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South African Embassy

LONDON

PRIME MINISTER'S
PERSONAL MESSAGE
SERIAL No. T 201/85

28th October 1985

(Original letter dated 22/10/85)

Dear Prime Minister,

Thank you for the message which you sent to me from Nassau and which I received on 21 October 1985.

At the outset let me say that I understand the difficult position in which you were placed during the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Nassau and appreciate the particular efforts which you made to ameliorate the decisions which were taken there. I am fully aware of the emotional atmosphere which dominated the discussions on South Africa.

Nevertheless I trust that you will also understand the position of the South African Government. The discussions on South Africa amounted to blatant interference in our national affairs. I must point out that outsiders cannot resolve our problems for us. It is South Africans themselves who will have to find the solutions. I wish to re-iterate that we need to be left in peace so that we can all meet across the table, develop trust and confidence in each other and resolve our problems in our own way.

It is clear to me that our neighbours in Southern Africa who subscribe to the measures decided upon in Nassau will damage their economies much more severely than ours. It must be obvious that one of the very first results of punitive economic measures or sanctions against South Africa, will be a curb on the influx of foreign workers from neighbouring states who seek to escape the hardships of the economic retrogression in their own countries by finding employment in South Africa. I wish however, to make it very clear that such a situation would not be of our making and that we should not be blamed if we are forced to curtail our economic co-operation with and assistance to our neighbours.

Regarding the proposed visit by a group "eminent Commonwealth persons", I must state that it is difficult for me to reconcile the declared purpose of encouraging the process of political dialogue in South Africa with the content of the condemnatory statement issued in Nassau and the punitive measures decided upon. Furthermore, I cannot embark on negotiations with my own citizens on matters which are our national concern, under external threat and subject to the demands which the Commonwealth Heads of Government have written into their package of measures on South Africa. A headline on the front page of a local evening paper of October 21 states "six months or else, SA told". Quite frankly if my Government were to yield to this sort of pressure, it would be the clearest possible signal to others to join in the hunt. I cannot possibly place myself and my Government in that untenable position and I say this to you knowing full well that you stood virtually alone in resisting pressure for extensive punitive action against South Africa and that you rely on this initiative to keep further sanctions at bay. There is undoubtedly much at stake for you but there is more at stake for South Africans of all communities and political beliefs and I do not therefore adopt this position lightly.

You will recall that the South African Government indicated at the time of the visit of the three EEC Foreign Ministers that they were welcome to visit South Africa as long as they did not claim any right to interfere in South Africa's internal affairs. The South African Government also expressed the hope that their discussions would proceed in a manner which was consistent with the normal conduct of affairs between nations. I personally and members of my Government spoke to the EEC Ministers at length but I regret that on their return to Europe a decision was taken to proceed with punitive measures and sanctions against South Africa.

It is furthermore not clear to me what is meant by "suspension of violence on all sides" in the Nassau statement. If it is intended to mean that the South African Government is perpetrating violence in the current unrest in South Africa, then I must tell you quite frankly that a mission of this nature cannot play a positive role. It will merely exacerbate an already delicate situation.

I feel convinced that you will appreciate my Government's attitude on this point because Great Britain has a similar problem in combatting terrorism.

On the other hand, I would be prepared to entertain the possibility of emissaries of individual Governemnts visiting South Africa for discussions with representatives of the South African Governemnt as well as representatives of the various communities, the private sector and other interested bodies.

Yours sincerely,

P.W. BOTHA
STATE PRESIDENT OF THE
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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