

MAJOR CHALLENGES FACING SOUTH AFRICA IN THE NEAR FUTURE

(AN EDITED VERSION OF THE TALK I GAVE AT THE

WAN CONFERENCE)

F VAN ZYL SLABBERT

The first challenge I referred to was: How to guard against the consensual stability we enjoy now, from drifting towards anarchy. If one places the variable of stability on a continuum, then at the one end you have complete repression and at the other, complete consent. These are of course ideal types, but whenever I begin to analyse a country, the first question I ask is: How is stability maintained.

The absolutely extra-ordinary aspect of South Africa's transition is that we moved from extreme repressive stability to consensual stability without major disruption or crises. This is an enormous credit to the people of this country. The constitutional items that reflect consensual stability are to be found in Chapters 2 and 9 of our Constitution i.e. civil liberties, freedom of expression, the right to strike etc.

What I mean about the danger of drifting towards anarchy is precisely that our consent begins to weaken and there is a tendency to take the law into one's own hands. Widespread crime and corruption are obvious examples; executing street justice another. Even a strike may degenerate into anarchic behavior e.g. when teachers on strike tear up pupils exam papers. Or when informal settlements steal electricity from rate payers who pay for theirs, and leave them in darkness. South Africa is not in a full on state of anarchy – far from it. But we (government and civil society) have to be alert to such dangers.

The second challenge I referred to was: How to prevent a Redemptive Ideology from undermining efficient service delivery. The most powerful redemptive

Ideology of the 20th century was Communism / National Socialism. This was the liberation war cry of particularly the ANC in exile. It generated enormous expectations of the good life to come when “we are in power” In a sense Apartheid was also a redemptive ideology but racially exclusive for whites. The new redemptive ideology promised a chicken in the pot for everyone. The evidence of the degree of disappointment about the current slow pace of delivery is there for all to see. The current strike is also partly related to this. However, it is impossible for the Government alone to solve this problem. All of us will have to help in education, health, building/construction etc.

The third challenge I referred is: Do not confuse legitimacy with competence. The fact that one is a member of the ANC and Black does not automatically make one competent, even though such a person may claim legitimacy. In this context I have already said that if we make ourselves hostage to a racist past we can budget for a racist future. Take the word African. Our President repeatedly says that every South African citizen is an African. However, the BBBEE act says that “African is a generic term which refers to Coloureds, Asians and Africans”. (i.e. Whitey falls off the bus) Two weeks ago it was reported that Groote Schuur Hospital refused to appoint Indian and White specialists and were only looking for Blacks as “equity partners”, (whatever that means). (So now I assume Indian and Coloureds fall off the bus as well.) The point about all this racial niggling is that the benefits will only accrue to a small elite whilst the plight of the vast majority will still be subject to a slow pace of change. All we know is that an African must be Black but no one has provided a legal definition of either that can be used in law (unless, God forbid, we go back to the Population Registration Act).

The fourth challenge is: Do not confuse Authority with Intelligence. This was the most common mistake of the previous regime. Suddenly someone becomes a Deputy Minister and his whole bearing changes. He struts around in a new suite, sits in his chauffeur driven car, and when he thinks of himself, he is convinced that he is in this position because he must be intelligent. The fact that he is the beneficiary

of patronage and a member of the Broederbond has nothing to do with it. Currently there are symptoms of the same disease. Nothing undermines good governance more quickly than confusing authority with intelligence. So far South Africa has not done too badly.

The fifth and final challenge I referred to was: The enormous challenge of transferring skills. Here I am not talking necessarily of going to university or a technical college. I am talking about imaginative programs constructed between government, corporate South Africa and civil society, to transfer skills from individuals in the work place to unskilled youngsters. In this regard I mentioned a program of socio-economic conscription where youngsters between ages 12 – 20 who are not at school and just walking around aimlessly every day, become involved in building a stadium, or a road or become part of a construction project. They may not become professionals but they can learn elementary plumbing, electrification, water reticulation or simple masonry. To look ahead and envisage a South Africa in 10 years where there are ± 2 million aids orphans of between fifteen and twenty years old walking around unemployed and unemployable, is to conjure up a nightmare.

Having identified these challenges the overriding point I tried to make was that they, (each one of them), refer to do-able things. We have the resources, human and otherwise, to respond to them and that makes South Africa such an exciting country to live in.

This Mr Khumalo, is more or less what I said. What meeting were you at?