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COMMENT:

MR F W DE KLERK'S VISIT TO MAPUTO

21.7.89

The extended three-hour meeting between the Leader of the National Party, Mr F W de Klerk, and President Joaquim Chissano of Mozambique has been hailed by both sides as significant and successful. President Chissano even went as far as foreseeing that South Africa could be welcomed as a full member of the Southern African community of nations.

Of even greater significance than the meeting itself, however, is the new and hopeful Southern African political climate in which it took place. In essence, Mr De Klerk's Maputo talks

were a follow-up to the earlier visits to Mozambique and other Southern African countries by State President P W Botha and the Minister of Foreign Affairs when a Marshall Plan for Southern Africa was first mooted by the South Africans. Then, as in Wednesday's talks, the various conflict situations in Southern African countries and a reaffirmation of the principles of the Nkomati Accord were discussed.

Superficially, the attitudes and expectations engendered by Mr De Klerk's visits abroad and his pronouncements since being elected Leader of the National Party on his vision of domestic political and constitutional development, are similar to those which prevailed when President Botha initiated his domestic reforms, signed the Nkomati Accord and met African and European leaders. What has changed significantly is the greater readiness to accept South Africa's good faith, a growing realisation at home and abroad that negotiated settlements have a far greater potential for producing results than continued confrontation, as well as a willingness to emphasise common ground rather than points of difference.

Previously, South Africa's relations in Southern Africa and further afield tended to be characterised by a great deal of suspicion - that the Government was less than sincere about real domestic reform, about bringing South West Africa/Namibia to independence and about not aiding Renamo or destabilising the Southern African Region.



Several important developments have aided the change of climate, including the constructive role played by South Africa in bringing about the peace accords for South Western Africa, her impeccable behaviour in implementing the independence plan in South West Africa/Namibia and President Botha's meeting with Mr Nelson Mandela.

There is ample evidence of the new climate: it is perceivable in the favourable response Mr De Klerk has elicited from people like Mrs Thatcher, Chancellor Kohl and Mr Herman Cohen; in President Kaunda's renewed statement that he is anxious to talk to Mr De Klerk at any time and in the declarations by Mr De Klerk and President Chissano that they want to play a positive role in one another's countries. Especially noteworthy in this context is Mr Chissano's public acknowledgement that the South African Government is not aiding Renamo and Mr De Klerk's unequivocal message to Renamo to end violence and negotiate.

New windows of opportunity for political, economic and social co-operation and development are clearly opening for Southern Africa. About those concerned being fully aware of this, there can be little doubt.

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