

It has become a truism to observe that we are in a period of remarkable change in the world.

It is a cliché; it is also an understatement.

Walls have tumbled - walls of the mind and real walls like the brutal barrier that once divided Berlin and is now mere rubble.

What we used to think was unchangeable has now changed - massively, irrevocably, and almost instantaneously. Change has become the only constant in world affairs.

And it is positive change:

- the collapse of communism and the triumphant assertion of democracy in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union;
- the discrediting of command economies and the enthusiastic embrace of the market place there - and around the world;
- the disintegration of authoritarian regimes in Latin America and the affirmation of popular power in Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Nicaragua and elsewhere;
- the possibility of real reform in South Africa, where two remarkable leaders, one black and one white, are poised for dialogue to end apartheid;
- And, at long last, signs of hope even in Indochina that the conflict there, which has killed millions and maimed many millions more, may now be coming to an end.

Those changes didn't just "happen". They are the product of the human mind, of human will. Sometimes it is the will of the people; sometimes it is the genius of wise leadership. Often it is both.

The events of the past year confirm in graphic fashion that for proud people history is there to be made - actively - not simply to be endured - passively.

And those events demonstrate the abiding ability of peoples and leaders to rise to the moment, to expand their horizons, open their hearts, liberate their minds - and in so doing construct a bright, bold future.

Those are sudden, hopeful changes, as people put the past behind them, and reach towards the future.