

REPORT OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA ON THE QUESTION OF THE AFRIKANERS

National Assembly, Cape Town 24 March 1999.

The Honourable Minister of Home Affairs, Dr Buthelezi, and I, would like to express the Government's sincere appreciation to the House and all the parties represented in the House for the opportunity to present this Report.

We are conscious of the fact that you have given us this possibility despite the work the House has to do before it rises in two days time.

We would also like to take this opportunity to apologise for the postponement of this debate from the 18th of this month, the date we originally requested.

This was occasioned by the request of the President of the Republic that he would like to be in the House as we discuss this important matter. As the Honourable Members are aware, last week President Mandela was in Europe visiting a number of countries.

We would also like to acknowledge the presence in the House today of many of the Afrikaner leaders of our people with whom we met, and thank them for honouring us by their presence.

From what has been written and said during the last few days, it is obvious that we owe this House and the country an explanation about the origins and the purposes of the initiative on which we are reporting today.

During 1997, the third year of the establishment of our democracy, we began to hear troubled voices which spoke about the role and place of the Afrikaners in the new South Africa.

The Rapport newspaper of March 11, 1997, reporting on a survey conducted by MarkData, said:

" Sustained signs during the past that White Afrikaans speaking people are very pessimistic about the future of their language and culture were confirmed. 83 per cent of all White Afrikaners are reasonably or very unhappy about the manner in which their language and cultural values get treated nowadays. 59 per cent of White Afrikaners expect that their language will become weaker or even extinct with time."

On the 4th of June, 1997, the Burger newspaper asserted that the Afrikaners had been systematically humiliated. It wrote:

" There are too many areas where Afrikaners have been humiliated, threatened and eventually marginalised. Just look at the Civil Service. Afrikaans speaking people are deliberately driven out and replaced by Affirmative Action appointees. The SABC is one example. It has been aggressively transformed to affirm the black majority. Now, one seldom hears Afrikaans on the SABC."

For its part, the Citizen newspaper of 13 June, 1997, commented:

" What is happening is that the Government, in its efforts to remake South Africa into a democratic country, has not paid enough attention to cultural diversity and the need of Afrikaners, in particular, to safeguard their language, their schools and the culture."

In a paper prepared for a seminar during September, 1998, Professor Hermann Giliomee makes remarks which are important in the context of our discussion this afternoon.

He wrote:

" For at least the first eighteen months (of the democratic government), the NP could keep up the pretence that it kept to its promise of building into the constitution careful checks and balances and protection for cultural rights...This could not last. The Afrikaners had lost power but were behaving like King Lear. As Orwell remarks in his discussion of the Shakespeare play, Lear had renounced power but expected everyone to continue treating him as a king. He did not see that if he surrendered power...others would take advantage of his weakness."

In the same paper, Prof Giliomee quotes remarks made by Mr FW. de Klerk during a visit to London which Prof Giliomee characterises as having:

" ripped apart the pretence of power-sharing or indeed the construction that the NP, whites in general and Afrikaners in particular had suffered no major defeat in the transition to an inclusive democracy."

Prof Giliomee quotes Mr de Klerk as having said:

" The decision to surrender the right to national sovereignty is certainly one of the most painful that any leaders can ever be asked to make. Most nations are prepared to risk total war and catastrophe rather than surrender this right. Yet this was the decision that we had to take. We had to accept the necessity of giving up on the ideal on which we have been nurtured and the dream for which so many of our forefathers had struggled and for which so many of our people had died."

Prof Giliomee then quotes a letter to the newspaper Die Burger, which he says expressed a commonly held view. The writer of the letter says:

" The NP had received a mandate from us to protect and secure our interests at all times. De Klerk did not get a mandate to lead, like a Judas goat, his unsuspecting people to the political abattoirs."

All these remarks seemed to suggest that clearly there was something wrong.

26 years ago, in 1973, Schalk Pienaar wrote an article in Rapport to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the accession of the National Party to power. Here are some of the things he said:

" Then there is the all-overpowering fact of an Afrikaner government. This fact caused an injection of adrenaline into the blood of all Afrikaners...There was an explosion of energy in all areas...The result of all this on the Afrikaner ego was extremely strong and indestructible." (27 May, 1973.)

On the other hand, Prof Giliomee quotes an article written by the Afrikaans poet, DJ Opperman in Die Burger, fifty years after the formation of the Union of South Africa. He says that 'Opperman acknowledged that the Afrikaners had made phenomenal progress during the fifty years of Union, but also pointed to the darker side.'

It was one of a " spiritual life, dominated and made barren by racial tension and racial values, spiritual isolation, spiritual inbreeding, crippled spirituality and ultimately barrenness."

The 1997 report in Rapport to which we referred earlier, posed the question as to whether government " can afford the bitter dissatisfaction of a strong and big minority group if they really want to build a nation."

It was in response to this consideration that neither the country nor the Government could afford such 'bitter dissatisfaction' that the decision was taken to act on these and other reports of a similar nature.

For its part, the Sowetan newspaper carried an article in its addition of July 3, 1997 which said:

"Loud noises about the threat to the existence of Afrikaans often divert attention from the issues at hand. It is time we closely examined these fears to see if the Afrikaans lobby has a real case, or whether these protestations are nothing more than a clamour to protect apartheid privileges."

Noting all these sentiments, the Government decided that we should interact directly with the Afrikaner people themselves to hear their views on the matters that had been raised.

This, of course, immediately posed the questions - who are the Afrikaner people and who has the authority and mandate to represent their views!

Two Sundays ago, the former editor of Die Vaderland, Mr Harald Pakendorf, wrote in the Sunday Independent that:

"The surest sign that all is well with Afrikaners is the existence of the Afrikaner Eenheidsbeweging - the Afrikaner unity movement that unites almost no Afrikaners and represents even fewer. And that is how it ought to be - there simply is no organisation or political party that can be said to represent what Afrikaners want. They are divided, spread out over a whole range of organisations, churches and political parties."

With regard to our own debate this afternoon, Mr Pakendorf says:

"To have a debate about Afrikaners seems almost absurd. Which Afrikaners? Who is an Afrikaner? Who will speak on their behalf? Hopefully, there will never be a debate about Afrikaners again. They are not separate enough from the rest of South Africa to be discussed as such."

The issues that Mr Pakendorf raises are, of course, very legitimate and were a central feature of our own discussions as to how we might organise our interaction with the Afrikaners.

To summarise, in the end it was decided that we should meet with the leaders of as wide a variety of Afrikaner institutions and organisations as possible.

We must, at this point, make the matter very clear that all the organisations and institutions we met consistently explained that they did not claim to represent all Afrikaners.

While being in contact with Afrikaner opinion through various forms of social interaction, they nevertheless sought firmly to get us to understand that they spoke only for their members and supporters.

The point was also made in a forthright manner, that there were many Afrikaners who did not relate to any of the institutions and organisations with which we interacted.

Nevertheless, these also felt as Afrikaner as any other Afrikaner. Many of them, it was said, were indeed searching for ways and means by which they could, as Afrikaners, contribute to the building of the new non-racial and democratic South Africa.

Before reporting on the specific matters which the Afrikaner leaders themselves raised, we would like to draw attention to the results of an opinion poll among whites in Pretoria carried out by the Volkstaat Council in 1996.

This poll identified the following problems by order of importance:

- crime;
- economic problems;

- personal security;
- affirmative action;
- educational standards;
- population growth;
- health services;
- language and cultural rights;
- housing; and
- other.

To come back to our own discussions, in summary, we can say that the Afrikaner leaders we met communicated two messages. One was that indeed there was a feeling of marginalisation and disempowerment among many Afrikaners.

One of our interlocutors expressed this in the following way that " the Afrikaner is suffering from the hangover of loss of power" resulting in despondency.

These feelings of marginalisation arose particularly from actions by the Government which were seen as being hostile to Afrikaner interests, especially with regard to:

- the Afrikaans language;
- the schools with regard to language, culture and religion;
- the Universities and the medium of instruction;
- affirmative action, including affirmative action in sport;
- crime; and
- the economy.

In this context, we must also include the comments made by Die Tussentydse Afrikanerberaad, the Interim Afrikaner Council, which said they expect the following:

- Recognition of the Afrikaner as a community that shares a common linguistic, cultural and religious heritage, with the right to conserve it and to resist forced assimilation in terms of their language, culture and religion and to be able to establish and maintain the institutions that will mediate it;
- Acceptance of the Afrikaners' desire to take up forms of self-determination on the basis of Article 185 as well as Article 235 of the Constitution; and,
- Cognisance of the Afrikaners' resolve to support one another therein.

Recognising the diversity of opinion on these matters, the Council says it:

" represents Afrikaners who will be satisfied with the effective application of individual rights, but also Afrikaners who aspire to minority rights and corporative measures, as well as Afrikaners who strive for freedom in their own state."

The second message conveyed by the Afrikaner leaders we met was one of commitment to help build the new South Africa as a prosperous, non-racial democracy.

The Tussentydse Afrikanerberaad put this unanimous view in the following words:

" the Afrikaner is a child of Africa and Afrikaners are committed to its people and its future. Therefore Afrikaners of all convictions share a feeling of co-responsibility for the well-being and development of South and Southern Africa and want South Africa to succeed...Afrikaners aim at normalising, improving

and expanding the relationship between the various language and cultural communities within the South and Southern African context."

Accordingly, the Afrikaners were ready fully to bring their skills and expertise into this development process and were ready to make such sacrifices as were necessary and reasonable.

What was required however was a clear vision for the country, with a transformation plan, accompanied by an implementation strategy with time frames so that all South Africans, including the Afrikaners, could better define their role in building the country.

Confidence in the future of the country was perhaps best expressed by the Afrikaner youth leaders who said:

" Yesterday was a foreign country; tomorrow belongs to us."

Taking all these matters into account, and accepting the views expressed by the Afrikaner leaders as being genuine and honest, the Government would like to respond as follows:

LANGUAGE

- The Government commits itself to the promotion of the rights to language and culture spelt out in Article 30 of the Bill of Rights which says that " everyone has the right to use the language and to participate in the cultural life of their choice..."
- To ensure that these matters are attended to correctly, sensitively and expeditiously, it has decided that there should be established in the Presidency a mechanism with the capacity to promote the achievement of these constitutional objectives, in co-operation with the Pan-South African Language Board and other relevant institutions.
- It has further decided that in the event that any state institution or parastatal seeks to introduce changes in language policy, it will notify the Presidency and the PANSALB to enable them to advise on the matter;
- Finally, it has decided that where such changes are agreed to, measures should be taken to publicise the decision together with the reasons for such decisions.

SCHOOLS

- The Government commits itself to the promotion of the provisions on education contained under Article 29 of the Bill of Rights.
- It however draws attention to the fact that school education is a concurrent competence shared in defined ways by the national and provincial governments.
- Taking this into account, it has resolved that it is desirable that the national and provincial departments of education should establish a mechanism which, while fully respecting the constitution and the law, would assist in ensuring that:
 - parents play their full role in school governance consistent with the provisions of the Schools Act;
 - this Act and the constitutional provisions are implemented in a way which is consistent with the constitutional rights and aspirations of all citizens with regard to language, culture and religion, including provision for single medium schools and mother tongue instruction.
- The Government has further decided that the Presidency should maintain regular contact with this educational council to assist in the realisation of the objectives we have just stated.

UNIVERSITIES

In this regard, we would like to cite some comments made by Professor Reinecke, Rector of Potchefstroom University, which we believe are consistent with the views expressed by the Rectors of all the Afrikaans Universities, whom we met. He says:

" All of us realised already some time ago that we will not be able to participate in alleviating the pressing needs for higher education in our country by maintaining educational programmes presented exclusively in Afrikaans. We therefore, independently, broadened our educational offerings by including English components in some way or another. The reality at present is that all five institutions still have active and extensive Afrikaans educational programmes, but also a distinct complement of programmes in English."

He goes on to say:

" With regard to the future, it is clear that a normal developmental process should be allowed to take place to establish the future cultural character at our campuses...In the meantime the country will benefit from our commitment to the development of South Africa and all its peoples, of which the Afrikaans-speaking community is an important component..."

The Government agrees with these sentiments and will make further pronouncements on these matters after receiving the report of the Council on Higher Education and after conducting the necessary consultations on the recommendations which the Council will have made.

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

The Government is under an obligation to implement the provision in the Constitution under Article 195 which says that:

" The public administration must be broadly representative of the South African people, with employment and personnel management practices based on ability, objectivity, fairness, and the need to redress the imbalances of the past to achieve broad representation."

The Government would also like to confirm that the public service is open to all races and selection into the service is made on the basis of a number of criteria, including skill and experience and not solely on the basis of representativity.

Further, it wishes to point out that we need to ensure that we communicate information about the transformation of the public service correctly, to reflect what is actually happening. For example, in 1998, there were 1 420 Africans in management and 2 259 whites.

The Government confirms that it will continue to apply employment policies that are not aimed at excluding anybody on the basis of race. Given the skills shortage in the country, it is necessary that all efforts be made to ensure the utilisation of all existing skills.

CRIME

The leaders cited crime as a major problem, while observing that they were raising this matter in the same manner that it is raised by all South Africans.

Particular concerns were, of course, mentioned with regard to the unacceptable escalation of crime and violence against the farmers.

Among others, the point was made that the level of crime as it impacted on the Afrikaners on a scale they had not experienced before, contributed to the feeling of despondency.

The Government reiterates its commitment to take all necessary and possible measures to escalate the offensive to reduce the levels of crime.

THE ECONOMY

The business leaders in particular noted that the Afrikaners had acquired a wealth of experience in business over the years and that this should be seen as an asset for the country.

The Afrikaners should be used as a resource and should be drawn into on-going government and national skills development programmes.

They emphasised the importance of creating jobs as well as building an internationally competitive economy, indicating their readiness to work with government to achieve these objectives.

The Government has decided to review the processes by which it interacts with the business community to ensure more effective co-operation in meeting the economic objectives stated by these business leaders, with which the Government agrees.

The Government further confirmed the decision to work with the South African Agricultural Union on a comprehensive growth and development plan for agriculture.

SELF-DETERMINATION

The Government decided that urgent steps will be taken as soon as possible after the elections to conclude the process of consultation about the establishment of the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities.

The Government is of the view that as soon as it is constituted, the Commission should focus on the identification of the relevant steps that should be taken to implement any measures already provided for in the Constitution to give expression to these collective rights.

The Commission should also seek to make a comprehensive finding with regard to the issue of the forms of self-determination as provided for under Articles 185 and 235 of the Constitution to enable the necessary legislative and administrative measures to be taken, to give effect to the purposes of these constitutional provisions.

In this regard, the Government will give due attention to the Report of the Volkstaatraad as soon as it is available.

CONCLUSION

The Government considers the Afrikaner people as an important component part of our country and society and is greatly encouraged by the commitment of those with whom it interacted to the building of a non-racial democracy in our country and the success of the African Renaissance.

It therefore commits itself continuously to address their concerns, as it must address the concerns of all communities.

Let me close with a poem by DJ Opperman - "Gebed om die gebeente."

"Dat ons as een groot nasie in die gramadoelas
met elke stukkie sinkplaat en met elke wiel,
en wit en bruin en swart foelie agter skoon glas
ewig u sonlig vang en mekaar toe speel."

It is a prayer to God from a woman whose son, Gideon Scheepers, was a rebel who was killed and whose body was never found, a plea from an Afrikaner mother for co-operation and mutual respect among all South Africans.