

White laagers must go

Johannesburg – 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 this week.

Addressing the Eskom African business leaders’ forum on Wednesday, he said the white population cannot provide the numbers of skilled workers, professionals and managers that a growing economy requires.

“Inevitably, and quite rapidly, the South African economy will grow to reflect the population composition as a whole,” he said in his address on the challenges facing South Africa as the country enters its second decade of democracy.

“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 need 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.

“South Africa cannot afford to lose skills and commitment on this scale.”

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 establishes basic minimum standards for all, while allowing flexibility for medium and small businesses.

The former president pointed out that the size of a family contributes to poverty, saying the more people there are in a family, the fewer resources there are to provide decent care and education for them.

“The roots of black poverty lies on the one hand in unemployment and on the other in the fact that the poorest South Africans continue to have the largest families.”

De Klerk said South Africa needs to improve service delivery to its poorest sectors.

“Efficient education, social services and health services can greatly help to improve the basic living conditions in which they live.” – *Finance24*