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Today the hope is abroad among our people, that those in our country who saw themselves as the master race have learned the error of their ways. There is hope that perhaps at last they have seen that injustice will not triumph. There is hope that perhaps at last they have realized that tyranny is part of the progenitor of the forces of its own destruction. There is hope that perhaps at last those who sought to deny the humanity of others have understood that by that act they also dehumanized themselves.

If indeed these are the results that have been achieved, a salute is due to those who struggled in the name of all humanity to ensure that the noble vision of liberty, equality and fraternity, includes all and excludes nobody on any basis whatsoever, be it race, colour, creed, or sex. Therefore, as we stand here today, Mr. Speaker, and acknowledge the priceless honour you have accorded us in person, we know that we are merely representatives of a people that can truly be called heroic. We come from a people who, because they would not accept to be treated as sub-human, redeemed the dignity of all humanity, everywhere.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Mandela: We represent countless matters who have walked into a hailstorm of bullets, not because they wanted to die, but because they wanted the millions of our people to live. We have sat in prison with great African patriots and noble examples of the human race, who faced torture and did not flinch, who met the hangman's noose with songs of freedom, who accepted their affairs as but a school out of which they would emerge with their convictions, their determination and their willingness to sacrifice immeasurably strengthened.

We are deeply moved that today you honour all these noble offspring of our people by allowing us, who were outcasts only yesterday, to experience, if only fleetingly, what it means to stand and speak at a place whose existence is based on the recognition of the right of all the people to determine their destiny and whose purpose is to ensure that the right is guaranteed in perpetuity. We are made better human beings by the fact that you have reached out from across the seas to say that we too, the rebels, the fugitives, the prisoners, deserve to be heard.

Our message, for whose propagation and realization so many have suffered so much, is indeed simple. It is that South Africa should be transformed into a united, democratic and non-racial country. We wish to see every adult South African enjoying the right to vote and having the possibility to be elected to all organs of government, without discrimination on grounds of race, colour or sex. Its Balkanization into Bantustan, the so-called homelands and group areas, has to end. Given our bitter experience of oppression and repression, we are determined that our country should be a truly thorough democracy in which the rights of all its citizens will be inviolable and in which all will be equal before the law.

Accordingly, in addition to a democratic constitution there should be an entrenched and justiciable bill of rights fostered by an independent judiciary.

As reflected in our historic document, the Freedom Charter, we are committed to ensure all our citizens enjoy equal rights to their languages, culture, and religious freedoms. These provisions among others will address the issue of so-called white fears while meeting the aspirations of the people of South Africa as a whole.

We also visualize an agreed constitutional arrangement whereby there is devolution of power to regional and local levels of government to ensure the broadest possible participation of the people in government themselves.

At the same time we are opposed to the idea which some in our country advance that we should opt for a federal state. We believe that there is nothing to federate. Certainly we do not accept that we should accept the fragmentation of our country as a given fact on which we should try to build the new reality.

Any attempt to do this would merely perpetuate the racial and ethnic divisions whose abolition stands at the core of our struggle. We cannot seek to end apartheid by continuing to maintain the structures of the apartheid system under any guise whatsoever.

We know that you have just completed a gruelling round of negotiations dealing with constitutional reform in this country. We are inspired by the fact that you were able to find compromises which make agreement possible. We believe that we too must be inspired by this manner of proceeding so that we also reach agreement