

Virtually all of the extra-Parliamentary groups were restricted, along with many individuals. Thousands remained detained without trial under a continued State of Emergency. Censorship was intensified and, ironically, was particularly effective outside South Africa, in taking apartheid out of the spotlight.

But South Africans did not give up. Neither did Canada.

There were periods of intense frustration, when some Canadians believed we should close our Embassy and cut our ties. We made it clear that, if other measures failed, we were prepared to take those final steps. But we knew that the price would be to drastically diminish our influence. So we chose not to walk away, but instead to increase our help to apartheid's foes within South Africa, to step up our involvement in events within that country, and increase our work with our friends outside to mount and maintain international pressure.

And now there are signs that we may be at a watershed in South Africa. Both the Government and the black majority recognize the need to move forward. Both are willing to contemplate peaceful change. The atmosphere is better than it has been for decades.

But there should be no illusions: apartheid is still very much with us. Optimism about what may happen must not cloud our understanding of what still exists. The pillars of apartheid - the Population Registration Act, the Group Areas Act, the Land Act, segregated education and health care, the homelands system, and above all, the denial of the vote to the black majority - those pillars still stand, cemented in law.

Repression is less intense but it has not stopped. The State of Emergency remains in force. Political trials and detentions have not ended. Although "whites-only" signs have been removed from the beaches, life remains essentially unchanged in the townships, squatter camps, rural farms and the homelands. The lives of ordinary blacks remain constrained and constricted by an unacceptable web of discriminatory regulations covering virtually every aspect of their lives.

Still there is reason to hope. Speculation has intensified concerning the imminent release of Nelson Mandela, with whom President de Klerk recently met. Mr. de Klerk has deliberately created expectations that he will announce significant political changes when Parliament meets at the beginning of February. He has said he is prepared to undertake fundamental change through genuine negotiations with representative leaders. He has warned fellow Afrikaners that only through such a process can they move to a secure future. The release of Walter Sisulu and other political prisoners is welcome, as is the decision to allow peaceful political marches, rallies and the recent Conference for a Democratic Future.

Most of the changes Mr. de Klerk has introduced have been symbolic rather than substantive. They change selectively the application of regulations rather than the regulations themselves. But the first steps have been encouraging.