

1993
Nobel Peace Prize Lecture
F.W. de Klerk

Acceptance and Nobel Lecture

Your Majesties, your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is a little more than six years to the end of this century and to the dawning of the new millennium. In three years we will mark the centenary of Alfred Nobel's death and in eight the hundredth year of this award.

The intervening years have witnessed the most dreadful wars and carnage in the long and violent history of mankind. Today as we speak,

the shells rain down on beleaguered communities in Bosnia;

there is bitter conflict in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan;

there are devastating wars and conflicts in Africa - in Angola, in Somalia and recently in Burundi; and

in my own country, notwithstanding the tremendous progress which we have made, more than 3 000 people have died in political violence since the beginning of this year.

As always, it is the innocent - and particularly the children - who are the main victims of these conflicts.

Above all, we owe it to the children of the world to stop the conflicts and to create new horizons for them. They deserve peace and decent opportunities in life. I should like to dedicate this address to them and to all those - such as UNICEF - who are working to alleviate their plight.

The question that we must ask is whether we are making progress toward the goal of universal peace. Or are we caught up on a treadmill of history, turning forever on the axle of mindless aggression and self-destruction? Has the procession of Nobel Peace laureates since 1901 reflected a general movement by mankind toward peace?

When considering the great honour that has been bestowed on us as recipients of this Peace Prize, we must in all humility ask these questions. We must also consider the nature of peace.

The greatest peace, I believe, is the peace which we derive from our faith in God Almighty; from certainty about our relationship with our Creator. Crises might beset us, battles might rage about us - but if we have faith and the certainty it brings, we will enjoy peace - the peace that surpasses all understanding. One's religious convictions obviously also translate into a specific approach towards peace in the

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secular sense. I have time only for a few perspectives on peace in this world and its effect on human relationships.

Peace does not simply mean the absence of conflict:

Throughout history, there has been an absence of conflict in many repressive societies. This lack of conflict does not have its roots in harmony, goodwill or the consent of the parties involved - but often in fear, ignorance and powerlessness.

There can thus be no real peace without justice or consent.

Neither does peace necessarily imply tranquillity.

The affairs of mankind are in incessant flux. No relationship - between individuals or communities or political parties or countries - remains the same from one day to the next. New situations are forever arising and demand constant attention. Tensions build up and need to be defused. Militant radical minorities plan to disrupt peace and need to be contained.

There can thus be no real peace without constant effort, planning and hard work.

Peace, therefore, is not an absence of conflict or a condition of stagnation.

Peace is a frame of mind.

It is a frame of mind in which countries, communities, parties and individuals seek to resolve their differences through agreements, through negotiation and compromise, instead of threats, compulsion and violence.

Peace is also a framework.

It is a framework consisting of rules, laws, agreements and conventions - a framework providing mechanisms for the peaceful resolution of the inevitable clashes of interest between countries, communities, parties and individuals. It is a framework within which the irresistible and dynamic processes of social, economic and political development can be regulated and accommodated.

In our quest for peace we should constantly ask ourselves what we should do to create conditions in which peace can prosper. It is easy to identify those forces and conditions which militate against it and which must be eradicated:

Peace does not fare well where poverty and deprivation reign.

It does not flourish where there is ignorance and a lack of education and information.

Repression, injustice and exploitation are inimical with peace.

Peace is gravely threatened by inter-group fear and envy and by the unleashing of unrealistic expectations.

Racial, class and religious intolerance and prejudice are its mortal enemies.

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Since the vast proportion of human history has been characterised by such conditions, it should not surprise us that much of history has been a lamentable tale of violence and war.

But there is reason for optimism.

Around the world forces which favour peace are on the move. Amongst those, economic development is fundamentally important. Economic growth, generated by the free market, is transforming societies everywhere:

It is helping to eliminate poverty and is providing the wealth which is required to address the pressing needs of the poor.

It is extending education and information to an unprecedented portion of the global population.

It is changing social and economic relationships and is placing irresistible pressure on archaic political and constitutional systems -whether these are of the left or of the right.

And hand in hand with economic development goes democracy. Wherever economic growth occurs it promotes the establishment of representative and democratic institutions - institutions which invariably develop a framework for peace.

It is highly significant that there has never been a war between genuine and universal democracies. There have been countless wars between totalitarian and authoritarian states. There have been wars between democracies and dictatorships - most often in defence of democratic values or in response to aggression. But there are no instances of truly free and democratic peoples taking up arms against one another. The reasons for this are evident:

It is difficult to incite people to aggression if they are educated and informed, if their basic rights are properly protected.

It is difficult to persuade people who have achieved a degree of material well-being to risk all in unnecessary conflict.

Such people will not easily be seduced by militarism or allow themselves to become cannon fodder.

The media - and particularly television - have stripped war and conflict of any of the glory or illusions which it might once have held.

Through these forces good progress is being made. The present worldwide constitutional development toward democracy, underpinned by economic development, augurs well for peace.

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It was also these forces which, more than any other, were responsible for the transformation of my own country and for the awakening of hope for all our people.

The basis for the fundamental reforms in South Africa was established, not by external pressure, but primarily by social changes which economic growth generated.

In as much as apartheid was broken down by pressure, that pressure primarily came - not from an armed struggle - but from the millions of peaceloving people moving to our cities and becoming part of our economy.

The realisation that far-reaching change had become inevitable was primarily influenced, not by political speeches and manifestos, but by the exposure to realities which were brought into millions of homes by television and radio.

However, the single most important factor which became the driving force towards a totally new dispensation in South Africa, was a fundamental change of heart. This change occurred on both sides which had been involved in conflict over decades.

It was not a sudden change, but a process - a process of introspection, of soul searching; of repentance; of realisation of the futility of ongoing conflict, of acknowledgement of failed policies and the injustice it brought with it.

This process brought the National Party to the point of making a clean break with apartheid and separate development - a clear break with all forms of discrimination - for ever.

Thus, we came to the point where we, as South Africans, could begin to bridge the generations of prejudice, enmity and fear which divided us. This process brought us to the negotiating table where we could begin to develop the frame of mind and frameworks for peace to which I referred earlier. They prepared the way for the new South African Constitution now being debated in Parliament. It *inter alia* provides for:

the establishment of a *rechtstaat*, a constitutional system where the law - the Constitution and a Bill of Rights - will be sovereign;

the protection of the basic rights of all individuals, communities and cultural groups through a Bill of Rights, in accordance with that which is universally acceptable;

an independent Constitutional Court, that will act as the guardian of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights;

clearly defined constitutional principles with which any future constitution will have to comply;

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a balanced division of functions and powers between strong provincial governments based on federal principles, and a strong central government and special majorities and mechanisms for constitutional amendments.

I believe that this transitional constitution provides a reasonable framework of agreements and rules, of checks and balances, which are necessary for peace in our complex society.

It ensures full participation in all fields of endeavour to all South Africans. It does not discriminate in any way on the basis of colour, creed, class or gender.

It contains all the major safeguards which all our communities will need to maintain their respective identities and ways of life. It also provides adequate guarantee for the political, social, cultural and economic rights of individuals.

I also believe that this framework for peace will succeed if we can now establish the *frame of mind*, to which I referred, which is necessary for peace - the frame of mind which leads people to resolve differences through negotiation, compromise and agreements, instead of through compulsion and violence.

I believe that such a frame of mind already exists in South Africa at the moment, however fragile it might be. All our leaders, including Mr Mandela and I, will have to lead by example in an effort to consolidate this frame of mind. We will need great wisdom to counteract the strategies of minority elements, threatening with civil conflict. We will have to be firm and resolute in defending the framework for peace which we agreed upon.

There is no room for complacency. All of us who believe in peace must redouble our efforts to reassure all our countrymen that their rights and security will be assured.

I have no doubt that we will succeed. There is a growing awareness among all South Africans of our interdependence - of the fact that none of us can flourish if we do not work together - that all of us will fail if we try to pursue narrow sectional interests.

Five years ago people would have seriously questioned the sanity of anyone who would have predicted that Mr Mandela and I would be joint recipients of the 1993 Nobel Peace Prize.

And yet both of us are here before you today.

We are political opponents.

We disagree strongly on key issues and we will soon fight a strenuous election campaign against one another. But we will do so, I believe, in the frame of mind and within the framework of peace which has already been established.

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We will do it - and many other leaders will do it with us - because there is no other road to peace and prosperity for the people of our country. In the conflicts of the past, there was no gain for anyone in our country. Through reconciliation all of us are now becoming winners.

The compromises we have reached demand sacrifices on all sides. It was not easy for the supporters of Mr Mandela or mine to relinquish the ideals they had cherished for many decades.

But we did it. And because we did it, there is hope.

The coming election will not be about the past. It will be about the future. It will not be about Blacks or Whites, or Afrikaners and Xhosas. It will be about the best solutions for the future in the interests of all our people. It will not be about apartheid or armed struggle. It will be about future peace and stability, about progress and prosperity, about nation-building.

In my first speech after becoming Leader of the National Party, I said on February the 8th, 1989:

"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 and against radicalism, irrespective of where it comes from."

Since then we have made impressive progress, thanks to the cooperation of political, spiritual, business and community leaders over a wide spectrum. To Mr Mandela I sincerely say: Congratulations. And in accepting this Peace Prize today I wish to pay tribute to all who are working for peace in our land. On behalf of all South Africans who supported me, directly or indirectly, I accept it in humility, deeply aware of my own shortcomings.

I thank those who decided to make the award for the recognition they have granted in doing so - recognition of a mighty deed of reformation and reconciliation that is taking place in South Africa. The road ahead is still full of obstacles and, therefore, dangerous. There is, however, no question of turning back.

One of the great poets in Afrikaans, N P van Wyk Louw, wrote:

"O wye en droewe land, alleen
onder die groot suidersterre.
Sal nooit'n hoe blydschap kom
deur jou stil droefenis? ...

Sal nooit'n magtige skoonheid kom
oor jou soos die haelwit somerwolk
wat uitbloeit oor jou donker berge,

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en nooit in jou'n daad geskied
wat opklink oor die aarde en
die jare in hul onmag terge;..."

Translated freely it means:

"Oh wide and woeful land, alone
Beneath the great south stars.
Will soaring joy ne'er rise above
Your silent grief?

Will ne'er a mighty beauty rise
above you, like the hail-white summer clouds
that billow o'er your brooding peaks
and in you, ne'er a deed be wrought
that over the earth resounds
and mocks the ages in their impotence?"

What is taking place in South Africa is such a deed - a deed resounding over the earth - a deed of peace. It brings hope to all South Africans. It opens new horizons for Sub-Saharan Africa. It has the capacity to unlock the tremendous potential of our country and our region.

The new era which is dawning in our country, beneath the great southern stars, will lift us out of the silent grief of our past and into a future in which there will be opportunity and space for joy and beauty - for real and lasting peace.

SOURCE: <http://www.nobel.se/peace/laureates/1993/klerk-lecture.html>