

# 'Lack of frank debate is harming economy'

All South Africans – black and white – must work together towards the economic empowerment of all “truly disadvantaged South Africans, most of whom are black”, former president FW de Klerk said yesterday.

Addressing the Eskom African Business Leaders Forum, he said the white population could not provide the numbers of skilled workers, professionals and managers that a growing economy required.

“Inevitably, and quite rapidly, the South African economy will grow to reflect the population composition as a whole,” he said in an address about challenges facing South Africa’s democracy in its second decade.

“However, the economy will not grow satisfactorily if we do not appoint and promote people with appropriate skills, whatever their race; if we interfere with the ability of companies to manage their affairs; or if we dilute property rights.”

He said South Africans needed to talk to one another frankly.

“There is very little frank debate ... minority communities have not been sufficiently consulted with regard to economic and social transformation,” he said.

“Many whites publicly express politically correct, but qualified, support

for transformation – while they privately educate their children to work 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.

Minority communities “feel less and less represented in the processes by which they are governed and often perceive 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.”

De Klerk also called for a labour system that established basic minimum standards for all, while allowing flexibility for medium and small businesses.

“We have adopted a social democrat labour system that is not even working in countries like France and Germany. It has raised the real cost of labour way above levels in other emerging economies with which we must compete in global markets.

“High costs and rigid regulation are a major disincentive to the creation of new jobs.” – Sapa