

Mr De Klerk, Elita, former Premier, Mr Friedrich, ladies and gentlemen,

I am really honoured to have been asked to speak on this occasion, celebrating the 20th anniversary of the FW de Klerk Foundation and the 25th anniversary of true democracy in South Africa. Apart from its founder, I would like to pay tribute to the contribution David Steward and Dr Theuns Eloff have made to the Foundation and the leading role it has played in defence of the Constitution.

As for the contribution FW de Klerk has made to the history of this country, we all remember the extraordinary scenes here in South Africa as, for the first time in their lives, millions of people who hitherto had been disenfranchised, for the first time in this country's history were able to go to the polls and cast their vote for the government of their choice. None of which would have been possible without the extraordinarily courageous decisions taken by FW de Klerk as President of South Africa.

And we should pause for a moment to remember just how remarkable those decisions were. When I arrived in South Africa as a British Ambassador in 1987, the country was in the grip of severe repression. It was an eerie experience to have to walk into the study of PW Botha at this time to argue with him about people's lives - in particular those of the Sharpeville Six.

The rest of the world had turned its back on South Africa. In response to the Rubicon Speech fiasco, international banks refused to continue lending to South Africa so that, henceforth, instead of importing international capital to fund South Africa's development, you were obliged to export this country's savings to pay the interest on your debts.

The police and army leaders had no idea what this meant. But the Governor of the Reserve Bank, Gerhard de Kock, understood all too well that henceforth South Africa's economy would be growing at a rate below that of the growth in population, with dire consequences for the future. That, ironically, is exactly the situation you find yourselves in once again as a result of the "lost decade" with Jacob Zuma.

You were increasingly isolated. The US Congress enacted comprehensive sanctions against South Africa. We did not believe in isolating South Africa, but we could not prevent you isolating yourselves. Most people outside South Africa, and many inside the country, believed that you were heading ineluctably towards ever greater violence and an eventual civil war.

I did not share their pessimism. In my very first meeting with FW, before he became President, he noted that I had served in Rhodesia during the ceasefire and elections there. "I just want you to know," he said, "that if I have my way, we will not make the same mistake they did."

"What was the mistake?" I asked. "Leaving it much too late to negotiate with the real black leaders", he replied.

Not long afterwards, I had dinner with FW on the day PW Botha banned the United Democratic Front. It was obvious that FW had not been consulted and did not agree with the decision. I made a speech at the time suggesting that "If you want to get out of a hole, the first thing you need to do is stop digging". Your Foreign Minister, Pik Botha, summoned me to protest about it, before telling me that he agreed with it.

Pik also used to look me straight in the eye and say: "Mr Ambassador, I just want to assure you that there is not a single South African soldier anywhere in Angola". Following which, we would both burst out laughing. But Pik and his remarkable Director General, Neil van Heerden, deserve a large part of the credit for getting you out of Namibia and the Cubans out of Angola.

When he took over from PW Botha, FW did so with a definite plan. One of his very first actions as the new President was not, at the time, publicised by him. It was to cancel South Africa's military nuclear programme. South Africa thereby became the first country on this planet to voluntarily relinquish its nuclear weapons.

His other first action was to lift the ban on major demonstrations, first in Cape Town, then across the entire country. He was determined to normalise the situation in South Africa and we pledged at the time to show support for what he was trying, in very difficult circumstances, to achieve.

At midnight on the day before he announced the unbanning of the ANC and the release of Nelson Mandela, FW telephoned me to say that: "You can tell your Prime Minister that she will not be disappointed!" I knew what that meant. Nevertheless, his announcement, coming when it did, astonished the world and most South Africans. After meeting him for the first time, the British Foreign Secretary, Douglas Hurd, wrote in his diary that FW was an "extraordinarily brave and courageous man".

For FW knew that in making that speech, he was changing South Africa forever.

Having released Mandela, their relationship was sometimes turbulent, due partly to some horrendous episodes of violence in the townships. But the underlying reality of that relationship was very different - for they depended on each other.

On one occasion, speaking about FW, Mandela said to me that "my greatest fear is to wake up one day and to find that he is not there." On another, after Mandela became President and made a speech criticising the National Party and FW, I went to see him. I said that "please remember that, but for FW, you might still be in jail!" Mandela laughed and said that I was right. He also said that FW had richly deserved his Nobel Prize "for he was who made peace possible".

I cannot think of these meetings with Mandela without a smile. For, though generally portrayed as saintly, he also was as wily and crafty a political operator as I have ever met. His strategy was to co-opt his warder who became his batman, then the Justice Minister, Kobie Coetsee. One of those next in line was me. "You are my advisor, what do you advise?" he would say. He kept urging me to join the ANC because - he claimed - "You think like us". I told him that I thought like him, but not like many of his colleagues.

Thatcher/Mandela meeting

We now have some mostly youthful idiots telling us that Mandela was a sellout. He never should have agreed to the Constitution of which most South Africans ever since have been justifiably proud and have done a great deal to defend. A myth has been propagated that the Government had no option but to surrender, with it also being suggested that the victory was won by the armed wing of the ANC.

The reality was very different. Both Mandela and Oliver Tambo were extremely realistic about the difficulty, verging on impossibility, of confronting the South African government militarily. When negotiations between the Government and the ANC broke down, I would have lunch with Joe Slovo, head of the South African Communist Party, at the end of which we would say to one another: "the only alternative to negotiations now is negotiations later". Tito Mboweni recently reminded the millennial youth that this was not a victory of one side over another: "we had to negotiate".

One of my Afrikaner friends at this time, in a meeting with FW, asked him why he was making all these changes then. "You know that we could have held out for another 20 years at least", he said. FW reacted angrily. "Yes", he said, "and what would we have done then?"

In a speech to the South African police he made clear that the old regime could only have been maintained by shooting more and more people every year and that, as a Christian, he was not prepared to do this. He told them explicitly that if there was a violent confrontation and thousands of people lay dead, "the problem would remain exactly the same as it was before the shooting started".

So how does the international community view South Africa today?

The first one person, one vote elections, and the leadership of FW and Mandela, led to a wave of euphoria around the world about South Africa. The avoidance of the expected disaster was hailed as a "miracle" and all your major trading partners hastened to re-establish their commercial ties and resumed investing in the country.

Mandela became a mythical figure, worldwide. I was very honoured to be counted by Mandela as a personal friend. I had over 30 meetings with him, one on one, in this period. Apart from his astonishing lack of bitterness, what struck me most about him was that he was absolutely colour-blind. At his trial, he said that he was against white domination. "I also am against black domination". He understood that South Africa and its economy could not thrive without a wholehearted contribution from the white community. He won their respect and more than their respect. They believed that he was committed to redressing the horrendous grievances and imbalances of the past, but also to reconciliation for the future. And they were right: he was.

The Government under him, run by Thabo Mbeki, and then Thabo as President, pursued growth-oriented economic policies, which were very successful in achieving rates of economic growth well in excess of the growth in population. This was a period in which South Africans on average all were getting better off. Mbeki never has got all the credit he deserves for this. By the time he was overthrown by Jacob Zuma in 2008, South Africa had made substantial economic process with the emergence of a rapidly expanding black South African middle class, though less success was achieved in addressing the vast problem of chronic unemployment.

At the time when the battle was underway to try to put an end to the catastrophic regime of Jacob Zuma, I wrote a book tracing the vertiginous fall in ethical and governance standards in this country from Mandela to Jacob Zuma. It spelt out, as many others were doing at the time, exactly how \$15 billion had been milked from the state-owned enterprises in South Africa for the benefit of the Gupta family and their associates.

Sherlock Holmes' old nemesis, Professor Moriarty, "the Napoleon of crime", would have been impressed by the audacity and sheer scale of the looting they engineered.

Just as they had in the last decade of apartheid, much of the world outside again was turning its back on South Africa, no longer seen as investible. If the Zuma camp had won the ANC leadership election in December 2018, not only Eskom, but also the country itself, would by now be bankrupt.

This was a period in which the regime spawned an astonishing array of villains, compulsive liars, Ministers taken captive, crime busters who were criminals, investigators who did not investigate (except those who were fighting corruption), plus some multinationals who should have known better seeking to win contracts through connections with the Guptas.

But the manner in which this disaster was averted gave great encouragement to your friends in the outside world. For this crisis threw up some heroes and an authentic heroine, just as this country did with the likes of Desmond Tutu and Helen Suzman in a prior era. Thuli Madonsela earned universal respect for her fearless and devastating reports on the malfeasance of the regime. Pravin Gordhan earned equal respect for his attempts to arrest the tidal wave of corruption - and still is paying the price for this in the counterattacks he continues to suffer from some very dubious sources today.

So how exactly was the country saved from a near total disaster? It was saved, firstly, by the South African press, or at any rate most of it showing itself to be formidably effective in exposing the corruption and malfeasance of the regime. Secondly, by your outstandingly independent and courageous Judiciary striking down numerous questionable actions and appointments by the Zuma Government.

And finally, we also witnessed the most effective campaign by Civil Society any of us have ever seen anywhere. The FW de Klerk Foundation played its part, in alliance with institutions like the Helen Suzman Foundation, Freedom Under Law of Johann Kriegler, the "Save South Africa" movement, Corruption Watch, Business Leadership South Africa and the Organisation Undoing Tax Abuse. Together, they made a remarkable impact.

To the relief of most of your friends in the outside world and of your main investors, all their efforts, plus the sudden appearance in the public domain of two hundred thousand emails, contributed to the incredibly narrow victory of Cyril Ramaphosa in the ANC leadership election.

What was most important about his victory was that it was won in the name of a return to Mandela values and respect for the Constitution, which Cyril helped to negotiate.

Ramaphosa is very well known to your friends in the outside world, who have confidence that he will do his utmost to re-establish government in the interest of the governed and a resumption of economic growth. They know that he is not a free agent and they worry that within the governing party there are many who have become addicted to entrenched corruption.

None of the \$15 billion syphoned away has been recovered. No one responsible for these crimes has been yet convicted. Hardly anyone has ever been charged. But South Africa does again have a President of whom it can be proud and who most of us believe will do what he can to clear up this mess.

Given the terrible legacy of the past and the millions of people who, although now benefitting from social grants, have been left behind, who have no jobs and little prospect of ever having any, it has come as no surprise to witness the rise of the sort of populist movement represented by the Economic Freedom Fighters.

The EFF were very effective critics of State capture under the Zuma regime. Since its overthrow, however, their propaganda increasingly has been racially-based and their economic solutions bear a close resemblance to those that have brought Venezuela to its knees.

On the other side of the political spectrum, the Democratic Alliance appeared to be making progress towards eventually offering the prospect of an alternative government or serious economic partner for the Government. Its progress recently has stalled not only because of the Ramaphosa effect, but also as a result of some self-inflicted damage. To overseas observers this is a worry, because the party has delivered under Helen Zille better government in the Western Cape than in any of South Africa's other provinces and is likely under Alan Winde to continue to do so.

I would like you to join me in paying tribute to Helen's extraordinary achievements as Premier of the Western Cape for the last decade, in the course of which the province has created more jobs than most of the rest of South Africa combined.

Leaders like Herman Mashaba in Johannesburg and Solly Msimanga in Tshwane also made real efforts to clean up government there. In Parliament and through the courts, the party played an important role in helping to bring the Zuma regime to account. The DA has pursued economic policies that work and are not based on the State trying to do everything. Like every country, including at present our own, this country needs a strong and credible opposition. That will depend on the DA embracing more wholeheartedly the need to broaden its support, so let's hope that they will do so.

Given the divisions of the opposition and the Ramaphosa effect, 57% of the voters concluded that only the ANC could "save South Africa" - in part at least from the ANC! But the Zuma camp is far from dead and buried and has been staging quite a comeback, for instance in the constant attacks on your leading corruption buster, Pravin Gordhan, led by your so-called Public Protector.

Then we have the Secretary General of the ANC warning all "deployees" like the President that they are all servants of the party and must do its bidding, which, he declares, entails an assault on the institution here most respected by overseas investors, namely the Reserve Bank. Plus, the idea of some "quantity easing", by which he means printing money which, he explained, would help to solve the problem of unemployment, poverty and inequality.

With growth less than 1% last year and likely to be no better this year, and debt, including Eskom, at 70% of GDP - the legacy of Jacob Zuma - you simply cannot afford to have wild statements of this kind, affecting all investors in your economy, needing to be corrected by your Finance Minister.

Your President is not by nature authoritarian - one of his attractive features. But he is not going to be able to restore confidence in the economy without asserting his authority over what is said about it.

You have overcome worse challenges than this and no one should underestimate the difficulties facing any government of South Africa. History is not made just by historical forces. It is also made by individuals - very much for the better in the cases of FW and Mandela, and for the worse in those of Mugabe and Jacob Zuma. Your President, despite all the challenges facing him, now has the chance to demonstrate how much better he can do than his predecessor, and I am sure he will.

But as these recent episodes have shown, that will depend on all the forces in this country that combined to hold the previous Government to account doing the same with this one. I am sure they will and that is why, in my experience, it invariably is a mistake to be a pessimist about South Africa, given the extraordinary courage and determination demonstrated by so many of you and by FW in circumstances much worse than they are today.

So let us, please, conclude with a toast to FW de Klerk for, in Mandela's words, "it was he who made peace possible."

Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen.