

Durban

Spokesman, recalling that yesterday he had been unable to say when FCO Minister of State, Mr Malcolm Rifkind and Mr Donald Anderson MP would be able to meet, said they had however met late yesterday evening for 30 minutes.

He said "They discussed the situation in the Durban Consulate. Mr Rifkind was interested to hear from Mr Anderson his impressions of his recent visit to South Africa". Spokesman then read out the following statement:

"We have received a statement issued by Messrs Gumede, Nair and David, the three South African citizens staging a sit-in in the British Consulate in Durban.

We made clear from the beginning of this problem that while, for humanitarian reasons, we would not require them to leave against their will, we hoped they would leave voluntarily. Since 8 October, when the Natal Supreme Court rejected the application for the invalidation of the detention orders, we have strongly advised the remaining three to leave. The increasing disruption of the Consulate's work is becoming intolerable.

We must emphasise now that HMG cannot countenance any demands from the three; nor can we accept any conditions for their departure. We have always said that we cannot act as intermediaries with the South African Government. It would also be quite improper for us to intervene in the legal processes of South Africa, however much we may disapprove of them.

We have also stressed to the three that the use of the Consulate's premises to make political statements is unacceptable. Following the clandestine ITN interview of 7 October we sought an assurance that there would be no repetition of such incidents. Such an assurance has not been forthcoming. The issue of this latest statement represents a further instance of such abuse of our premises. We take a very grave view of it. We are urgently considering its implications."

Spokesman added that Lord Trefgarne had made a similar statement in the House of Lords today in reply to a question. This statement read:

'We made clear that we would not require the three South African citizens in the Consulate to leave against their will. However, our mission in Durban is one of the smallest in the Diplomatic Service and the problems created by the sit-in are immense and increasing. The increasing disruption of the Consulate's work is becoming intolerable. We have therefore strongly urged the three to leave voluntarily.

We have stressed to the three that the use of the Consulate's premises to make political statements is unacceptable. We sought an assurance that there will be no repetition of the clandestine ITN interview of 7 October. Such an assurance has not been forthcoming. Yesterday's statement by the three is a further instance of the abuse of our premises. We take a grave view of it. We are urgently considering its implications. We must emphasise now that HMG cannot countenance any demands from the three; nor can we accept any conditions for their departure.'

Replying to questions, spokesman said the accumulative effect of the sit-in was resulting in a serious disruption of the Consulate's normal commercial, consular, political and aid work.