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Commonwealth

10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

31 July 1981

Dear Mr. Ramphal.

I am writing in reply to your circular letter of 27 May about the agenda for this year's Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting.

I share your view of the gravity of the problems facing the world community today and, like you, I believe that the Commonwealth's capacity for helping in their solution has been demonstrably enhanced since our meeting in Lusaka two years ago. I am confident that Melbourne will see that capacity both increased and utilised.

I feel sure that it will be right, as you suggest, to retain the well-proven shape of the agenda, with broad (and flexible) headings; and the general outline suggested in your letter looks very suitable. The traditional review of the world political scene should, as always, be particularly valuable.

The problem of Rhodesia now, happily, lies behind us; but, as you rightly indicate, others in Southern Africa remain. I share your view that lasting peace in the whole of Southern Africa depends on faster progress towards the ending of apartheid; and the Heads of Government will clearly wish to review the situation in that area. On the Gleneagles Agreement, I hope we shall not try to change it. It is a subject that arouses strong feelings and the different traditions of individual members of

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the Commonwealth make differences of approach inevitable. I do not think that the Commonwealth would profit from a lengthy discussion.

I agree with you that there are plenty of sources of concern for Commonwealth countries in the world economic situation. I agree too that, coming as it does between Ottawa and Mexico, the meeting at Melbourne takes on an added significance. There will be plenty to talk about. What I look forward to at Melbourne is a discussion which seeks to identify the economic problems which matter for all (or the majority of) Commonwealth countries, and which focuses on possible solutions to those problems. I believe that it would be wrong in principle, as well as in conflict with the Commonwealth tradition, to consider these problems in the context of a conflict of interest - or, even worse, confrontation - between the developed countries and the developing countries. Our quest must be for solutions which could bring benefit to all countries concerned. The report prepared by Professor Arndt and his colleagues could provide a useful point of departure. It was gratifyingly down to earth and practical in its approach.

There will clearly be much to discuss under the heading of Commonwealth functional cooperation, something which I too regard as one of the most valuable features of the Commonwealth relationship. On the particular topic of food production, we agree with you on the importance of this, and will look forward to hearing about your ideas.

I shall too look forward to hearing about progress in regional cooperation: and I agree that it will be useful to have a further discussion on the problems of our smaller member countries particularly the island developing countries and certain other specially disadvantaged member countries.

You can be assured that the British Government recognises the value of the work done by the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation and share your hope that ways and means can be found

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of providing it with adequate resources. I hope that there may be a readiness to respond on all sides.

While welcoming in principle the suggestion of increased cooperation in the cultural sphere, I must confess that I have very real doubts about the idea of creating at the present stage an intergovernmental body for such a purpose. Given present financial constraints, we would not ourselves be in a position to provide funds; and I suspect that this could also be true of many of our Commonwealth partners. Perhaps the Commonwealth Arts Organisation can be encouraged to look elsewhere for support.

Finally, one suggestion. Lusaka was successful in preserving a welcome degree of the frankness and informality which have, traditionally, been such valuable characteristics of Commonwealth meetings. I wonder whether at Melbourne we might not try to achieve a rather shorter communique than in recent years, and one more directly reflecting actual discussions. I hope that this thought may commend itself to you and to Malcolm Fraser.

Yours sincerely
Raymond White

His Excellency Mr. Shridath S. Ramphal, Kt., C.M.G., Q.C.