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**SPEECH BY FW DE KLERK
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THE FUTURE OF UNITY IN DIVERSITY IN SOUTH AFRICA

It is a pleasure for me to address this inaugural conference of the Centre for Unity in Diversity.

The Centre's goal is to promote the vision of unity in diversity that is articulated in the preamble to the Constitution. The time for such a Centre is ripe - because the concept of South Africa as a multicultural country in which all our communities enjoy equal respect and dignity is under growing pressure.

The main global threat to peace during the 21st century no longer comes from conflict between countries but rather from the inability of states to manage relationships between ethnic, cultural and religious communities within their own borders.

As I pointed out at our annual conference in February, the United Nations Development Programme has identified cultural liberty as a vital part of human development. If handled well, it can lead to greater cultural diversity and enrich people's lives. However, if it is mismanaged it can "quickly become one of the greatest sources of instability within states and between them". The answer is to "respect diversity and build unity through common bonds of humanity".

These questions are of particular significance to South Africa with its complex multiracial and multicultural population.

When we were wrestling with the need to extend full political rights to all South Africans during the 1980s one central concern was that white domination might be replaced with black domination.

However, by the time that I became leader of the National Party in February, 1989, we had accepted that all South Africans should enjoy full and equal political rights - but on a basis that would avoid new forms of racial domination or oppression. Indeed, in my first speech that I made after my election as party leader I said that:

"Our goal is a New South Africa;
A totally changed South Africa;
A South Africa which has rid itself of the antagonisms of the past" and most crucially
"A South Africa free of domination or oppression in any form..."



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We realised that a society free from oppression could be achieved only by negotiating a strong constitution that would protect the individual and communal rights of all our people. The subsequent negotiations gave extensive attention to cultural and language rights and to the prohibition of unfair discrimination on a number of grounds - including race, colour, language or culture. It called on South Africans to heal the divisions of the past and to strive for unity within our diversity. This is what the FW de Klerk Foundation wants to help achieve through its new Centre for Unity in Diversity.

The Constitution created ample space for language, cultural and religious diversity:

- It recognised our 11 official languages and proclaimed that they should enjoy parity of esteem.
- Government at national and provincial level would be required to use at least two official languages.
- People belonging to cultural, religious and ethnic communities would be able to enjoy their culture, practise their religion and use their language.
- Importantly, everyone would have the right to education in the language of their choice in public educational institutions, where such education was reasonably practicable.

It is only within such a framework of tolerant multiculturalism that all of us who live in multicultural societies can achieve our full potential as human beings in the many different areas and communities in which we operate.

It was accordingly gratifying when former President Nelson Mandela declared in his inaugural speech that “Never, never and never again shall it be that this beautiful land will again experience the oppression of one by another”.

Sadly, 22 years later, the vision of toleration, reconciliation and mutual respect that is called for in our Constitution is under enormous pressure.

Virtually every one of the constitutional provisions relating to cultural and language rights has been ignored or diluted.

English is increasingly the single *de facto* official language.

The official status of the remaining ten languages is increasingly an illusion.

Little or nothing has been done to develop our indigenous languages.

Afrikaans, as a university and school language, is under enormous pressure.

The protection against unfair discrimination that we so carefully negotiated in section 9 of the new Constitution was seriously diluted by the 2004 judgement of the Constitutional Court in *Minister of Finance v Van Heerden*.

The Court ruled that “If an (affirmative action) measure properly falls within the ambit of section 9(2) it does not constitute unfair discrimination” and need not therefore be subjected to scrutiny in terms of section 9(3) - which prohibits discrimination by the state -



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and section 9(5) which states that discrimination is automatically unfair unless it can be established that it is fair.

The only limitation placed by the Court on remedial action was that “a measure should not constitute an abuse of power or impose such substantial and undue harm on those excluded from its benefits that our long-term constitutional goal (of a non-racial, non-sexist society) would be threatened.”

In other words,

- measures that impose harm on citizens according to their race are permissible without having to establish whether they are fair - and
- non-racialism was relegated to a long-term goal - even though, as a foundational constitutional value, one would have thought that all citizens should axiomatically be able to enjoy it as a fundamental right.

In his concurring judgement, Judge Sachs stated that “it is important to ensure that the process of achieving equity is conducted in such a way that the baby of non-racialism is not thrown out with the bath-water of remedial action”. He expressed his belief that “it would be illogical to say that unfair discrimination by the state is permissible provided that it takes place under section 9(2).”

We have to face the unpalatable fact that our present government has adopted policies that are consciously directed toward harming the core interests of a section of the South African population according to their race.

In the name of promoting equality, the government is implementing comprehensive affirmative action and BBBEE policies that are incrementally limiting the economic and cultural space within which minorities can operate. The ultimate goal a society in which land, jobs, power and wealth will be allocated according to the racial composition of the population.

The lives of citizens would once again be determined to a large extent by their race - and not by merit, effort or enterprise.

This is bad news for minorities. Whites comprise 26% of the population over the age of 70 - but only 4.3% of children below the age of 5. Their share of wealth, jobs and land will decline commensurately over the next 30 years.

As the BBBEE noose tightens, it may become increasingly difficult for white South Africans - and their children - to find employment. Inevitably, many will be forced to leave South Africa.

Also, under demographic representivity, minorities would be subject to the control of the majority in virtually every area of their lives: in their jobs, in their schools, in their universities and in their sports.



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This is precisely the outcome that Nelson Mandela declared would never, never and never again, occur in our beautiful land.

If demographic representivity is consistently applied, minority traditions and identities at universities like UCT and Stellenbosch will with the passage of time be progressively eclipsed by the majority.

Majority domination is graphically illustrated by the government's decision last year to appoint a non-Afrikaans-speaking black South African as Chairman of the Board of the Paarl Afrikaanse Taalmuseum.

All of this is the antithesis of the idea of unity in diversity - the very ideal which our new Centre for Unity in Diversity would like to revive in cooperation with other like-minded organisations and individuals.

Unfortunately all these developments, to which I have referred, have gone hand in hand with a deterioration in the tone of the national debate on race.

A toxic argument has been seeping into our national discourse:

- alleged assumptions of cultural superiority - whether conscious or unconscious - automatically make whites racists - while it is impossible for blacks, under any circumstances, to be racists;
- whites have not atoned for the sins of the past;
- all the land they own was stolen from blacks;
- all their wealth is derived ultimately from black exploitation - and is therefore undeserved;
- nothing has changed in South Africa since 1994: the country is still owned and dominated by whites;
- whites - because of their association with past oppression - are responsible for continuing unemployment, inequality and poverty; and
- whites are 'colonialists of a special type' - alien interlopers in the African continent. So, for example, after the recent municipal elections, Malusi Gigaba referred to the DA's successes as 'colonial victories'.

That all of these propositions are either false or gross generalisations is neither here nor there: the problem is that they are being actively propagated by our present national government - and that they are fervently believed - particularly by the government itself and by the radicalised youth.

The propagation of racial stereotypes - and the attribution of negative qualities to all the individuals in a community - is the essence of racism. When this comes from governments in multiracial countries it is particularly dangerous. Each person is an individual - and should



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be judged on his or her own merits - and not according to the group into which they are arbitrarily consigned by others.

The toxic argument is increasingly evident in statements that openly advocated race violence at recent black protests; in the negativity towards minority identities and traditions at UCT and Stellenbosch; in demands by demagogues for the removal of the last vestiges of minority heroes and culture from the national identity; and in the social media where racial attacks have become the order of the day.

It was also evident in the degree to which some parties blatantly used racial mobilisation in their recent municipal election campaigns.

Sadly, these deep racial cleavages were also evident in the Constitutional Court's judgment last month in *City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality v AfriForum* regarding the renaming of streets in Pretoria. The Court declared that "the effects of the system of racial, ethnic and tribal stratification of the past must thus be destroyed and buried permanently". It added that this "would be achieved partly by removing from our cities, towns, "dorpies", streets, parks, game reserves and institutions, names that exalt elements of our past that cause grief to other racial groups or reopen their supposedly healing wounds."

This led Judges Froneman and Cameron to observe in their dissenting judgment that "the implication that may be drawn from the first judgment is that any reliance by white South Africans, particularly white Afrikaner people, on a cultural tradition founded in history, finds no recognition in the Constitution, because that history is inevitably rooted in oppression."

The judgment unfortunately created the perception that there is nothing in the history, culture and achievements of white South Africans that is honourable or worthy of commemoration. Because white culture and history are inextricably interlinked with the racial, ethnic and tribal stratification of the past, they must be destroyed and buried permanently.

By this measure, we would have to dispense with the histories of most of the peoples of the world since virtually all of them have been involved with "racial, ethnic and tribal stratification". This includes the Bantu peoples who dispossessed the original San people - and certainly the Zulus under Shaka.

But if white South Africans are stripped of their history and culture what remains of their foundational rights to human dignity and moral equality? What remains of the constitutional vision of unity in diversity?

So, it is clear that against this background the new Centre for Unity in Diversity is going to have its work cut out for it. It is equally clear that there is an urgent need for a consensus-seeking debate on the promotion of the Ubuntu-friendly ideal of Unity in Diversity.

Fortunately, the picture is perhaps not so gloomy as one might imagine.



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Race relations are in fact quite good. According to a survey by the Institute of Race Relations in February this year

- 76.2% of South Africans feel that race relations have stayed the same or improved since 1994.
- 85.4% agree that different race groups need each other.
- White South Africans support the need for redress.
- Black South Africans do not believe that whites should be treated as second-class citizens.
- Only small minorities of both black and white people hold hostile views of one another.

Also, the Constitutional Court reaffirmed some important principles in the *Tshwane v AfriForum* case relating to the respect that should be given to diversity.

- It emphasised the “need to respect white and black South Africans who played a crucial role in building and developing South Africa into the modern country of note it now is” and it recognised that street renaming processes should “be done sensitively and in pursuit of inclusivity, unity in diversity and recognition of the need for a sense of belonging for all.”

We can also take reassurance from the fact that whatever the government’s ideological goals might be, it knows that it cannot implement them without causing enormous damage to the country and to the interests of its own supporters. The reality is that our communities have a symbiotic relationship. It is impossible to harm one of them without harming them all.

Finally, the recent municipal elections signalled an important move away from race-based politics. For the first time South Africans voted in significant numbers according to their political convictions and not according to their race.

In its future work the Centre for Unity in Diversity should to my mind consider the following approach:

- It should encourage white South Africans to understand the depth of the hurt that was caused to non-whites by the policies of the past. The expression of views that might be interpreted as patronising should be avoided at all times. And white South Africans should make it clear that they are dedicated to building a better united South Africa for all its people.
- The Centre should take a firm stand in support of constitutional values and rights - and particularly those that recognise the needs of all of our cultural and language communities.
- It should insist that we should honour the agreements that we reached during the constitutional negotiations.



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- It should resolutely oppose unfair discrimination against any South African citizen and should reject racial ideologies that result in new forms of racial discrimination and domination.
- It should call on government to implement the language and cultural provisions in the Constitution.

It should as a top priority call for a new dialogue between South Africans from all our communities to promote positive relations between them. We need to return to the spirit of reconciliation, compromise and goodwill that characterised the first years of the New South Africa. Leaders of goodwill from all our communities must come together in a new CODESA:

- They should unambiguously condemn racism from whatever quarter it might come;
- They should call to account those who seek to incite violence;
- They should oppose negative racial stereotypes;
- They should urge all South Africans to treat one another with respect, courtesy and toleration;
- They should promote open dialogue between our communities to gain understanding of the sources of their anger; their fears and their sense of hurt;
- They should encourage South Africans to learn more about one another's cultures, languages and histories; and
- They should call on all of us to unite around the values in the Constitution and to work for a society in which those values will be translated into reality for all our people.

If we do this, we will achieve the vision of unity in diversity.