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10 DOWNING STREET

23 September, 1983

THE PRIME MINISTER

Dear Mr. Ransford.

I enjoyed our recent talk about the prospects for this year's Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. I am now writing in reply to your circular letter of 2 August about the agenda.

As you say in your letter, the world continues to be beset by apparently intractable problems. I of course share your hope that the Commonwealth may be able to make a contribution to solving at least some of them. I would see great value in private, informal discussion of these matters. It is that kind of discussion that gives these meetings their unique value.

As far as individual issues are concerned, you have identified those of particular Commonwealth concern. With so many problems to discuss, it will be more than ever important not to spend too long on one or two, however important, at the expense of the others.

I am however a little unhappy about two of your suggestions. First, I do not believe that a specifically Commonwealth initiative on disarmament or global security would advance significantly the work already under way in arms control negotiations in the UN and other fora. Second, we believe that the best prospects for reaching a settlement in Cyprus lie in the inter-communal talks in Nicosia held under the auspices of the UN. Initiatives outside this framework would seriously risk cutting across the efforts of the UN Secretary-General and could well prove counter-productive. For this reason we would prefer to avoid substantive discussion of this question in New Delhi.

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I agree that the problems of Southern Africa should be discussed by Commonwealth leaders in order to see how best to contribute to the search for solutions. I share your disappointment at the slow rate of progress towards Namibian independence. I shall naturally be ready, with Mr. Trudeau, to give an account of the activities of the Contact Group. Some of our colleagues will no doubt want to discuss implementation of Gleneagles, but I would hope we need not spend a great deal of time on this. I was, as you know, greatly encouraged by the decisive vote by the MCC against sending a team to South Africa.

As you suggested to Janet Young in July, it might be opportune for me to bring Heads of Government up to date on our thinking on the Falklands. I would propose to say something about our plans for the Falkland Islands, to thank those of our colleagues who have given us general support on this issue and to urge them to continue doing so.

As you say in your letter there has been a great deal of discussion about international economic issues in the first half of 1983. The reality of interdependence is now generally accepted. An enduring recovery in the world economy will do more than anything else to alleviate the problems currently facing the developing countries. We are at present studying the report entitled "Towards a New Bretton Woods", which you sent me on 12 September and about which we spoke when you came to see me.

I agree that we should look closely at the various aspects of functional co-operation within the Commonwealth. I am sure you are right to say that, in present financial circumstances, we should aim for a period of consolidation. If there are to be proposals for increased activities in any area, it would be helpful if these could be costed, and if proposals could also be put forward for balancing savings.

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I look forward to seeing your paper about the style and format of our Meetings. As you know, I would like to see them become even more informal and businesslike. But I recognise the problems and realise that the solution essentially lies with Heads of Government themselves. I believe that the Chairman has a particularly crucial role to play. We can rely on Mrs Gandhi to exercise the right mixture of firmness and tact. In this connection, I welcome your suggestion that the Meeting should conclude on the evening of 29 November.

Finally, I hope we can pursue with real determination our search for a shorter communique. We all seem to favour this in principle, but it always eludes us in practice. I hope we may have more success on this occasion.

Yours sincerely
Rajiv Gandhi

His Excellency Mr. Shridath Ramphal, Kt, GMC, QC