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Johannesburg 2000

4th December, 1990

Dear *Mona and Baba Serube,*

The past year has been such a sweet-sour affair. The euphoria and anticipation that accompanied FW de Klerk's historic initiatives seem to have given way to the sobering realization that things are not going to be easy.

The mystique surrounding the liberation movements has evaporated, exposing severely disempowered and poorly equipped structures. This, together with economic circumstances and lack of party political machinery, has left the recently unbanned organizations very vulnerable and disconcertingly dependent upon rhetoric, ideology, mass-mobilization and militancy as the only ways of retaining their constituencies.

The Government faces similar dilemmas for different reasons. Having irreversibly relinquished their past, they need to satisfy their constituency that there is indeed a better future. It will require a re-education and sensitization programme of national proportions.

No one, it appears, is capable of yet offering a sufficiently unifying and tangible new vision. Yet all sides are being forced to relinquish much of their old ways and beliefs. In the absence of an attractive and cohesive vision all may still be forced to seek refuge in their past. It is a choice South Africa cannot afford.

Such times demand courageous and visionary leadership capable of understanding the inevitable turmoil of transformation, and with the will to build a tantalizing and fulfilling vision.

I have over the past few years, and especially again this year, had the rare privilege of meeting and working with so many committed individuals who are capable of mastering the challenge of change. But the worrisome reality is that, even now, their energies are often dissipated or embroiled in unnecessary conflict and exclusive vested interests.

As I was writing this note, I was flying in over Cape Town. Below me lay a land of such contrasts. The almost heart-rending beauty of the Cape, its mountains, valleys and vineyards contrasted harshly against the squalor and despair of the squatter camps of Guguletu and Khayelitsha.

This contrast contains the seeds and potential for hope and wonderfully constructive transformation, or the very real possibility of debilitating destructive transformation.

We are undoubtedly experiencing times that demand realism, yet need faith in the future. It will require pragmatism, but also the spirit of poetry. It will need all of us.

Having met you, and so many others who are also engaging the challenges, has convinced me that it is possible. Thank you for the times and thoughts we have had the opportunity of sharing.

Your love and acceptance has left me, forever, a changed person. Thank you for everything you have meant to me.

Christo Nel

Please join me in a New Year's wish and hope that the leaders of our country, and people of courage and vision, will finally join forces to create a vision of peace, stability, justice and prosperity.

Torn heart,
in the dust and debris of the past
we have buried so much,
perhaps too much
of people's lives and minds -
overburdened souls that burst with fears and hopes
drowning in histories lost
on unsure plains and far-off horizons
that test the hunter's pioneering spirit
against the cry of dwellers in caves
who cling to the comfort of yesterday's gods
and yesterday is dead.

Tender heart,
the darkest time of night
chills the few who venture out
before the new day dawns
to warm weary limbs
and light the trail-blazing way
beyond traditions and limitations
that tie us to the tombs
of times and opportunities lost
for in the new day alone lies hope
of the vision to be wrought
if tomorrow is still to be won.

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Best Wishes for 1991.

Love,

John