
EDITORIAL/REDAKSIONEEL

This year South Africans celebrated their first ten years of democracy, a decade of remarkable changes which two former presidents, F W de Klerk and Nelson Mandela, critically evaluated in consecutive addresses they made to a joint session of Parliament.

Speaking first, former President De Klerk paid tribute to Mandela and urged South Africans to work towards economic and social transformation within the framework of three imperatives.

First, South Africa needed transformation that, within the next ten years, would reduce the poverty and deprivation of the most disadvantaged citizens: “We must all work for programmes that will substantially increase employment, will reduce poverty, and will effectively combat AIDS and TB”.

Second, De Klerk said that transformation had to take place within the framework of the basic rules of the globalized world-economy: “We need to ensure that South Africa becomes a winning nation in highly competitive markets, so that we can become the first African nation to join the ranks of the First World”.

Finally, South Africa needed a transformation process that would enjoy the active and enthusiastic support of all communities, and all sectors of the economy. The government, of course, had to take the lead in that process, but all South Africans would have to work in unison to promote it. De Klerk said: “Our challenge now is to continue to bring real justice to all our people—to those who are suffering and to those who are already contributing to a better South Africa. I call on all our people now to continue to work together, to take hands and to make our wonderful country a shining example to the rest of the world.”

Former President Mandela, in his historic speech, expressed his most heartfelt wish for the country, when he said that “South Africans should never give up on the belief in goodness, and that they cherish that faith in human beings as a cornerstone of our democracy”. Mandela emphasised that human dignity was the first value mentioned under the founding principles of South Africa’s Constitution, and explained that this value was central to the country’s successful transition from apartheid to democracy.

He said: “We accord persons human dignity by assuming that they are good, that they share the human qualities that we ascribe to ourselves. Historical enemies succeeded in negotiating a peaceful transition from apartheid to democracy exactly because we were prepared to accept the inherent capacity for goodness in the other”.

Mandela warned that poverty, unemployment, preventable disease and ill-health and other forms of social deprivation continue to impact on the quality of life of South Africans. “Nothing impacts the dignity of a person so much as not being able to find work and gainful employment. HIV/AIDS continues to threaten the future in a particular frightening manner”.

He urged all citizens to be mindful of “the extent, depth and gravity of the challenges ahead as we set out to transform, reconstruct and develop our nation and our society”.

Within the context of these wishes and challenges for the next decade, it is now for social welfare and social work academics and practitioners to decide what our responses are going to be to make social development meaningful to all. How indeed are we going to contribute to the building of a new community in a rapidly evolving South Africa? We will have to offer critical reports or our reflections on how we can reduce poverty, increase employment and prevent ill-health. We need to

play a role in the monitoring of empowerment projects created by the government, such as the public works programmes at Gundo Lashu and Giyani in Limpopo. We will have to demonstrate how our research results, teaching and service rendering can broaden the field of knowledge of academics, students, practitioners and welfare organisations. Above all, we will have to explain how the knowledge gained from research can be used as guidelines to identify reliable practice strategies that can be used to promote social development and a good life for all in the next decade of democracy in South Africa.

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