

'MINORITIES FEEL ALIENATED BY GOVERNMENT POLICIES SUCH AS AFFIRMATIVE ACTION'

# De Klerk warns of white skills exodus

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FORMER South African president FW de Klerk warned yesterday that SA could lose most of its skilled workforce to other countries if minority groups' concerns were not taken into account in SA's economic and social transformation agendas.

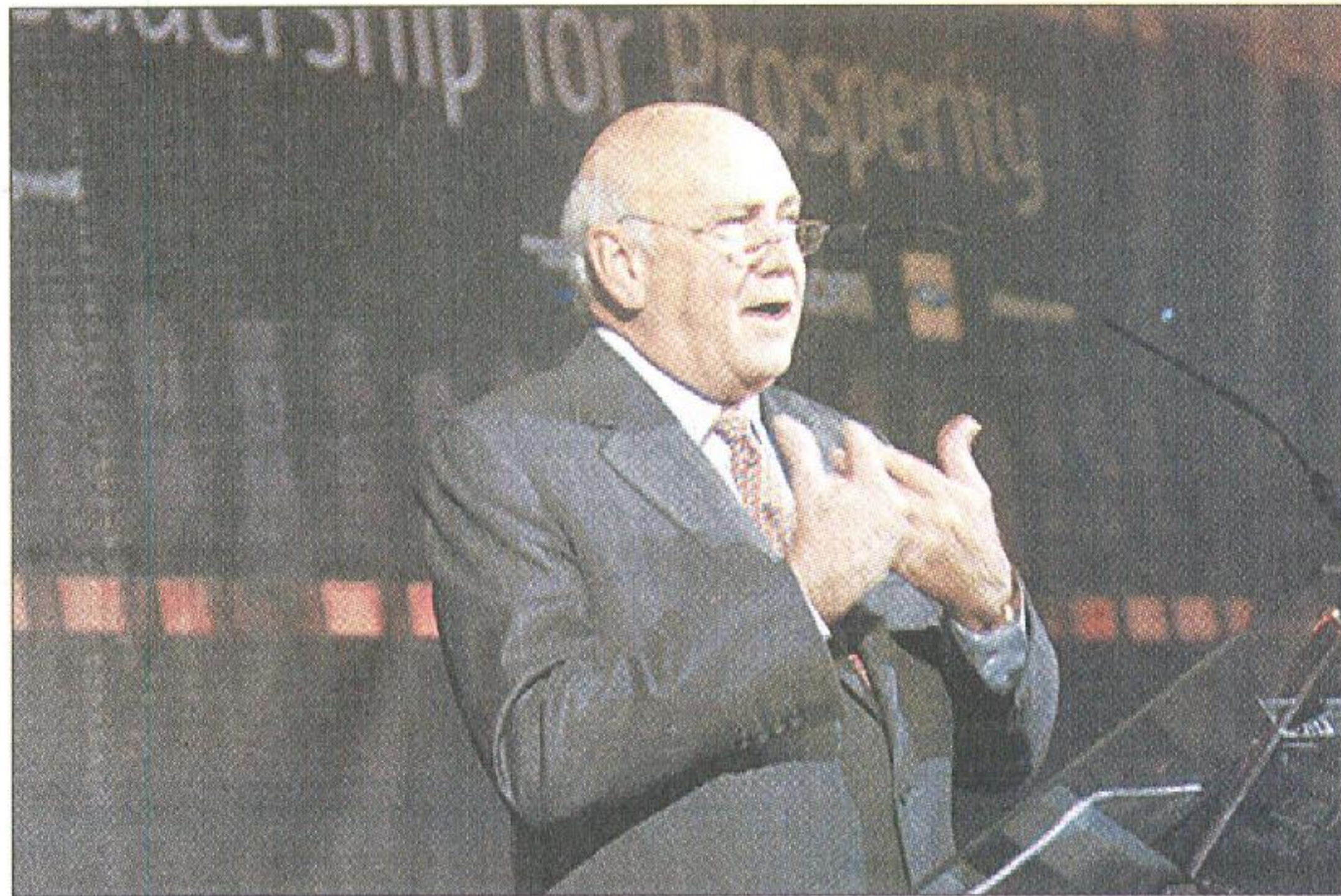
The Nobel laureate's comments come in the wake of indications that many white people, especially males, feel alienated by government policies such as affirmative action.

Speaking at the Eskom African Business Leaders Forum in Sandton yesterday, De Klerk said minority groups, mainly whites, felt "less and less" represented in the processes by which they were governed, and often perceived transformation as a new form of racial discrimination.

"The majority on the other hand often regards it as a long-overdue rectification of the deep injustices of the past," said De Klerk. He said he was "deeply concerned" by growing alienation between different racial groups in SA.

De Klerk said recent polls had shown that 72% of white males now believed, rightly or wrongly, that affirmative action had turned them into second-class citizens in their own country.

On the other hand, 70% of



**Former state president FW De Klerk addresses an African business leaders forum in Sandton yesterday. He said minority groups, mainly whites, felt 'less and less' represented.** Picture: ROBERT BOTHA

blacks South Africans felt that white farmers should be forced to sell their land, and less than 25% of blacks agreed that landowners should have the right to dispute land claims in court.

"The indications are that intercommunity tensions are increasing — not decreasing —

with the passage of time," he said

According to De Klerk, there was little frank debate about these issues. Many whites, he said, publicly expressed political support for transformation — while they educated their children privately so they could get jobs overseas.

"The result is that too many whites are emigrating — either overseas or inwardly into their own communities. They are withdrawing behind their security fences, and are not making the contribution to the broader society that they could make and I believe would dearly like to

make," the former president said.

"SA cannot afford to lose skills and commitment on this scale," said De Klerk.

He called for a national dialogue on social and economic transformation issues in which all sectors of the society including civil society would participate.

"We South Africans need to talk to one another about the challenges of our second decade.

"We need to work towards a national understanding that will enable us all to make the fullest possible contribution to achieving the vision in our constitution — the vision of a truly free, non-racial and equal society."

He urged all South Africans to work towards reaching a "balanced national consensus" on all challenges facing the country.

The country's ability to continue nurturing reconciliation and national unity would determine whether South Africans from all walks of life could live together in goodwill, equality and mutual respect, said De Klerk.

"And finally, it will determine whether the brave experiment that we South Africans launched 15 years ago will continue to succeed and offer a beacon of hope for other divided societies throughout the world."

De Klerk also urged government to deal with the scourge of HIV/AIDS poverty and the problem of illiteracy.