

PRESS LINE FOR NEWS DEPARTMENT

NOMINATION OF LORD BARBER TO THE EMINENT PERSONS GROUP

Line To Take

The Prime Minister has asked Lord Barber (Baron Barber of Wentbridge) to be the British nominee on the Eminent Persons Group established by the Commonwealth Heads of Government in Nassau. Lord Barber has agreed to undertake this role and the Commonwealth Secretary-General has been informed.

Supplementaries

Why Lord Barber?

Lord Barber is a Privy Counsellor and a former Chancellor of the Exchequer. He has had wide experience of government and of international affairs. He thus brings exceptional ability, experience and status to this task.

What about his position as Chairman of the Standard Chartered Bank?

Lord Barber has played a major role in expanding the activities of the Standard Chartered Bank worldwide. The Bank operates in a number of countries, many of them in Anglophone Africa, and in South Africa itself.

Who are the other nominees?

The Australians have announced that their nominee will be Mr Malcolm Fraser. The other Commonwealth governments have not yet announced their choices.

What will the Group do?

The Commonwealth Accord called for the Group to encourage through all practicable ways the process of political dialogue in South Africa. Detailed terms of reference have still to be worked out.

When will it begin work?

No date has been set, but we would expect it to have its first meeting within about one month.



Will Lord Barber act independently or be guided by HMG?

Lord Barber will be a member of the Group in his personal capacity as an eminent Commonwealth figure not as a representative of the British Government.

Prime Minister has given way to Mr Ramphal in not appointing Sir Geoffrey Howe?

It was clear to the Prime Minister that, bearing in mind the scope and importance of this task, Lord Barber would be an eminently suitable choice. Mr Ramphal did not try to influence the British decision. It was simply not practical for Sir Geoffrey Howe to combine membership of the Group, given all the possible time and travel this might require, with his duties as Foreign Secretary.

South African reaction to Eminent Persons initiative?

While President Botha has said that South Africa did not need a Commonwealth Committee to come to South Africa in order to facilitate change there, he has not specifically rejected the Group or said that he would not co-operate with it.



