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Judge Mr. de Klerk By His Actions

By Desmond M. Tutu

THE CREDIBILITY crisis that faces the new South African administration of state President F. W. de Klerk was pinpointed by Dr. Frank Chikane, general secretary of the South African Council of Churches, when he, I and Dr. Allan Boesak, president of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, met Mr. de Klerk last week.

Dr. Chikane told Mr. de Klerk, in almost as many words: You are telling the world to give you a chance. You are telling black South Africans, "The door to a new South Africa is already opened and it is not necessary to batter it down." You say you want to talk to representative leaders. Today, as I left to come and take advantage of your open door policy, a leader of the democratic movement wanted to consult me about this meeting. To claim to be representative, I needed to hear his views; I asked him to travel with me. He told me he couldn't because a Government restriction order — imposed during your presidency — prohibits him from leaving the Johannesburg magisterial district. People are saying your actions don't match your words.

Dr. Chikane did not mention the estimated 3,000 political prisoners who remain in South Africa's jails after the release of Walter Sisulu and other leaders of the African National Congress and Pan Africanist Congress. He did not talk, at that point, about the fact that those two organizations — our premier liberation movements — remain banned by Government decree. He did not refer to the Government's emergency regulations, which provide the framework for restricting and jailing people without trial.

He didn't need to; his point was clear. The South African Government may have allowed protest marches for the first time in many years and it may have released eight leaders. But those steps are drops in the ocean when seen against the pervasive network of laws, regulations, practices and attitudes that characterize the police state that has grown up in the last 30 years.

Enormous obstacles still stand in the way of the free political activity that is needed to get negotiations about a new political arrangement in

South Africa off the ground. I and other church leaders remain committed to the belief that international pressure is one of the principal keys to removing those obstacles.

As I said to Mr. de Klerk, we are firmly opposed to the use of violence to achieve the fundamental change that our country needs. If you are not allowed to vote for the central legislature in your country because of the color of your skin, and if you reject violence, what other option do you have than nonviolent strategies that will force a government to change?

We have a responsibility to explore these strategies, and we have sought to fulfill that responsibility through acts of civil disobedience. The international community can play its part by keeping up its pressure on the South African Government.

Make no mistake: That pressure is working. It was international pressure, combined with domestic pressure, that forced the Government to allow the series of marches that have swept the country. It was the prospect of the further sanctions now being discussed at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Malaysia that precipitated the release of Mr. Sisulu and his comrades.

The willingness of Mr. de Klerk's Government to move toward the establishment of a nonracial democracy in South Africa must be judged by his actions, not his words.

The United States, the Commonwealth, the European Community, the rest of the international community should not let up the pressure on the South African Government on account of rhetoric. They should continue the work necessary to implement strict financial sanctions and a ban on direct air links with South Africa.

However, if we are to judge Mr. de Klerk by his actions, he needs a little time to plan and implement action.

Let us first see what he achieves in his first 100 days. Then we should evaluate carefully what he tells the opening session of Parliament next year and give him, say, three months after that to make the necessary legislative changes.

I desperately hope that Mr. de

Klerk will have demonstrated by then that the sanctions campaign can be put on hold. And of course, once a truly democratic government is guaranteed, sanctions can be lifted and South Africa will take its rightful place as a respected member of the international community. □