

ورقة

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**REMARKS BY FORMER PRESIDENT F W DE
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**THE IMPORTANCE OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN A
GLOBALISING WORLD**

Why are human rights important? And why is it in the interest of wise leaders to promote the freedom of individuals?

Human rights are important not only because of the intrinsic contribution that they make to the quality of life of individuals. They also create a climate of freedom that is essential for the prosperity and success of countries in a fiercely competitive globalising world.

Britain was the first country to enter the industrial age, not because of the size of population, the extent of its territory or the resources that it controlled. The critical success factor was that the English enjoyed far greater personal freedom and security from arbitrary state action than their counterparts anywhere else in the world – even though the country was still very far from being a constitutional democracy. The fact is that already by the eighteenth century Englishmen enjoyed the protection of a reasonably independent legal system. In a period of absolute monarchs in most of the rest of Europe, there were effective constraints on the power of British kings and governments to do as they pleased.

In the climate of relative freedom that ensued there was a remarkable blossoming of intellectual, commercial and scientific endeavour in Britain that greatly contributed to its emergence as a global power.

In the final analysis the free systems of the West triumphed over the totalitarian system of the Soviet Union and its satellites – not because they had greater armies or military resources. They were successful because the closed Soviet system was non-competitive and incapable of the creativity, innovation and dynamism of free societies.

In a period of three or four decades Hong Kong became one of the most prosperous and creative societies in the world because it had the freest economy in the world. The people of Hong Kong were free to take basic economic decisions with minimum government interference – and their basic rights were protected by an effective and impartial legal system. The People's Republic of China noticed this and realised that economic growth depended – to a great extent – on liberalising its economy and providing people with much greater ability to make decisions about their lives.

Above all, the freedom assured by fundamental human rights empowers people. It enables and invites them to

compete in free market places of ideas, commodities and employment. On the whole, it rewards the diligent, the creative and the productive participants in the economy. The aggregate of the efforts of free people results almost inevitably in accelerated economic growth and in improved living standards.

Individual rights will become even more crucial to the success of societies in a globalising world. The creative, productive and competitive individuals – who are essential for the success of any society – will increasingly be attracted to free environments where their efforts will be properly rewarded.

*With the resulting brain drain
from less free countries*

Finally, the recognition of human rights provides the foundation for the development of democratic systems. Indeed, genuine democracies cannot function in the absence of freedom of speech and opinion; freedom to organise and to participate in elections; and freedom from arbitrary government action.

There is a close correlation between basic civil and economic rights on the one hand, and high economic growth rates, low unemployment and improving living standards on the other. Accordingly, respect for fundamental human rights and for economic freedom is increasingly becoming a *sine qua non* for societies that wish to compete successfully in our globalising world.