

Interview with FW De Klerk

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Let me make some points that I thought about after reading your interview request. Firstly I am deeply committed to help ensure, through my own participation, and that of my foundation that we succeed in building the new South Africa into a truly non-racial state. I think an important departure point is not to confuse non-racialism with the absence of multiculturalism. To put it differently, multiculturalism is as important in South Africa to my mind as nation building is. We are a multicultural country. Our Constitution, which really should be upheld as a solemn pact reached through intensive negotiation, recognises on the one hand the multicultural nature of our population, and on the other hand the necessity of non-racialism. Therefore we are not facing a choice between non-racialism and multiculturalism. The constitution and past agreements bind us to strike a balance between these two concepts.

Q: Some may argue that it is difficult to balance the concepts, because if you embrace multiculturalism you are embracing the differences of races. If you look at non-racialism you are trying to surpass the differences.

Yes, but I am not advocating multiracialism, I am advocating multiculturalism. There is a very big difference between the two concepts. By recognising we have 11 official languages, by recognising the concept of mother tongue education for those who would like to do so, provided it does not lead to discrimination on the basis of race or colour. And many other aspects in our Constitution cement the acceptance of the reality that we are a multicultural nation. How it should be brought in balance with non-racialism to my mind commands a few approaches.

Firstly, each of the 11 linguistic groups in our country should be made to feel that they are appreciated and recognised building blocks of the greater South African nation. No South Africans should be made to feel that he or she is a second-class citizen because they belong to minority cultural groups within the country. At the same time we should develop and encourage a common loyalty to southern Africa, the country of us all. And we should identify how we can unite our multicultural nation behind common goals and common values and symbols. We have achieved it in the past. We achieved it on 27 April 1994. We achieved it in the constitution, which encapsulates such values and goals. We achieved it in 1995 with the Rugby World Cup. We achieved it with the soccer World Cup, where all our people rose above themselves and took hands across the divides of the past and across their cultural differences and worked together.

I think all South Africans face now the big challenge of achieving the same unity of purpose in dealing with the challenge of fighting poverty and unemployment which goes hand-in-hand with that. To bring it a bit to a conclusion, non-racialism means that no South Africans should feel that because of his or her ethnic origins they are being discriminated against. This is a cornerstone of our Constitution and our Bill of Rights.

Therefore when dealing with concepts such as black economic empowerment and affirmative action, both of which are necessary and which I support, and have been written into the constitution. I firmly believe there must be a balance struck between the need for pursuing those calls, on the one hand, and on the other hand, the need to do it in a way which does not constitute institutionalised discrimination. In this regard, the quest for representativity which we are seeing at the moment in South Africa, is to my mind counter-productive towards building a non-racial South Africa. The way in which affirmative action has been taking place, continues to take place, is counter-productive towards building a truly non-racial South Africa.

Q: Is there anything else that you would like to add about the features you see as a part of a non-racial society?

I think that in the process of building a non-racial society it is a fundamentally important that there should be ongoing dialogue. Solution orientated dialogue across colour lines and ethnic lines. This should be done in order to develop an action plan is to address the big problem of inequality. We should be talking with each other instead of shouting at each other.

Q: what would ongoing dialogues look like in practice?

I think they should take place at various levels. I think it should take place between individuals in their normal activities, at the workplace, between neighbours, between the parents whose children attend the same school etc. That's the one level. Another level should be through existing forums or new forums, to be established aimed at promoting such dialogue. My foundation is actively involved in this process. I also think, may be on the big issue of poverty and unemployment and inequality we need to establish, once again, a truly representative forum, CODESA style, to In a systematic way try and achieve a broad consensus about how these issues should be dealt with.

Q: So both macro and micro levels?

Yes.

Q: Are there anymore features you want to mention before we go onto challenges?

I think I've touched on challengers are ready. I also think that leaders, and I'm not only talking about political leaders, should accept the challenge to keep their constituencies on track with regard to the issue of non-racialism. At the moment the debates on this is being dominated much too much, by radical elements on all sides. The voices of moderation are not sufficiently heard. If one follows the media then you see the publicity which has been given to Malema, and the like, and the racist rhetoric from some elements in the white constituency, in reaction to this.

Q: Which elements are you referring to?

Most newspapers show what sms's they receive. If the letter columns in a newspapers, you see specifically also from white Afrikaner's, who are not necessarily representative of all Afrikaners, a vicious racist backlash.

Q: what is your sense of the Afrikaans community's feeling about non-racialism now?

I think people tend to forget that in the 1990 referendum about one third of the whites voted against the reform path. I think if a proper study is done it will be found that the overwhelming majority, over 69%, voted yes and want non-racialism to succeed. The most vicious racist attitudes that that exist can be traced back to the 30% had voted against reform.

Q: Is there is still a sense in the white community that people want to overcome the radical elements that have recently arisen?

There is no question in my mind that if we were to hold a referendum today amongst whites, asking the question do you remain committed to the values and principles and goals contained in the constitution, and would you like us to succeed in building a truly non-racial state, once again the overwhelming majority will vote yes for that and the minority will vote no. The internal debate in Afrikaner circles is becoming quite dynamic at the moment. The voices of moderation are intensifying

their efforts to be heard and not to be characterised by the utterances and philosophies espoused by what essentially is a clear minority, within Afrikaner circles.

Q: To go back to challenges, you mentioned affirmative action and BEE are not effective. Do you want to say a bit more about that, and any other challenges you see in building a non-racial South Africa?

As I interpret the Constitution it demands that a balance be struck between affirmative action on the one hand and merit and representativity on the other hand. Let me give you an example. Recently when judges had to be appointed for the Western Cape, notwithstanding the backlog in the courts, the judicial services commission left some posts vacant, notwithstanding the ability of absolutely fit and proper people, just because they are white. They were not appointed. No suitable black or coloured candidate could be found and therefore the post was left vacant. It is a clear example of how affirmative action should not take place. Secondly, in the whole approach about representativity in management, and in professions, account is not being taken of the real percentages of the number of people who have been trained to do the job. Let me use a fictitious example. Let's say only 16% of chartered accountants in South Africa are black, then to say 45% of posts must be filled by blacks does not make sense. Nonetheless this is what is taking place. My percentages are fictitious but the principle is taking place in quite a number of professions where specialist training is required to do the job properly. Insufficient account is being taken of availability and percentages when it is looked at through ethnic glasses.

Q: How could things be done differently?

By being realistic. By rather saying, using the same example, to increase the number of black chartered accountants by 2020 to such a percent. And then demand when that percentage is achieved, the same percentages should apply in the workplace.

The broad point is that the real empowerment of people disadvantaged by policies of the past lies in education and training. And our education system is in a mess. And this fact is unfortunately admitted by the government of the day this is a step forward as in the past there was denial about it. Education and training, quality education and quality training, holds the key to bring about greater equality. This should be seen as the cornerstone of empowerment and of affirmative action.

Q: What elements of society do you feel should play an important role in fostering non-racialism? Example you mentioned education.

Training is very important. It is more of a technical nature. I think it was a mistake to force the technikons into unification with the universities. I think they were fulfilling a very special place in technical training. Part of the problem with a shortage of engineers lies in the closure of these technikons, or rather making them more academic institutions and less pragmatically orientated.

I also think if we look at the consensus which exist in South Africa, that delivery, service delivery has deteriorated dramatically. Once again admitted by the government of the day. The solution lies in revising the 'how' of affirmative action and black economic empowerment.

Let me make one broad point:

I am not obsessed with the constitution, but let me repeat that the constitution is a pact that we reached. It contains a fine balance between seemingly conflicting ideas and goals and principles. It demands that a balance be struck between everything. There are no primary rights and secondary rights in the constitution. All rights and all responsibilities are equal value. What is happening in the debates at the moment, dominated by what I refer to as the extremists, is that the more radical

elements in the ANC alliance are trying to elevate the things they like in the constitution to primary rights and to relegate things on which Mr Mandela, under his leadership, the ANC made concessions on under his leadership, those rights and responsibilities as being secondary to such primary rights. This is unconstitutional. If this is allowed to continue, and if the constitution is eroded around every corner, it will be the biggest setback at the quest for a truly non-racialism Africa can suffer.

Q: Personally based on your experiences pre-94, do you think non-racialism is on the right track, is it what you envisaged?

I think the relative ease with which the transition within education took place, the relative ease with which residential segregation was broken down, point us to the fact that yes we are on the right track. I could cite other examples where really we are witnessing a natural transition towards more relaxed inter-ethnic relations. I think it is particularly true of the youth. In my interaction with university students and so on I find them absolutely relaxed about the issues of racism and almost naturally being non-racial in their thinking and their approach. So I am positive. If I put the negatives and the positives on a scale I remain positive about the future of South Africa and our capacity to fulfil our full potential.

Sometimes negativity dominates the media because good news is not news.

Q: is there anything you personally do on a regular basis to promote non-racialism? Is it anything you would like to share as a practical step?

I have my foundation. I employ a number of people. I employ two lawyers full-time. Under our umbrella we have established the constitutional rights centre. We often advise people of all races on their constitutional right. We are at this moment poised to go to the constitutional court to fight racial discrimination taking place against people of colour. Yes I am almost full time involved in activities involved in upholding the constitution. If we uphold the constitution we walk the path of non-racialism.

Q: what do you think helps people feel part of the non-racial society?

I think sport is very important in building non-racialism. I think rigid implementation of quotas in sport militates against non-racialism. Once again the how of the affirmative action is important. The emphasis should be on development of talented young sportspeople as the best path towards natural non-racialism. But let me once again say, in the quest for non-racialism, it is fundamentally important to make each and every South African, irrespective of his or her race or ethnic origins, feel that their concerns are receiving adequate attention and that they are appreciated, in the Mandela philosophical style, as fellow South Africans of equal value to the nation, and equal importance to the nation.

Q: Do you feel this isn't happening at the moment?

I think the how of affirmative action, the unbridled and unchecked racist rhetoric with in the governing party, but also in other places, militating against taking the whole nation along on the road of non-racialism. It is creating more divisiveness.

Q: How would you see a change taking place?

By the moderate voices making themselves heard. By the moderates not sitting in corners but coming out of those corners and being on the playing field, and voicing their rejection of the growing racism which we see. Not only the ANC leaders come out, but leaders across the board, business leaders, religious leaders, political leaders, cultural leaders, leaders in all spheres. The church I think have a specific role to play in this.