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File Rhodesia



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

13 July 1979

Dear Sir,

BISHOP MUZOREWA'S CALL ON THE PRIME MINISTER ON 13 JULY, 1979

Bishop Muzorewa, accompanied by his Minister for External Affairs, Mr. Mukome, called on the Prime Minister at No. 10 this afternoon at 1445. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and Sir Antony Duff were present at the meeting. I enclose a copy of my note of the discussion, which lasted for just over three-quarters-of-an-hour.

I should be grateful if you would ensure that the record, parts of which are particularly sensitive, is given a very restricted distribution indeed.

I am sending a copy of this letter, and enclosure, to Martin Vile (Cabinet Office).

Yours ever,

Ryan Cardwell.

J.S. Wall, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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← Master Set of Records.

NOTE OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S DISCUSSION WITH BISHOP ABEL MUZOREWA,
PRIME MINISTER OF ZIMBABWE-RHODESIA, AT 10 DOWNING STREET, ON
13 JULY 1979

Present:

The Prime Minister

Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary

Sir Antony Duff

Mr. B.G. Cartledge

Bishop Muzorewa

Mr. Mukome (Minister for
External Affairs)

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When the Prime Minister had welcomed Bishop Muzorewa, and the Bishop had in turn congratulated the Prime Minister on her election victory, the Prime Minister said that although she did not wish to cover the same ground as Lord Carrington during the Bishop's morning session of talks with him, she thought it would be useful to summarise the British Government's position once more.

The Prime Minister told Bishop Muzorewa that everybody in the United Kingdom recognised that he and his colleagues had come a tremendously long way. She never failed to tell everybody she met that Rhodesia had held elections on the basis of one person, one vote, in which there had been a 65 per cent turn out and which had resulted in the election of a black Prime Minister, with a black President, a black majority in Parliament and a black majority in the Cabinet. Zimbabwe-Rhodesia had covered the greater part of its journey towards independence. The British Government wished to take as many people as they possibly could with them in winning acceptance for the new situation in the country; this was the purpose of the consultations which had been carried on in recent weeks. From these consultations, two points had come across very strongly. The first was that the constitution of Zimbabwe-Rhodesia would have to be comparable to the constitutions which the UK had given

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to other African countries at their independence. Secondly, the constitutional arrangements would have to be seen to have originated with, and to have been approved by, the UK.

The Prime Minister went on to say that the constitutional changes which the UK thought necessary would not be such as to undermine the confidence of the white population in Rhodesia. Bishop Muzorewa was very wise to insist on retaining this confidence, in the interests of his country's future economic success. The changes would, moreover, be quite small in relation to the distance which Rhodesia had already travelled. The Prime Minister pointed out to Bishop Muzorewa that the kind of changes the UK had in mind would in fact increase his own powers as Prime Minister. It was astonishing that he, as Prime Minister, should have to submit new appointments to the independent commissions. There were also too many white Members of Parliament, who were able to operate a blocking mechanism. The Prime Minister repeated that changes to these aspects of the constitution would, nevertheless, be minor in relation to what Rhodesia had already achieved. Rhodesia had already covered 90 per cent of the distance: the UK wanted her to travel the remaining 10 per cent of the way, so that the British Government could say that the constitution was legal and comparable to those which had been granted in the past.

The Prime Minister said that the British Government was determined that if they regarded revised constitutional arrangements as being right, they would not be blocked or dictated to by anybody or at any conference. Having come so far, it would be foolish if Rhodesia were to fail to take the final step. The Prime Minister repeated that the British Government had no wish to undermine the confidence of the whites. They were speaking to Bishop Muzorewa as friends and they wanted to see rapid progress over the last phase. Sir Anthony Duff was already engaged in a detailed comparison of the constitution of Zimbabwe-Rhodesia with the constitutions of other former British colonies in Africa. Many of these constitutions had allowed

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for the special representation of minorities: there could be no objection of principle to this and minorities had to be protected. The Prime Minister emphasised that the British Government were not seeking immediate or instant changes. They were concerned to work towards the ending of sanctions, as rapidly as possible; but, at the forthcoming conference in Lusaka, they would not propose to set out the constitutional changes which they had in mind in detail. This was purely a matter between Bishop Muzorewa and the UK. At Lusaka, she and Lord Carrington would simply say that they would be making proposals for a constitutional basis on which Zimbabwe-Rhodesia could be brought to legal independence. Thereafter, if the proposals were acceptable to the Bishop, the British Government would invite him and the representatives of the Patriotic Front to a conference. If the Patriotic Front refused to attend, this would not give them a power of veto over progress to independence. There would then have to be a test of acceptability but it should be possible to complete the whole process by the end of October.

Lord Carrington said that he had only one point to add, namely that unless the kind of changes which the Prime Minister had outlined took place, no country of any importance would recognise Zimbabwe-Rhodesia, even if the UK had done so. The Prime Minister agreed and pointed out that Lord Harlech's consultations had shown that even President Banda and President Seretse Khama had made it clear that changes to the constitution were essential. The British Government must be able to argue, with other African governments, ^{they had themselves accepted comparable constitutions when} that/they had achieved independence and that they consequently had no right to object to the constitution of Zimbabwe-Rhodesia.

Lord Carrington said that it was important to be able to wrong-foot the bullies: if this were done, there would be a much better chance of putting an end to the war in Rhodesia. In a brief reference to Mr. Ian Smith, the Prime Minister said that he would presumably leave the Government as soon as he was certain that independence and the lifting of sanctions were in prospect.

/Bishop Muzorewa

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Bishop Muzorewa told the Prime Minister how much he appreciated the new and positive attitude of the British Government towards his country. The visits to Salisbury of Sir Antony Duff, Mr. Day and Lord Harlech had made a very great difference to the situation and he and his colleagues in Salisbury now knew that the British Government were trying to help. The Bishop said that the Prime Minister clearly understood some of his concerns. But he still believed, on the basis of the reports which he had received from his representatives, that many in Africa would follow a clear lead from the UK. If the British Government were to decide to lift sanctions or to recognise his regime, they would find that they had support even if no changes had taken place in the existing constitution. Sanctions, after all, had not been imposed because of defects in a constitution: they had been imposed as a result of rebellion against the British Crown. But now the people of Zimbabwe-Rhodesia were sovereign and had spoken up for government by the people. Zimbabwe-Rhodesia nevertheless remained Britain's responsibility and it was therefore up to Britain to give a lead. Inevitably, there would be some shouting and name-calling: but, the Bishop said, many would follow the UK.

The Prime Minister replied that she wished that this were true. But it did not accord with the British Government's own information. Telegram after telegram which she had read showed that there was still some way for Rhodesia to go. The Prime Minister emphasised that it would strengthen the Bishop's own hand if he were to get rid of the commissions and if he were to increase the number of black Members of Parliament - it might be easier to add to the black membership rather than reducing the white membership.

Bishop Muzorewa said that a key problem was the fact that in the present situation all the members of the white community were sensitive and frightened. The situation following the

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achievement of black majority rule was in any case a delicate one: but in Zimbabwe-Rhodesia it was greatly aggravated by the war. The whites were wondering in what way Bishop Muzorewa was any different from other African leaders. He could only show them how different he was through his own actions. Any move towards constitutional change would frighten the whites. The Prime Minister replied that the British Government was only asking that Rhodesia should have a constitution similar to that which had been given to other African states on independence. She asked the Bishop whether it would be helpful for Lord Carrington to visit Salisbury immediately after the Lusaka conference. This might strengthen the confidence of the white population. Lord Carrington said that it might be better if somebody other than he were to go; such a visit could, in any case, have an unsettling rather than a reassuring effect on the whites.

The Prime Minister said that the opponents of the internal settlement argued that power had not really been transferred to the Africans. She assured them that it had. The critics then pointed to the blocking mechanism and to the commissions. If these aspects of the constitution were changed, the critics' argument would crumble. The British Government would also be able to say that the constitution was comparable to others. It would be possible, in those circumstances, for the UK to bring the United States along with her; the American attitude had already changed significantly, as a result of the British Government's efforts.

Lord Carrington said that the United States would probably be able to come along with the UK. But the US would certainly not support the UK if recognition were to be given on the basis of the constitution as it stood.

Bishop Muzorewa said that Zimbabwe-Rhodesia's problem was that they had already done so much and would have hoped for

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some reward for what had already been achieved. For example, sanctions could be lifted now, in return for what had already been done, and legality restored in return for the further changes which the British Government wanted. This procedure would create greater confidence in the white community. If they were given some reward now, the whites would face the second stage of change with greater confidence. The Prime Minister said that this approach would create political problems in her own Party. The timescale of the process which the British Government had in mind would in fact be very short: once constitutional changes had been made, the UK would move very fast. Lord Carrington pointed out that a further difficulty in the course suggested by the Bishop would be that it would undermine the procedural approach which the Government had in mind: if sanctions had already been lifted, nobody would take the British Government's further efforts at all seriously. The Prime Minister asked Lord Carrington whether it would be possible for him to go to Salisbury any earlier, before Lusaka. Lord Carrington pointed out that this would be interpreted, at Lusaka, as collusion between London and Salisbury; the British would be accused of ganging up with the Rhodesians.

Sir Antony Duff, referring to the comparative constitutional study on which he was working, said that the independence constitutions of both Tanzania and Zambia had provided for special minority representation. Bishop Muzorewa agreed and commented that the Tanzanian constitution, in particular, had been extremely generous to minorities.

The Prime Minister repeated that it would be necessary to work very fast. Bishop Muzorewa would not have long to wait. The UK would send somebody to visit Salisbury, with specific proposals, very soon after the end of the Lusaka conference on 8 August. Lord Carrington said that Lord Harlech's and Mr. Day's talks with members of the white community in Zimbabwe-Rhodesia showed that many whites, for example David Smith, admitted that there was a need for some change.

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Mr. Mukome said that the unfortunate factor in the situation was that his country was engaged in a war. Any leak concerning the possibility of constitutional change would gravely undermine the confidence of the white members of the security forces, since they would have no means of knowing how extensive the changes were likely to be. Their suspicions would be aroused. The whites argued that the British Government had set out six principles which must be fulfilled. These had all now been carried out and they would have expected the British Government to acknowledge this. Instead, they were told that there were still weaknesses in the constitution and that they could not reap the benefit of what they had done until changes had been made. They were always being asked for more. It was true that some of the changes which the British Government wanted to see concerned aspects of the constitution which the Africans themselves had tried to get rid of. But their retention was the price which the Africans had to pay for being able to keep the terrorists down, which could not be done without the help of the whites. The Prime Minister said that it would have to be made very clear to the white community that the changes for which the British Government were asking represented the end of the process. She told Bishop Muzorewa that she would have to take the whole of her Party with her if sanctions were to be lifted. Lord Carrington added that unless there was some move on the constitution, a number of Conservatives would vote against the removal of sanctions.

The Prime Minister said that the way forward which she had indicated should be acceptable to the Bishop and his people and it would also enable the British Government to bring the Americans, and others, along with them. She and her colleagues had no interest in those who wanted the bullet to win in Rhodesia. Bishop Muzorewa told the Prime Minister that at the end of his meeting with President Carter, the President had said that the US Government would follow whatever lead the British Government gave. Lord Carrington pointed out that

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what the President had in mind in saying this was precisely the kind of procedure which he and the Prime Minister had been outlining.

Bishop Muzorewa asked about the timetable which the Prime Minister had in mind. The Prime Minister said that the UK's proposals for changes in the constitution could be put forward by the middle of August and a constitutional conference convened in September. The whole process could be completed by the end of October. When the British Government made its proposals, Bishop Muzorewa could make it clear that he and his people would accept the new constitution if the UK were to grant Zimbabwe-Rhodesia legal independence. Lord Carrington pointed out that if Nkomo and Mugabe did, in fact, agree to attend the constitutional conference, the next steps would have to be arranged rather differently; but they were very unlikely to come. The Prime Minister said that if they did attend, and accepted the proposals, there would be no argument against an immediate return to legality.

Mr. Mukome said that he feared that the Patriotic Front leaders might be advised by the Front Line Presidents to accept invitations to the constitutional conference in order to buy more time. If this happened, the confidence of the whites would be undermined and Zimbabwe-Rhodesia would lose a great many of her most skilled people. He could foresee a situation in which the Patriotic Front might attend a conference and drag it out while the war continued. Sanctions would remain in force at the same time, while the Patriotic Front were supplied with more new weapons. The timescale of what the UK was proposing was much too long.

Bishop Muzorewa said that another problem lay in the Prime Minister's reference to a further test of acceptability. The

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British Government should not under-estimate what the people of Zimbabwe-Rhodesia had been through during the last election, turning out to vote at the risk of their lives. Lord Carrington said that this stage was still some way off. Sir Antony Duff told Bishop Muzorewa that he was permanently concerned by all the things which might go wrong along the road to a settlement. It was impossible to perceive exactly how matters would turn out: but both the British Government and the Bishop were certain of their objectives and the only sensible approach was to move forward step by step, tackling problems as and when they arose. He was now more optimistic about the prospects for a settlement than he had been for a very long time.

The Prime Minister said that the British Government certainly possessed the resolve to carry matters to a conclusion. Lord Carrington added that they were also working to a timetable.

After a short discussion of what should be said to the press, it was agreed that both sides would adhere strictly to the three paragraphs of the attached note, omitting the second paragraph of the original draft press line.

Concluding the discussion, the Prime Minister repeated that the British Government had the resolve to help Zimbabwe-Rhodesia towards legal independence within a limited time.

The meeting ended at 1535.

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13 July 1979