This Report is the culmination of a remarkable effort by extraordinary people, and
I want to begin by paying a warm tribute to the Commission’s staff, committee
members and commissioners. At this time in particular, we give thanks for those
staff who, under the direction of Commissioners Hlengiwe Mkhize, Denzil
Potgieter and Yasmin Sooka, have given such meticulous attention to bringing
the project to finality, to the extent of providing us with summaries of the cases
of some twenty thousand people declared to have suffered gross human rights
violations in the period between 1960 and our first democratic election. We
owe a very great debt of gratitude to Sue de Villiers who, with her editorial
colleagues, working under considerable pressure, did wonders to produce
codicil on time. Thank you, thank you. It has been an incredible privilege
for those of us who served the Commission to preside over the process of
healing a traumatized and wounded people.

We are also deeply grateful to the thousands of South Africans who came to
the Commission to tell us their stories. They have won our country the admiration
of the world: wherever one goes, South Africa’s peaceful transition to democracy,
culminating in the Truth and Reconciliation process, is spoken of almost in
reverent tones, as a phenomenon that is unique in the annals of history, one
to be commended as a new way of living for humankind. Other countries
have had truth commissions, and many more are following our example, but
ours is regarded as the most ambitious, a kind of benchmark against which
the rest are measured.

We hope that the completion of the Commission’s Report brings a measure
of closure to the process. I regret that at the time of writing we owe so much
by way of reparations to those who have been declared victims. The healing of
those who came to us does hinge on their receiving more substantial reparations
and I would be very deeply distressed if our country were to let down those
who had the magnanimity and generosity of spirit to reveal their pain in public.
I appeal to the Government that we meet this solemn obligation and responsibility,
and I should like to express appreciation that the Minister of Finance has made it
clear that he still regards reparations as unfinished business.

Those who brought to birth the TRC process also ought to be commended
for their wisdom, which has recently been demonstrated no more clearly than by
the trial of Dr Wouter Basson. Without making any judgment on the correctness
of the judge’s decision, the case has shown clearly how inadequate the
criminal justice system can be in exposing the full truth of, and establishing
clear accountability for what happened in our country. More seriously, we
have seen how unsuccessful prosecutions lead to bitterness and frustration
in the community. Amnesty applicants often confessed to more gruesome
crimes than were the subject of the Basson trial, yet their assumption of
responsibility, and the sense that at least people were getting some measure
of truth from the process, resulted in much less anger. For the sake of our
stability, it is fortunate that the kind of details exposed by the Commission
did not come out in a series of criminal trials, which – because of the difficulty
of proving cases beyond reasonable doubt in the absence of witnesses other
than co-conspirators – most likely would have ended in acquittals.

In terms of the settlement reached between the Commission and Chief Buthelezi
and the Inkatha Freedom Party, I draw your attention to appendices 1 and 2
to Section 4, Chapter 4 of this volume, being their responses to the findings
made against them in the Final Report handed to President Mandela on
29 October 1996.

It is something of a pity that, by and large, the white community failed to take
advantage of the Truth and Reconciliation process. They were badly let down
by their leadership. Many of them carry a burden of a guilt which would have
been assuaged had they actively embraced the opportunities offered by the
Commission; those who do not consciously acknowledge any sense of guilt
are in a sense worse off than those who do. Apart from the hurt that it causes
to those who suffered, the denial by so many white South Africans even that
they benefited from apartheid is a crippling, self-inflicted blow to their capacity
to enjoy and appropriate the fruits of change. But mercifully there have been
glorious exceptions. All of us South Africans must know that reconciliation is
a long haul and depends not on a commission for its achievement but on all
of us making our contribution. It is a national project after all is said and done.

We have been privileged to help to heal a wounded people, though we ourselves
have been, in Henri Nouwen’s profound and felicitous phrase, ‘wounded healers’.
When we look around us at some of the conflict areas of the world, it becomes
increasingly clear that there is not much of a future for them without forgiveness,
without reconciliation. God has blessed us richly so that we might be a blessing
to others. Quite improbably, we as South Africans have become a beacon of
hope to others locked in deadly conflict that peace, that a just resolution, is
possible. If it could happen in South Africa, then it can certainly happen any-
where else. Such is the exquisite divine sense of humour.