

3 February 2015

Dear friends and fellow South Africans,

On 2 February 1990 President FW de Klerk rose in Parliament and delivered a watershed state of the nation address. After 52 years of apartheid, and many more of racial discrimination and oppression, a way was being opened towards democratic negotiations in South Africa.

Political parties were being unbanned, political prisoners released, executions suspended, and emergency regulations on media and education were being lifted.

Finally South Africa was crossing the Rubicon.

Through many years of struggle, history had been moving inexorably toward this moment. The end of the Cold War had removed Western support for the National Party, as the threat of a communist takeover ended with the fall of the Berlin Wall.

There was no longer any contrived justification for apartheid. Its grand scheme of balkanising South Africa had fallen apart when the erstwhile KwaZulu Government, under my leadership, refused to accept nominal independence.

The apartheid regime wanted to be able to say that they were not responsible for the self-governing territories; that they were not oppressing black South Africans because these were not really their citizens.

My refusal to allow millions of black South Africans to lose their citizenship derailed this plan, inspiring Anglo-American's Mr Gavin Relly to declare that "Buthelezi was the anvil upon which apartheid was finally crushed."

I was not surprised by President de Klerk's speech. The National Party had approached Inkatha to begin bilateral negotiations in the years preceding this moment. With some two million card-carrying members, Inkatha was considered an

authoritative voice of the oppressed majority.

For two decades I had held more rallies under the banner “Free Mandela” than any other South African. I constantly quoted Mandela, despite it being illegal to do so. At every juncture, I demanded political franchise for all South Africans. I confronted successive leaders of the apartheid regime, making the case for freedom, equality and social justice.

But I would not negotiate bilaterally with the National Party, for I believed that all South Africans needed to come to the negotiating table if we were to negotiate a truly democratic future. The prerequisite I posed for negotiations was the release of political prisoners and the unbanning of political parties.

Our country had reached a point of no return. When President de Klerk addressed the nation on 2 February 1990, he mentioned only one person by name as having helped him reach the decision to take these steps. I understood why he thanked me by name, for while my actions had derailed apartheid’s grand scheme, they had also prevented outright war.

When the ANC’s mission-in-exile adopted armed struggle as their central strategy, Inkatha had disagreed. Inkatha was founded on the 1912 principle of non-violence and we refused to abandon the fundamental principle that maintained our struggle on the moral high-ground.

To Inkatha, bloodshed and slaughter were too high a price to pay to achieve what negotiations would ultimately achieve. We could not see our country reduced to ashes, with no spoils of war for anyone to enjoy.

Thus, as we stood on the threshold of democratic negotiations, President de Klerk thanked me for what I had done to bring South Africa to this point. I knew, however, that this was but the beginning of our journey.

Democratic negotiations saw the ANC suing for a centralised government in which all power is held at the top. They saw themselves as the moral victors and could not conceive of a future in which an ANC-led government would trample the rights of our people. They saw no need to include a Bill of Rights in our first democratic Constitution, and refused to consider that the future might hold an arms deal, a Marikana or an Nkandla.

The IFP, on the other hand, was well-versed in the ANC's tendencies and flaws and we sought the greatest possible protection of human rights and the strongest possible constitutional democracy. We pushed for power to be decentralised and advocated a federal state in which provinces could design tailor-made solutions, rather than being dictated to in a conveyor-belt system of governance from the top.

Thank God, the IFP won several important victories at the negotiating table, not least the creation of provinces and the inclusion of a Bill of Rights in the Constitution. More than two million votes secured our participation in the Government of National Unity, where we continued to fight for checks and balances against unfettered power in the ANC.

Twenty five years after President de Klerk's watershed speech, there is still much to be done to create the South Africa envisioned by so many generations as they struggled for freedom. My generation brought us across the threshold and laid a foundation for a stable, unified, prosperous and secure South Africa. It is up to this generation to take it forward, and to protect our gains.

Yours in the service of our nation,

Prince Mangosuthu Buthelezi MP

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