

**August 31, 1990**  
**Letter from South African President De Klerk to  
President Bush**

**Citation:**

"Letter from South African President De Klerk to President Bush", August 31, 1990, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Bush Presidential Library. Obtained and contributed by Anna-Mart van Wyk, Monash South Africa  
<https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/114187>

**Summary:**

South African President De Klerk writes to U.S. President George H.W. Bush in reply to the latter's 24 July, 1990 letter regarding South Africa's accession to the NPT. The letter explicitly states South Africa's commitment to disarmament and suggests the possibility of "declaring South Africa a nuclear weapons free zone."

**Credits:**

This document was made possible with support from Carnegie Corporation of New York (CCNY)

**Original Language:**

English

**Contents:**

Original Scan



Uniegebou  
Pretoria

Union Buildings  
Pretoria

31 August 1990

Mr George H W Bush  
President of the United States of America  
The White House  
WASHINGTON, DC  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Dear Mr President

Thank you for your letter dated July 24, 1990, concerning prospects for South African accession to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Your continued interest in the South African position and your efforts on our behalf to persuade the Front Line States to join South Africa in membership of the Treaty are highly appreciated.

The South African Government gave a firm assurance to the three NPT depository states during March this year that it would accede to the Treaty pursuant upon certain Southern African Front Line States making an equal commitment. This commitment remains unchanged. The depository states have in the past advised my Government that the reason advanced by various African states for their refusal to accede to the NPT was their concern and fear that South Africa had developed a nuclear weapons capability which could be used against them. My Government therefore saw the March step as an important commitment towards the process of disarmament in Southern Africa, perhaps to be followed by a regional treaty declaring Southern Africa a nuclear weapons free zone.

This remains our goal. Indeed, my Government would be strongly in favour of a Treaty declaring the entire African continent a nuclear weapons free area. The South African Government finds it difficult to understand why the Front Line States do not share our objective and are

not prepared to cooperate with South Africa in achieving this goal.

Since the commencement of discussions with the depository states, South Africa has conducted its nuclear programme in the spirit of compliance with the aims of the Treaty. We shall continue to do so. You will know that we indicated a willingness to open all our nuclear facilities to international inspection by August 1991, irrespective of whether we may have acceded to the Treaty at that time. Due to scheduling arrangements, however, the date of August 1991 has become problematical and we now propose November 1991 at which time we shall be ready to enter into a comprehensive safeguards agreement. All of this, we believe, should demonstrate to the Agency and the international community our commitment to adherence with Treaty objectives and responsibilities.

I have been encouraged by your sympathetic insight into the political sensitivities prevailing in South Africa. I therefore feel that I can be frank with you in sharing some thoughts on the dilemma that accession to the Treaty poses presently. As a political leader, Mr President, you will appreciate the situation where I am required to deal with a domestic environment that is not made easier by the continuing inability of foreign governments to demonstrate encouragement in a more substantive manner, of the progression in the negotiation process. My situation is further complicated by linking foreign demands for change to punitive measures rather than incentives of encouragement.

In dealing with the accession dilemma within this context it is important for our domestic political programme that any appearance of being responsive to foreign agendas be avoided. The most sensible way we feel that our present domestic situation could be reconciled to the inevitable domestic political exploitation of accession, would be if a regional accession initiative could be brokered with the Front Line States. We firmly believe this position is reasonable and should prove attainable for the collective resources of the three Depositories.

3

It remains our hope that the depository states will be able to find it possible to create the required context for South Africa to accede to the Treaty at the earliest possible date.

I too look forward to a meeting and in the interim offer my best wishes.

Yours sincerely



F W DE KLERK  
STATE PRESIDENT OF THE  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA