

1993

The Nobel Peace Prize 1993 Presentation Speech

Francis Sejersted, Chairman of the Norwegian Nobel Committee

Your Majesties, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Norwegian Nobel Committee has decided to award the Nobel Peace Prize for 1993 to Nelson R. Mandela and Frederik Willem de Klerk for their work for the peaceful termination of the apartheid regime, and for laying the foundations for a new, democratic South Africa. It is a great pleasure to be able to welcome the two Prize-Winners here today.

This is the third time the Nobel Committee has awarded the prize to human rights advocates who have actively participated in the struggle against the apartheid regime in South Africa. There are many reasons why South Africa has attracted so much attention. After the second World War and the fall of the Hitler regime, racism as a system was thoroughly discredited. The general trend was to remove institutionalised racial barriers at the same time as the old colonial empires were being dismantled. But just when this was the general trend, South Africa chose to move in the opposite direction. From 1948 onwards the apartheid regime was consolidated and systematically, through legislation and organisational forms, developed into a brutal regime of oppression based on criteria of race alone. Thus it also became the symbol of a particularly debasing form of oppression. The apartheid regime gave racism a face. When ANC leader Albert Lutuli was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for 1960, more than a generation ago, he drew attention to the systematic, institutionalised undermining of human equality. As a Christian, Lutuli anchored the idea of equality in his religious beliefs:

As a Christian and patriot, [I] could not look while systematic attempts were made, almost in every department of life, to debase the God-factor in man or to set a limit beyond which the human being in his black form might not strive to serve his Creator to the best of his ability. To remain neutral in a situation where the laws of the land virtually criticised God for having created men of colour was the sort of thing I could not, as a Christian, tolerate.¹

By awarding the prize for 1960 to Lutuli, the Norwegian Nobel Committee initiated what was in some regards a new policy. From then on, the struggle for human rights became a much more important criterion for awarding the Peace Prize than it had been previously. This criterion has been controversial, for it has been pointed out that work for human rights has created conflicts in many areas. On the surface, and in the short-term, this is true. But it also seems true that on the whole the committee's policy has gained widespread support throughout the world and within different cultures.

If anything close to a stable peace is to be achieved, respect for each other's character, integrity and dignity is an absolute requirement. This is an important point in Immanuel Kant's famous 200-year-old essay on everlasting peace.² He links peace to the idea of justice, which was the cornerstone of his political philosophy. During the cold war, and with the type of ideologically based oppression that existed in the totalitarian regimes then, one could have been led to believe that peace was dependent on the balance of terror, and that oppression created stability. These must have been the

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thoughts motivating those who criticised any consideration of the struggle for human rights as work for peace. Today, we know that these regimes of oppression were the most fragile. They did not yield freedom, nor did they offer stability. The breaches of the most fundamental human rights and the systematic undermining of human dignity and self-respect were bound to give rise to opposition. Such regimes always find themselves in a vicious circle sooner or later, facing the danger of disintegration into wars, chaos and bloodshed.

South Africa had long been caught up in such a vicious circle. However, on the eve of the 1990's the regime reversed its policies under its new president, Frederik Willem de Klerk. Nelson Mandela was released unconditionally after nearly 28 years of imprisonment, and the dismantling of apartheid became the official policy of the regime. To what degree this was a strategic adjustment to a situation characterised by internal dissolution or the fruits of moral reflection as well, each individual participant must determine for himself. South Africa had long been caught up in a vicious circle, and only time can show whether these initiatives came too late.

The natural partner in the negotiations that were initiated was the ANC, whose leader Nelson Mandela went straight from prison to the negotiating table. Mandela had early taken a stand as an active opponent of apartheid. Initially, he was among those who were inspired by Gandhi's methods of nonviolence. But the climate hardened inexorably, as the Sharpeville massacre of 1960 showed.² In 1962 Mandela was imprisoned, and his confinement would last almost 28 years. Some months after his release in 1990 we had the pleasure of receiving Mandela here in Oslo to the so-called "Hate Conference" organised by the Nobel Committee in cooperation with the Elie Wiesel Foundation.⁴ It was a conference which enjoyed the participation of an exceptional group of outstanding men and women. And in this setting Nelson Mandela stood out. He spoke with a moral authority and in a constructive tone that made a profound impression. This is my personal recollection, but I know that I was not alone in feeling this.

Many people have remarked on the apparent lack of bitterness that characterises Mandela's conduct since he was released from prison. He himself has said that perhaps he would have harboured bitter thoughts if he had not had a job to do. Then he adds as an afterthought that if only all those who have made such great sacrifices for the sake of justice could see that they have not been in vain, that would serve to eliminate the bitterness from their hearts.

The two Prize-Winners, from their highly disparate points of departure, the one from the side of the oppressors and the other from the side of the oppressed, have taken initiatives to break the vicious circle that their country was caught up in. These are initiatives the world has taken note of, initiatives which reflect personal integrity and great political courage on the part of both men. They have both chosen not to dwell on the deep wounds of the past. In so doing, they are different from leaders in many other conflict areas, even though the wounds in South Africa were deeper than perhaps anywhere else. Mandela and de Klerk have chosen reconciliation rather than the alternative, which would inevitably have been an ever more bitter and bloodier conflict. Another aspect of the policy of reconciliation is compromise and the recognition that one must give in order to be able to take. Political action on this basis reflects the highest political virtue. But in order to attain success, all parties must be willing to sacrifice.

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Eminent statesmanship has been demonstrated in South Africa, and it is astonishing what has been achieved since Mandela was released in 1990. The institutionalised apartheid regime has been dismantled, a provisional constitution has been adopted, a broadly based Transitional Executive Council has been established. The date for fully democratic elections has been set.⁵ There can be no doubt that the main credit for these highly significant steps towards a peaceful transition to a democratic South Africa is due to these two Prize-Winners.

Yet we know that the process is not finished. The danger of setbacks exists. There are groups who are not party to or who have withdrawn from the negotiations. South Africa today is still a society marked by bitterness, fear and violence. The number of people killed while the negotiations have taken place is in the tens of thousands. The vicious circle has not been decisively broken. Thus, there are today two competing trends - conflict and reconciliation. In the ongoing process it is vital that all parties demonstrate their goodwill by doing their utmost to bring the violence to an end. It is also essential that the groups now outside the negotiations are drawn into active participation in the continuing process of reconciliation and compromise. There is an unquestionable need for more statesmanship.

Should we, then, have waited to award the prize until the definitive breakthrough of the policy of reconciliation? Some would say so. However, the question is whether it makes sense to talk of a definitive breakthrough. Work for peace and reconciliation requires ceaseless effort. Slackening off means opening for new conflicts. Thus the Norwegian Nobel Committee, when awarding the Nobel Peace Prize, will always have to enter into processes in one way or another. In his will, Nobel wrote that the prize should be given to the person or persons who in the preceding year have contributed the most for the benefit of peace. It is the conviction of the committee that Nelson R. Mandela and Frederik Willem de Klerk have made a brilliant contribution and attained astonishing results with their policy of peace and reconciliation. They have given peace a chance. Whether peace will prevail, time will have to show.

Alfred Nobel also intended the institution of the Peace Prize itself to represent a positive contribution to peace. Thus it is the hope of the Nobel committee that this year's award will serve as a contribution, however small, for the peaceful development towards complete democracy in South Africa.

It is the privilege of the Norwegian Nobel Committee to award the Nobel Peace Prize. We do so in admiration and deep respect for those who manage to maintain their humanity in a world characterised by fear and brutality, who assume the responsibility to do something about the problems, and who succeed in doing so. The policy of reconciliation that Nelson R. Mandela and Frederik Willem de Klerk represent provides hope not only for South Africa: it is also a shining example for the world that there are ways out of the vicious circle of violence and bitterness.

1. Albert John Lutuli (1898–1967), Zulu tribal chief, president of the ANC and national leader of the nonviolent struggle for equal rights in South Africa, received the 1960 prize at the award ceremony in 1961. Chairman Gunnar Jahn of the Norwegian Nobel Committee asked in his presentation address, “Will the non-whites of South Africa, by their suffering, their humiliation, and their patience, show the

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other nations of the world that human rights can be won without violence?”. See Abrams, *Nobel Peace Prize*, pp. 178–180. The name is often written as “Luthuli”, but “Lutuli” was the spelling he preferred.

2. Immanuel Kant, (1724–1804), *Zum ewigen Frieden* (1975), translated by M. Campbell Smith as *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophic Essay* (London: 1903), reprinted in the Garland Library of War and Peace, New York: Garland, 1971.

3. In Sharpeville, a township in southern Transvaal, on 21 March 1960, a crowd of some 5,000 Africans passively faced 300 white policemen, who, in a moment of panic, shot 69 dead and wounded 186 others. The impact of this massacre was felt around the world, where the brutality of the apartheid regime was universally condemned.

4. In August 1990 the Norwegian Nobel Committee and the Elie Wiesel Foundation convened in Oslo a conference entitled “The Anatomy of Hate. Resolving Conflict Through Dialogue & Democracy”. It was attended by some 70 writers, scientists and academics from 29 countries, including Nobel peace laureates Elie Wiesel (1986), Mairead Maguire (1976), and Oscar Arias Sanchez (1987), Presidents Francois Mitterrand of France, and Vaclav Havel of Czechoslovakia, former U.S. President Jimmy Carter of the United States were among the speakers.

5. On 26 September 1992 Mandela and de Klerk signed a Record of Understanding confirming their agreement that a single, freely elected constituent assembly would draft a new constitution. On 23 June 1993 it was agreed that the elections would take place on 27 April 1994.

SOURCE: <http://www.nobel.se/peace/laureates/1993/presentation-speech.html>