

## **Closing remarks at The Cabinet-SANEF Indaba**

Sun City, 30 June 2001

Let me start by saying that all of us owe the leadership of SANEF our thanks, because in truth we are meeting because they suggested we should meet. What has happened since yesterday has demonstrated that SANEF was correct to suggest that we do meet.

My own view of the meeting is that it has gone very well. We have sought to focus on issues on which we needed to focus. The issues that have been raised with regard to relations between the media and the government have certainly alerted me to some things that perhaps one wasn't sufficiently sensitive to.

It seems clear to me in that context, that as government we have not done really what we ought to have been doing more effectively, which is to communicate about what the government is doing and thinking. I think the message has come across very strongly, that this has been a very serious failure on the part of the government. Clearly it is something that we need to correct.

There is a question that has been lingering in the minds of a lot of us in government, which has been described as a question of mistrust. It was important that this question should have been raised in the manner that it was raised, with the openness with which it was raised, because at least I would hope that members of SANEF would therefore have a better a sense of why people in government behave the way that they do, and understood that even if whatever informed that mistrust on the part of the government, even if that was wrong, that it nevertheless existed and therefore informs behaviour. And it says to both sides that we therefore have to address that matter.

All of us would say this is the beginning of a process, a process of interaction, and we need to treat it like that. What the committee that put together the statement about the Way Forward is saying, among other things, is precisely that we need to find a way of continuing the engagement, an engagement about operational matters, about the logistics of the questions that we are talking about, about the suggestions regarding people in government going to sit for some time at news organisations to see how they work, and the other way round. That kind of question. Let us do that engagement. It assists in terms of making sure that the two sides understand each other better, and exposes both sides to the working environment of the other. Those logistical questions do require continuing engagement.

But it is also clear that there are some outstanding matters that are not of a logistic nature but of a substantive nature. A question that has been raised and has been included in the Way Forward is a matter that we must continue to engage on. It is the issue raised about journalists as witnesses. It is clear that the concerns raised by the media people about that particular matter are legitimate concerns. The Minister of Justice has the responsibility to say that this is what the law of the country says. That means we must engage the matter, because what happens is not something that is going to be decided by the gods. It has to be decided by ourselves as human beings who must say what we think is the best position to arrive at. There are substantive questions like that.

There is the very troublesome phrase, 'in the national interest'. What is that? We come at it from different angles, different histories, and therefore we respond in different ways. But it is an important issue of substance, with which we need to engage.

So what we did here was to begin a process and we have begun that process very well indeed. We need to find ways and means in which to continue this engagement and to deal with all of these elements that are outstanding.

I am not quite sure who took the decision that we should meet for a day and a bit, but they should not raise their hands because I think that was a mistake. It is clear that we needed a bit of a longer period. Even in the context of last night's interaction (Trevor Manuel and Alec Erwin spoke with great enthusiasm

about Club 38, and present it as an occasion where all that happened was to meet and discuss, but I am sure other things happened there) both Ministers were saying, we engaged one another quite vigorously without any animosity, without any sense of tension, but spoke openly among ourselves as South Africans. And by the time everybody convened here this morning the point had been established that we could actually discuss anything and everything, without acrimony. Clearly even those of us who were not at the club last night could see even during the course of today, that engagement is also a critical element in addressing that other issue of mistrust. Just the fact of getting together, even if in the end we don't agree, will at least mean that there are more negative things that will be taken away as a result of the engagement.

So for all of these reasons, we would trust that SANEF and the GCIS would engage with the question as to how we might handle interaction between ourselves: It is important that we do that.

I do not know what happens in other countries, but it may very well be that by these processes in which we engage ourselves, we might be sending some message to other people about how this complex relationship can be handled in a manner that respects the independence of the two institutions and that recognises that even journalists are human beings. They care about poor people, they care about oppression, they care about discrimination against women, they care about discrimination against people on the grounds of race or colour. They will exercise their functions as journalists, independently, bravely, boldly, but that doesn't mean that they don't care about these various things.

It may be that a message might go out to the rest of the world as to how to handle all of those things simultaneously.

There are a few words in one of the sentences in the Way Forward which are wrong, and need to be corrected. They say "in the mutual interest of the country". Now, that is a combination of two notions: "In the mutual interest of the press and the government ", and "In the interest of the country".

That is why we must engage: in our mutual interest, and in the interest of the country.

Thank you very much to everybody for their contribution.

Drive safely! Arrive alive!  
Thanks a lot.