



FW de Klerk
FOUNDATION

**REMARKS BY FORMER PRESIDENT FW DE KLERK
UNIVERSITY OF HAIFA
27 MAY 2014**

I would like to thank the University of Haifa most sincerely on behalf of all the recipients of Honorary Doctorates for the honour that has been bestowed on us today.

We represent a very wide variety of experience and expertise:

- Scientific Research
- History and Religion
- The performing and creative arts
- Diplomacy, governance and politics
- Psychology and philosophy
- Business, public service and support for good causes.

I am greatly honoured to have been included in this eminent group of individuals. All of them have excelled in their respective disciplines. All of them deserve the recognition that their honorary doctorates signify. All of them contributed to greater understanding and deeper insight. All of them made a significant difference towards a better world.

As far as I am concerned I have always regarded the honour of an honorary degree more as recognition of the great historical process in which I was involved - rather than as a reflection of my own role in that process. The reality is that I could not have successfully contributed to the democratic transformation of South Africa if all the circumstances had not been right and the timing had not been propitious.

History moves at its own pace - sometimes with agonizing slowness - and at other times with alarming speed. The role of the leader is to assess the tides and currents of events and to embark on great initiatives at the appropriate time. We could not have successfully done what we did at the beginning of the 1990s had we tried to do so ten or twenty years earlier. The situation was simply not ripe.

However, when I became president in September, 1989 there was a confluence of factors that that made it possible for us to move forward boldly with the transformation of our society.

- The first factor was the government's realisation that its policy of 'separate development' had failed and that in our case it was morally unjustifiable.
- A critically important factor was the acceptance by all sides that there could be neither a military nor a revolutionary victory - and that continuing conflict would simply turn South African into a wasteland.
- Discreet contacts between the ANC and the government - originally initiated through Nelson Mandela while he was still in prison - enabled both sides to explore possibilities for negotiated solutions.



- Sanctions were, of course, also a factor. By the mid-80s our economy was increasingly isolated and we had to deal with the crisis caused by the refusal of international banks in 1985 to roll over our short-term loans. However, sanctions were often counter-productive. They increased opposition to foreign interference - and hobbled two of the greatest forces for change - economic growth and exposure to international influences.
- Economic and social developments played a major role. I will refrain from expanding on this, as it will require a full-blown speech on its own.
- A further factor was the successful conclusion of a tripartite agreement in 1988 between South Africa, Cuba and Angola. This resulted in the withdrawal of 50 000 Cuban troops from Angola, the implementation of UN Resolution 435 and the independence of Namibia.
- The final - and critically important - factor for change was the collapse of global communism in 1989. At a stroke, it removed the government's primary strategic concern. The demise of international expansionist communism created a new global strategic and economic paradigm. The manifest success of the free market economies also meant that there was no longer any serious debate with regard to the economic policies that would be required to ensure economic growth in a future democratic South Africa.

At the beginning of the 1990s history had opened a window of opportunity for us. We knew that circumstances would never again be so propitious for a negotiated settlement. So we did not hesitate: we leapt through the window.

Even so, we would not have been able to succeed had we not had the right partners.

- If the ANC had not had a leader of the stature of Nelson Mandela it would have been very difficult for us to have managed the many crises that beset the negotiation process.
- Had Mangosuthu Buthelezi, the leader of the IFP, and the leaders of right wing white parties not decided to participate in our first elections 20 years ago, the outcome could have been very different.
- And finally, had 70% of white South Africans not voted to continue with negotiations in our 1992 referendum, I would not have been able to proceed with the transformation process.

So, I would, in all humility, like to dedicate the award that you have bestowed on me today to all my fellow South Africans who made it possible for me to play the role that I played when I was President.

It was their courage, their perseverance, and their belief in a better future that enabled us to create our new society. With all its challenges, it is a far better, a far more secure, and far more just country than it was when I became President in 1989.



FW de Klerk
FOUNDATION

It is my hope that some of the lessons we have learned in South Africa - regarding the management of change, negotiation and the grasping of opportunity when it offers itself – can be of help to other societies facing complicated challenges.

In closing I would like on behalf of us all to extend our very best wishes to the University of Haifa, its management, staff, academic personnel and students. Apart from your academic excellence you are playing a leading role in promoting tolerance in a multicultural society.

We subscribe wholeheartedly to the belief that President Shapira expressed in a letter in November 2013 to me:

“...the belief that through our differences and our acceptance of them, we shall thrive and excel event further.”

May you thrive and achieve even greater heights through your development of a vision for 2025. And may you continue, here from the top of the historical Mount Carmel, to shine as a beacon of hope and opportunity to the young generations of today and tomorrow.