

Washington Office on Africa Educational Fund, Inc.
BRIEFING PAPER
March 1990

DE KLERK AND APARTHEID: WHAT KIND OF CHANGE?

Frederik W. (F.W.) de Klerk became acting President of South Africa on August 15, 1989, replacing his ailing and discredited predecessor P. W. Botha. De Klerk took office as president in his own right a month later, after his ruling National Party won a reduced majority in the whites-only election.

De Klerk, pledging a new era of reform, released some political prisoners and modified some apartheid laws in 1989. In February this year he released Nelson Mandela, unbanned the African National



Congress (ANC) and other organizations, and relaxed other repressive measures.

This dramatic victory for the anti-apartheid movement opens a new phase in the struggle for freedom in South Africa.

But, does de Klerk plan to move on to "end apartheid," as some overseas observers suggest, or is he trying to buy time for a revised edition of white minority domination? What does the evidence say? What opportunities and pitfalls lie ahead on the road to freedom?

APARTHEID: WHAT KIND OF CHANGE?

POLITICAL PRISONERS

De Klerk has released ANC leader Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu and some other prominent political prisoners. He has lifted the ban on the ANC and other opposition groups. He has also promised to set free prisoners who were only convicted of membership in a banned organization.

De Klerk has still refused to free, however, most political prisoners convicted of crimes under security legislation or common law. Unless he makes further concessions, only about one-fourth of at least 2,500 serving sentences will be released. This includes people arrested for "public violence" and imprisoned members of the ANC's military wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe.



Photo: Eli Weinberg

SECURITY MEASURES

De Klerk has removed the security management system which gave police and military officials the lead role in coordinating all aspects of government and administration. And he has relaxed the enforcement of emergency and security laws. He has suspended enforcement of the death penalty, pending a review, and lifted banning orders which restricted the activities of political activists.

By late-February, however, de Klerk was still refusing to lift the State of Emergency. Permanent security legislation still gives the regime extensive powers to detain individuals and ban organizations, meetings or demonstrations, as well as to censor news coverage. And amnesty has not been promised for exiles, leaving them vulnerable to arrest under security legislation if they return home.

MILITARY AND POLICE

De Klerk has accepted the victory by SWAPO nationalists in Namibia's election, and Namibia's independence on March 21. He has withdrawn South African troops from Angola and Namibia. Downplaying military threats against neighboring countries, he says South Africa has ended military support for UNITA in Angola and is no longer backing terrorist actions by Renamo guerrillas in Mozambique. He has cut the military budget and reduced the length of military service for South African whites.

He has ordered investigations in response to revelations about secret police death squads which have killed government opponents in South Africa and abroad.

But South Africa's security apparatus is still powerful. The government is still investing in high-tech military spending, including nuclear-capable ballistic missiles. Special commando units of whites and blacks known for attacking neighboring countries are intact. And, African recruits from Koevoet, the brutal counter-insurgency units from Namibia, are being regrouped in South Africa.

The question remains whether de Klerk is willing and able to consistently control his own security forces.

Covert actions against Mozambique are continuing from South African territory, for example. Inside the country, three prisoners died in police detention in late January. Most importantly, higher-ups responsible for the death squads and surrogate military operations are still being protected.

SEGREGATION/ DESEGREGATION

De Klerk has accepted the desegregation of some public facilities such as beaches, and he has exempted four suburbs from the law imposing segregated housing. The regime is lifting segregation on buses and other public facilities. Additional similar concessions are likely in response to anti-apartheid campaigns.

De Klerk's concessions to integration, however, are in large part recognition of local gains already achieved by protesters. Most significantly, he has repeatedly pledged loyalty to the legal pillars of apartheid, such as the Group Areas Act and the Population Registration Act. The Group Areas Act restricts living areas by race, and the Population Registration Act defines every South African as a member of a specific racial group.

The regime's plans still reserve vital services such as education and health care to these separate racial groups. South Africa's white schools are only 74 percent full, while Blacks cannot even fit into the limited facilities assigned to them. **The government spends five times as much on education for a white child as for an urban Black, nine times as much as for a rural Black.** Segregated health care shows similar disparities, with **the infant mortality rate for Blacks almost 10 times that for whites.**

NEGOTIATIONS

De Klerk says he is willing to talk about political reforms with Black leaders, and that leaders of the African National Congress could be included in these talks.

But the regime's plans for political change still fit within the apartheid scheme of keeping racial groups legally separate. They envisage complicated power-sharing arrangements among the races, with whites still holding far more power than in a "one person, one vote" system. They would protect not only the rights of individual whites, but also the privileges of whites as a group. And even

this power-sharing would only come at the end of years of gradual changes supervised by the present government.

The regime's bottom line position still excludes the anti-apartheid consensus demanding a nonracial democratic political order.



United Nations Photo/151707

WHAT CAN WE EXPECT FROM DE KLERK?

De Klerk is not a liberal, either in background or philosophy. His previous record as a National Party politician is more conservative than former President Botha's. But he has been forced to accept new realities. Most important of all, he recognizes that internal pressures and external sanctions are taking their toll. Even more than in 1978, when President Botha

His goal is not to end apartheid, but to save it... he hopes to buy time, gain international confidence and win relief from sanctions by key western countries.

coined the phrase, the Pretoria regime must "adapt or die."

De Klerk thus knows he must make concessions. But he is not yet convinced the National Party will have to hand over its dominant political position. His goal is not to end apartheid, but to save it. By jettisoning less essential elements, he hopes to buy time, gain international confidence and win relief from sanctions by key western countries.

In the short run, this involves several goals. The first is to block any move towards stronger international sanctions. So far this seems to be working, as indicated by the international banks' rollover of some \$8 billion in loans in October 1989 and, more generally, by international willingness to give him additional time.

A second goal is to keep the public relations initiative by concessions which win international credit without conceding essential points to internal anti-apartheid forces. He hopes to begin formal negotiations from a position of strength, avoiding the agenda of a transfer of power.

More ambitiously, de Klerk wants to persuade key western nations such as the United States to lift sanctions already in effect, gaining a vote of confidence and acceptance of the regime's prerogative to control the pace of change.

Britain's Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, a long-time sanctions foe, eagerly responded to Mandela's release by unilaterally lifting a ban on new investment.

Over the longer term, de Klerk would like to shape a



If de Klerk gets short-term relief from pressure before conceding the key issues in negotiations, there will be repeated delays on the road to a free South Africa.

stable new political order. It would have to garner enough Black and international support to be accepted as legitimate, but still maintain a separate sphere for whites and a white veto over changes affecting them.

This is likely to be an impossible recipe, and so de Klerk's fall-back objective is the old one of gaining time. Meanwhile, the white regime remains in control.

If de Klerk gets short-term relief from pressure before conceding the key issues in negotiations, there will be repeated delays on the road to a free South Africa. If the pressure is maintained, however, de Klerk will probably be forced to make more and more concessions and be unable to stop short of a real end to apartheid.

WHAT THE ANTI-APARTHEID MOVEMENT HAS TO SAY.

Anti-apartheid forces in South Africa have responded with both jubilation and caution to the release of Nelson Mandela, and the other concessions which Pretoria has been forced to make. Jubilation for their leaders' freedom from prison and the beginning of the end for apartheid, caution that apartheid remains in effect and that the road to a non-racial political system may be long.

In 1989, during the Botha-de Klerk transition, anti-apartheid leaders spelled out their criteria for judging the new regime. These criteria emerged from a wide-ranging consultation among anti-apartheid forces. Nelson Mandela himself was involved, as was the exiled leadership of the African National Congress and the many internal political organizations grouped under the banner of the Mass Democratic Movement in South Africa. This consensus position was widely adopted as the Harare Declaration by the Organization of African Unity in August and in the October "Call for Intensified Sanctions by Church and Labor Leaders in South Africa".

The first prerequisite, these statements agreed, was to establish a climate for negotiations. As of late-February, de Klerk had gone a long way towards meeting these conditions, but with several glaring exceptions:

- most political prisoners were not released,
- the State of Emergency was still in effect,

- there were still troops in African townships, and
- most exiles could not return for fear of being arrested under security legislation.

The key question for the anti-apartheid movement is full freedom for political action before formal talks begin. There must be a definitive end to all political repression, so that exiles can return, everyone can organize freely, and negotiators can freely consult the people.

The next step will be the negotiations themselves.

Anti-apartheid forces agree that the negotiations must have the objective of a non-

racial and democratic society. The new constitutional order should include protection of human rights for all of South Africa's people, regardless of color, race, sex or creed. In the words of the Harare Declaration, these goals, "and not the amendment or reform of the apartheid system," must be the aim of the negotiations.

The details of negotiations are certain to be complex, with many opportunities for delay. To ensure their success, South African church and labor leaders declared, pressure including international sanctions "should be sustained and intensified until the dismantling of apartheid has become irreversible."

From the Harare Declaration on the Question of South Africa Organization of African Unity August 21, 1989

We... encourage the people of South Africa, as part of their overall struggle, to get together to negotiate an end to the apartheid system and agree on all the measures that are necessary to transform their country into a non-racial democracy. We support the position held by the majority of the people of South Africa that these objectives, and not the amendment or reform of the apartheid system, should be the aims of the negotiation...

Discussions should take place between the liberation movement and the South African regime to achieve the suspension of hostilities on both sides by agreeing to a mutually binding cease-fire...

The parties shall define and agree on the role to be played by the international community in ensuring a successful transition to a democratic order.

The parties shall agree on the formation of an interim government to supervise the process of the drawing up and adoption of a new constitution; govern and administer the country, as well as effect the transition to a democratic order including the holding of elections.

After the adoption of the new Constitution, all armed hostilities will be deemed to have formally terminated.

For its part, the international community would lift the sanctions that have been imposed against apartheid South Africa.

NELSON MANDELA -- The Road Ahead

(Nelson Mandela, Cape Town, February 11, 1990,
shortly after his release from prison.)

Mr. de Klerk has gone further than any other Nationalist president in taking real steps to normalize the situation. However, there are further steps as outlined in the Harare Declaration that have to be met before negotiations on the basic demands of our people can begin.

I reiterate our call for, inter alia, the immediate ending of the state of emergency and the freeing of all, and not only some, political prisoners.

The people need to be consulted on who will negotiate and on the content of such negotiations.

Negotiations cannot take place above the heads or behind the backs of the people. It is our belief that the future of our country can only be determined by a body which is democratically elected on a nonracial basis.

Negotiations on the dismantling of apartheid will have to address the overwhelming demand of our people for a democratic nonracial and unitary South Africa. There must be an end to white monopoly on political power, and a fundamental restructuring of our political and economic systems to insure that the inequalities of apartheid are addressed and our society thoroughly democratized.

It must be added that Mr. de Klerk himself is a man of integrity who is acutely aware of the dangers of a public figure not honoring his undertakings. But as an organization, we base our policy and strategy on the harsh reality we are faced with, and this reality is that we are still suffering under the policies of the Nationalist government.

Our struggle has reached a decisive moment. We call on our people to seize this moment so that the process toward democracy is rapid and uninterrupted. We have waited too long for our freedom. We can no longer wait. Now is the time to intensify the struggle on all fronts.

To relax our efforts now would be a mistake which generations to come will not be able to forgive. The sight of freedom looming on the horizon should encourage us to redouble our efforts. It is only through disciplined mass action that our victory can be assured.

We call on our white compatriots to join us in the shaping of a new South Africa. The freedom movement is the political home for you, too.

We call on the international community to continue the campaign to isolate the apartheid regime. To lift sanctions now would be to run the risk of aborting the process toward the complete eradication of apartheid.

Washington Office on Africa Educational Fund, Inc.

Staff

Aubrey McCutcheon, III
Executive Director
Dr. William Minter
Assoc. Dir. for Communications and Education
Imani Countess
Assoc. Dir. for Publications and Public Affairs
Jacqueline Wilson Asheeke
Legislative Director
Kristie Dunston
Administrative and Program Assistant

110 Maryland Avenue NE Suite 112
Washington, DC 20002
202-546-7961 FAX 202-546-1545
WOA Africa HOT LINE 202-546-0408

How to Use this Briefing Paper

- Copy the briefing paper in its entirety or in sections and distribute at events and meetings.
- Sponsor community events and invite anti-apartheid speakers.
- Encourage your organization or community group to conduct a workshop on "Apartheid: What Kind of Change" at your next conference or meeting.
- Call the Washington Office on Africa Educational Fund for information, assistance or speakers at: (202) 546-7961 FAX (202) 546-1545.

Sources

"Apartheid's New Face: An Expose of De Klerk's First 100 Days." Anti-Apartheid Movement, London, England, 1989.
"Call for Intensified Sanctions by Church and Labour Leaders in South Africa." October 1989.
De Klerk, F.W. "Address to Parliament." 2 Feb. 1990.
"Declaration of the OAU Ad-Hoc Committee on Southern Africa on the Question of South Africa." Organisation of African Unity, Harare, Zimbabwe, Aug. 1989.
Mandela, Nelson. "Speech at the Cape Town City Hall." 11 Feb. 1990.
"Statement Regarding the Address by State President F.W. de Klerk." Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, 1990.