverse cultures and religions?
- How will different religious and cultural communities within the same countries be able to live together in peace, toleration and mutual respect?

We derive much of who we are from the cultures to which we belong, from the languages that we speak and the religions in which we believe - or do not believe.

The world's rich diversity of cultures, languages and religions provides the multi-coloured threads from which the glorious tapestry of human experience is woven.

They are an integral part of who we are.

- Our languages play an important role in moulding our identity. I sometimes wonder whether our thinking processes are influenced by the syntax of our languages. It is almost impossible to imagine the Italian national character coupled with the German language - or the German national character arising from the French language.

- In a similar way our cultural heritage impacts virtually every aspect of our lives - including the food we eat; our fairy tales and literature; our manners; our sense of humour; the games we play and the festivals that we celebrate.
- For billions of people throughout the world, religion is the lens through which they view the universe. It is the foundation of their values and the primary source of meaning in their lives.

We have numerous overlapping identities - all of which contribute to our uniqueness as individuals. For example:

- I am FW de Klerk, a human being.
- I am a male.
- I belong to the De Klerk and Coetzer families.
- I am a member of the Gereformeerde Kerk.
- I am an Afrikaner.
- I speak the Afrikaans language.
- I am a South African.
- I am an African.
- I am also a member of the great Western European culture.
- I am a citizen of the world.

None of these identities is mutually exclusive. All of them enrich me and make me who I am. I am proud of all of them and ashamed of none.

These identities are all central to our human dignity - the enjoyment of which is perhaps the most fundamental of all human rights.   A core objective of national and international law should accordingly be to protect us in the enjoyment of all the identities that make us who we are.

But unfortunately, this is often not the case.

The reality is that although language, culture and religion are central to our being, they are also at the root of most of the conflict in the world today.   Since the beginning of this century there have hardly been any wars between countries. Virtually all conflict is now within countries between cultural, religious and language communities.

All three of the world's major ongoing wars - those in Afghanistan, Yemen and Syria - have their roots in religious conflicts between Islamic fundamentalists, and Shi'a and Sunni Muslims. In all three cases these conflicts are being exacerbated by the involvement of external regional and global powers pursuing their own strategic goals.

The world's seven minor wars - in Somalia, Nigeria, Iraq, Southern Sudan, Mali, the Sahel and Libya - likewise have their origins in the clashes between ethnic tribes, Islamic fundamentalists, moderate Muslims and Christians.

Unresolved ethnic and religious tensions also lie at the root of numerous national and international crises – including:

- the plight of Rohingya refugees fleeing from Burma;
- the current treatment of the Uighurs in Sinkiang;
- the ongoing crisis in Kashmir - between Muslims backed by Pakistan and Hindus supported by India;
- the clash between the Ukrainian-speaking majority and the Russian-speaking minority in Ukraine; and
- the unresolved problem of the Kurds, a people without a state, straddling Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran.

Despite all this, it must be stressed that Steven Pinker is right: we live in the most peaceful time in human history. Last year there were fewer than 150 000 conflict-related deaths - which is a rate of only 0.01 conflict deaths per 100 000 of the world's population. By comparison, the global murder rate of 6 per 100 000 is 60 times higher.

Nevertheless, there is no room for complacency.   The challenge of accommodating diversity is becoming increasingly acute in a shrinking, globalised world.

The preservation of cultural diversity is also one of the central issues in the debate on where globalisation is leading us. Many people believe that the identity, purpose and dignity that they derive from their cultural heritage are being threatened by the global tidal wave of English-language mass culture. The pervasive media, entertainment and communication influences that it broadcasts are brashly consumerist and often respect few boundaries or traditional values.

One of the inescapable implications of globalisation is an enormous increase in the interaction between people from different backgrounds, cultures, languages and religions.   The management of the resulting diversity will be one of this century's greatest challenges.

The days of the homogeneous nation state are numbered. Throughout the world, populations are becoming more cosmopolitan: the world's 200 countries include more than 6 000 different cultural communities. More than 130 countries have cultural minorities comprising more than 10% of their populations.

In many countries - particularly in North America, Europe and even in South Africa - cultural diversity is being augmented by new waves of migrants seeking economic opportunities and freedom. Everywhere people are on the move - and everywhere they are confronting once homogenous societies with new challenges.

Among the most evocative and heart-breaking images of the past decade are photos of refugee children drowned on Greek beaches - or videos of refugees crammed into unseaworthy craft - trying to cross the Mediterranean or the English Channel.

The accommodation of new waves of immigrants has become one of the most controversial issues in Europe. It has played a significant role in recent elections in a number of European countries and has led to ugly reactions, especially in the eastern and southern EU countries.

The European Union is confronted by the challenge of striking a balance between core humanitarian values on the one hand, and political reaction on the other. It must also take into consideration the need to facilitate the immigration of sorely-needed skilled workers - necessitated by the shrinkage of the populations most European countries. It is expected that the EU will experience a shortage of 20 million workers by 2030.

As you are all too aware, immigration has also been a central factor in the current Brexit crisis. Control of Britain's borders was a key concern in the decision of many of those who voted to leave. Another factor was their wish to restore British national sovereignty against what they perceived as the encroachment of an amorphous European super state.

One of the key issues confronting Europe - with or without the United Kingdom - will be the balance that is ultimately struck between states with deeply-entrenched national identities on the one hand - and the new emerging European super-identity on the other.

Immigration and demographics also played a central role in the 2016 election of President Donald Trump. Trump supporters fear that the traditional European-descended dominance of the United States is under threat from changing demographics - and particularly from the emergence of Hispanic Americans as the country's largest ethnic minority. Trump's election slogan that the USA should "build a wall" was a direct appeal to the visceral ethnic fears of the diminishing white majority.

But it was a Canute-like attempt to stem the inevitable tide of demographic change. Hispanics will include more than 100 million people - or one in four Americans - by 2050. Already they make up more than a third of the populations of Texas and California and more than 40% of the population of New Mexico. But will they continue to accept the convention that all migrants should eventually become English-speaking - or will the United States increasingly have to accept bilingualism and multi-lingualism?

In countries throughout the world the challenge of diversity is unleashing new forms of identity-based populism.

- In several European countries it has given rise to extreme nationalist groups and aggressive mobilisation against immigrants;
- In the United States political discourse is characterised by extremist statements regarding minorities and immigrants, in language that would have been unacceptable five years ago;

- In India - the world's most populous democracy - there is deep concern among religious minorities - including the country's 190 million Muslims - over the growth of aggressive Hinduism under Prime Minister Modi.
- In South Africa we have recently witnessed new bouts of xenophobia directed at businesses owned by immigrants from the rest of Africa. We are also witnessing the ugly re-racialising of political discourse, with political leaders openly calling for mobilisation against the white minority.

Lurking behind much of the tension throughout the world is the unresolved challenge posed by Islamic fundamentalism.

Islamic fundamentalists are motivated by a deep sense of religious and cultural grievance. They believe that the rampant advance of globalised consumer culture, with its attendant political and social ethos, poses a deadly threat to their deeply conservative societies. They fear it with every fibre of their being, precisely because their people find its shiny consumer products, its flashy, free-wheeling lifestyle and its amoral pop culture so alluring.

They believe that the attendant liberal values of unrestrained freedom, democracy, sexual emancipation, abortion on demand, gender equality and materialism are irreconcilable with the austere teachings of their Prophet.

The result is fanatical rejection of western culture and its chief exponent, the United States.

What lies at the root of these cultural and religious tensions?

There are a number of factors:

- There is fear - fear of the other - fear of the real or imagined threat that is posed by people who belong to different cultures and who profess different faiths.
- There is ignorance - ignorance of the cultures and religions of others and the contribution that immigrants can make to the economic well-being of everyone;
- There the past. Memories of inter-community conflicts are deeply engraved in the histories of many communities.
    - the Protestants in Northern Ireland still march on 12 July every year to celebrate their victory over Catholics at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690;
    - every year the Serbs still remember their defeat by the Ottomans at the Battle of Kosovo 630 years ago;
    - memories of slavery still hang like a pall over race relations in the United States;
    - Jews have been the victims of distorted history for more than 2 000 years;
    - So it is with South Africans. Our deeply divided past is still the elephant in the room in interactions between whites, blacks, coloureds and Indians.
- Finally, there is the cynical exploitation of cultural and religious differences by populist politicians who see the stoking of xenophobia as an easy root to political power. The spectre of populism is threatening inter-community relationships throughout the world.

We South Africans attempted to address these threats to inter-community harmony when we adopted our new Constitution 23 years ago. Our new Constitution:

- recognised our 11 official languages and proclaimed that they should enjoy parity of esteem.
- required us to strive for unity within our diversity.
- prohibited discrimination, *inter alia*, on the basis of race, language and culture.
- enjoined the State to take special action to develop our indigenous languages.
- recognised the right to receive education in the language of one's choice in public educational institutions, where such education is reasonably practicable; and that
- people belonging to cultural, religious and ethnic communities would be able to enjoy their culture, practise their religion and use their language.

Unfortunately, virtually every one of these provisions has been ignored or diluted since the adoption of the Constitution in 1996.

- English is increasingly the single *de facto* official language.
- The supposed official status of the remaining 10 languages is an illusion.
- Little or nothing has been done to develop our indigenous languages.
- Afrikaans, as a language of public education, is under enormous pressure.
- The cultural identity of Afrikaner and British-descended South Africans is routinely denigrated by government leaders and their heritage is being progressively excised from the national identity.

During the past 24 years South Africa has been moving further and further away from the ideal of cultural, religious and language diversity - and from the halcyon days when Nelson Mandela led the way in promoting reconciliation and national unity.

So what do we - and the international community - need to do right now to promote a world that will be safe for diversity and that will be able to counteract inter-community conflict?

We need to listen to the advice - and heed the warning - of the United Nations' Development Programmes Human Development Survey, which insists that multi-culturism is the most effective response to the challenge of diversity. It points out that:

> "*Cultural liberty is a vital part of human development …. People want freedom to participate in society without having to slip off their chosen cultural moorings. States face an urgent challenge in responding to these demands. If handled well, greater recognition of identities will bring greater cultural diversity in society, enriching people's lives. But there is also a great risk. These struggles over identity, if left unmanaged or poorly managed, can quickly become one of the greatest sources of instability within states and between them - and in so doing can trigger conflict that takes development backwards.*"

The report goes on to deal with - and dismiss - various myths relating to the management of intercommunal relations and concludes that "*policies recognising cultural identities and encouraging diversity to flourish do not result in fragmentation, conflict, weak development and authoritarian rule. Such policies are both viable, and necessary, for it is often the suppression of culturally identified groups that leads to tension*."

As we in South Africa have discovered, the answer to diversity is not secession, partition and devising ways to enable communities to live apart. It is to adopt approaches and to establish norms that will enable different cultural and ethnic communities to live together peacefully and in mutual respect within the same states. To achieve this, we must reach broad agreement on the cultural, linguistic and educational rights that such communities should enjoy. We need to do much more to define and protect the rights of cultural, ethnic and religious minorities throughout the world:

- We need to adopt a new and comprehensive international convention to protect the rights of cultural, religious and language communities, just as we have already done for individuals, for women and for children.
- We need to promote acceptance of the role that education can and must play in the preservation of religious, cultural and language diversity.
- We need to mobilise against politicians who stir up racial and religious animosities to promote their own political agendas.
- We need to measure the behaviour of governments against these norms.

By doing these things I hope that we will be able to find the answers to the three questions that I posed at the beginning of my talk - so that:

- we will be able to maintain cultural and religious identity in a rapidly globalising world;
- we will be able to eliminate religious, cultural and ethnic conflicts; and so that
- we will be able to build societies in which different religious and cultural communities will be able to live together in peace, toleration and mutual respect.