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Prime Minister.

The Foreign Secretary thought
that you might like to see the
speech before CHOGA.

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CHOGA.

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John Coles, Esq



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The Foreign Secretary thought
that the PM might look at
this in advance of, or en
route to, CHOGM.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE
SW1A 2AH

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SPEECH BY THE RT HON SIR GEOFFREY HOWE, MP TO THE ROYAL COMMONWEALTH
SOCIETY: 14 NOVEMBER

BRITAIN AND THE COMMONWEALTH TODAY

I am grateful to the Royal Commonwealth Society for the invitation to speak today. I suspect that the timing of the invitation was not entirely random. You will be expecting me to say something about the Commonwealth in advance of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in New Delhi, hereinafter referred to as CHOGM. I shan't disappoint you. The meeting later this month does of course make this an appropriate occasion for looking anew at the value of the Commonwealth to Britain. But I also want to look at the value of the Commonwealth model for the wider world, and in particular for Southern Africa.

[The Delhi meeting will be the first Heads of Government Meeting I have attended - "a seminar for statesmen" as the Prime Minister of Singapore has called it. But it is a reflection of the importance of the Commonwealth to British interests that this will be by no means my first taste of Commonwealth Ministerial meetings. As Chancellor, for example, I was privileged to serve as chairman for two meetings of Commonwealth Finance Ministers. I am looking forward to the Delhi meeting as a chance to renew old friendships and to make new ones.]

I know that I am preaching to the converted here about the value of the Commonwealth. But we do have to acknowledge that not all in Britain are now automatically convinced of this: I confidently predict that between now and the Delhi meeting some British newspapers will carry sceptical pieces about the Commonwealth. They will decry the supposed ingratitude of the Third World members, suggest that the Commonwealth should be wound up, that it no longer has relevance for Britain and so on. Very similar articles appear before every CHOGM.

One of the things I want to do today is to answer those points in advance.

[It would be very easy for me just to come and offer pleasantries and platitudes about the Commonwealth. To talk about shared values, the family atmosphere, unique bonds of blood and friendship. These things are all true. They are often self-evident. But apparently they do not convince the sceptics.]

The key foreign policy objectives of this and preceding British governments are to provide security, to enhance prosperity and to promote stability. But Britain's role has changed and is changing from that of a global power. Inevitably this has meant that to achieve our objectives our diplomatic activity has concentrated more on regional issues. Our commitments to the European Community and to the Atlantic Alliance have become the twin pillars of our foreign policy. Both have a vital role in achieving security, prosperity and stability. But let me reiterate what I said in my speech on the Community at Chatham House on 4 November. Our membership of the Community has not meant a renunciation of old ties. Rather it has provided a new context for them.

The Commonwealth remains central to our foreign policy - in particular outside the Atlantic area. The intense official and public interest in Grenada has once again shown that clearly. Let me just depart from my text for one moment to pay tribute to both Sir Paul Scoon in Grenada and to Mr Ramphal, both of whom have been working in the finest traditions of the Commonwealth to restore constitutional rule on the island. As I said in the House on 3 November, we stand ready to respond positively to requests from the interim authorities in Grenada for help.

If Britain is now more of a regional power, then it is one with worldwide interests and responsibilities. We have our commitments in the Falklands, Hong Kong, Gibraltar and the other overseas territories under the protection of the Crown. We derive a considerable proportion of our national income from overseas activities: much higher than most other industrialised nations. We import many of the raw materials for our industries. We export across the globe. We have extensive foreign investments which need protecting.

And we have a vital role as a responsible Western ally in helping to deny opportunities outside Europe to the Russians and their satraps. If then we are looking at the Commonwealth in these hard-nosed nationalistic terms, in terms of what we get out of it, its value to us is inextricably linked to our worldwide interests. Much of the benefit to British interests from the Commonwealth is invisible or intangible. This makes the task of the sceptic easier.

But there are concrete and visible benefits too. The existence of the Commonwealth gives us an immediate and privileged entrée to the governments of 30% of the membership of the United Nations. And to markets with a quarter of the world's population: markets which are growing in purchasing power. In 1982, Commonwealth countries took nearly 13% of our exports. Nigeria alone bought well over £1 billion of exports and is one of our three largest markets outside the industrialised world. In 1981 Commonwealth countries accounted for some 35% of our income from non-oil investment overseas.

But the advantages are not only economic. Commonwealth membership has been of direct political benefit to Britain. I regard the Lancaster House settlement which ended a civil war and brought independence to Zimbabwe as one of the very important achievements of Mrs Thatcher's first government. I very much doubt whether Britain would have achieved that settlement if it had not been for the agreement reached at the CHOGM in Lusaka in 1979. And the role of the Commonwealth of course did not stop there. The Commonwealth monitoring force and the Commonwealth observer group played an important role in the run-up to independence in Zimbabwe. They helped to ensure that power was transferred peacefully and smoothly. Britain's reputation was enhanced as a consequence. And so was that of the Commonwealth. And wider Western interests were served because opportunities for meddling outsiders were reduced.

The Commonwealth saw it as their duty in Zimbabwe to help us to discharge a British commitment. It was the same with the Falklands. [Many of you will remember Mr Ramphal's speech at the height of the Falklands' conflict. Its title was "Not Britain's Cause Alone". Another clear example of a situation in which the Commonwealth came to the aid of Britain in dealing with what was technically a national responsibility. The great majority of Commonwealth states gave us strong support after the Argentinian invasion. New Zealand lent us a frigate, others took economic sanctions; some gave us quiet support for military logistics or open political support in the UN. I am convinced that Commonwealth support for Britain among non-aligned countries was a significant factor in deterring the Soviet Union from vetoing SC Resolution 502.]

And I can cite other examples where the Commonwealth has helped to promote stability, thereby serving our political and security interests directly or indirectly. The achievement of independence for Belize was due in no small way to the support which the Commonwealth drummed up in the UN. And the Commonwealth Declaration on Belize gave reassurance to the people in their dispute with Guatemala. The Commonwealth also helped to promote stability in Africa when it sent observers to monitor the Ugandan elections in 1980 and later a military training team. And in general the existence of the Commonwealth provides a highly effective means for Britain to play a responsible part alongside other Western nations in aiding the development and stability of the Third World. Certainly many of the smaller states feel that their membership of the Commonwealth and its regional bodies makes them much less exposed in a hostile international climate. As I said in the Foreign Affairs Debate on 3 November, we shall be examining with our Commonwealth partners what we can do to help these and other small states even further, in particular so that they are not exposed to take-over by tiny groups of evil men.

So much for the direct and visible benefits to Britain from the Commonwealth. But many are more intangible. To speak of shared values in the context of the Commonwealth is to use a truism. But the fundamental characteristic of truisms is that they are true. The Declaration of Commonwealth Principles adopted in 1971 is perhaps the clearest expression of the values which we hold in common. One has to acknowledge that not all members are successful in practising these principles. But they do provide an ideal, a benchmark, towards which all the member states can strive. And the Commonwealth countries generally compare favourably with their counterparts elsewhere in preserving and practising the independence of the judiciary, a key foundation stone for a fair society. In the political sphere Nigeria has just demonstrated anew that parliamentary democracy can work in Africa. In a subtle way, all these shared values work in our national interests because they help to spread a way of life which has worked for us and which can enhance stability.

I also see the Commonwealth as a unique channel for developing contacts and understanding between the industrialised and developing world. This too serves our interests. In particular our Commonwealth experience puts us in a good position, along with Canada, Australia and New Zealand, to act as a fulcrum in international financial negotiations. And the Commonwealth in general provides a valuable, possibly a unique forum, free of polemic and bitterness, in which the developing and the industrialised countries can gain a better understanding of the constraints and needs of the other. We shall be able to discuss these issues further at CHOGM where economic and financial questions will be among the key items on the agenda.

And finally, in this "accountant's approach" to the Commonwealth, we must not forget the edge in trade which the English language gives us. Nor the advantage we gain from the direct experience which many Commonwealth leaders have of British institutions - schools, universities, the Bar and, for some - happily very much a thing of the past - our prisons!

no lunch

But there is no free lunch in foreign policy. This post-prandial speech bears witness to that. If we get benefits of this order out of the Commonwealth then we have to put something in. We have to bear costs, make commitments. And we have to recognise that the other members of the Commonwealth may see it as a legitimate way of furthering their own interests. For the long-term value and health of the Commonwealth I hope they do.

I hope too that no one here has doubts about the commitment of this British Government to the Commonwealth. Its central role in our foreign policy outside Europe is reflected for example in the disbursement of our bilateral aid. In recent years about 75% has gone to support development programmes in Commonwealth countries. And that is how it should be. Not only does our money then serve British national interests, but our knowledge and experience in those countries helps to make them effective recipients. And this is not the whole story.

Much of our aid reaches Commonwealth countries through multilateral channels, including the EC. This may have reduced bilateral programmes in some cases. But let me emphasise one point for you clearly. The benefit to the recipients is generally the same - or even greater. And some Commonwealth countries have definitely benefitted in aid terms from our membership of the Community. India for example is the largest recipient of Community aid. More than half the countries in the Lomé Convention are members of the Commonwealth and benefit from its important aid and trade provisions. Let me put it another way: three-quarters of the Commonwealth are members of Lomé, a mark of the importance that we attach to Commonwealth links when we were negotiating our accession to the Community. One of the first acts of St Kitts Nevis on attaining independence was to apply for membership of the Lomé Convention. And finally, as you know, we play a major role in supporting the Commonwealth's own institutions and aid programmes.

Foreign policy is not of course susceptible to accurate cost/benefit analysis. But in terms of the Commonwealth the visible and invisible balances of costs and advantages do appear to leave us in substantial political surplus.

The Commonwealth however means much more than that to us. We cannot ignore the more human and emotional factors. That is what distinguishes our society from that of the Communists. There is deep sentiment in this country in favour of the Commonwealth. The ties of kinship and blood to the old Commonwealth are now strengthened and enriched by the links between the ethnic minorities here and their families in the Caribbean, the sub-Continent and West Africa. And then there is the unofficial Commonwealth, that benign mafia of everybody from Commonwealth architects to athletes. [Most recently, we have had the very successful meeting of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association in Nairobi at which Ray Whitney represented us: another example of the way in which personal ties serve to bind the Commonwealth together.]

But it is not always going to be 'sweetness and light' inside the Commonwealth. In such a diverse body there will be occasional differences of perception and interest. The Grenadan intervention showed that even within a small region of apparently similar states, Commonwealth members can differ sharply on what needs to be done. But any differences are temporary and soluble. They will not detract from the underlying value of the Commonwealth for multinational cooperation and mutual help. Nor should the welcome trend towards regional cooperation with fellow Commonwealth members as well as other states. [Just as we have developed special ties with the European Community so too other Commonwealth members are participating in organisations within their own regions: Singapore and Malaysia in ASEAN; the Caribbean states in CARICOM; the Pacific states in the South Pacific Commission. This regional activity need not and should not weaken Commonwealth ties. Indeed it should be positively encouraged as a contribution to the stability and prosperity of Commonwealth members.]

The Commonwealth is in short a body of which Britain is proud to have been the midwife. And it is clear that the attractions of the Commonwealth endure for others. Since the last CHOGM Antigua, Barbuda, the Maldives and St Kitts Nevis have all joined. Brunei is planning to do so when it gains full independence next year.

The continued growth in membership is welcome in itself. But it also means that the Commonwealth has a better chance of sharing its experience with the wider world. And in particular for demonstrating that cooperation between peoples of different races and backgrounds can help to solve world problems. [I have already referred to the Commonwealth's role in bringing a peaceful settlement in Zimbabwe and in helping Uganda.] The Commonwealth experience could also be of particular relevance to the problems of southern Africa where nations of very different cultures and histories seem to be sliding towards increased violence.

[We have]

We in Britain are committed to preventing this; and to helping to ensure stability throughout Africa. This Government's commitment to Africa was clearly shown by the hard work put in to the Lusaka CHOGM and to the subsequent and successful Lancaster House conference. [That conference marked the formal end of the colonial era in Africa. On the whole the process of decolonisation was as successful as it was both inevitable and desirable. Despite the anxieties of some in this country, even today, the British record in this resounds to our credit. And it has enabled us to] establish^{ed} strong relationships throughout the continent: in the past we have concentrated - and rightly so - on the thirteen African Commonwealth members. We shall continue to build on these ties. But we have also started to supplement them by improving our links with some of the French and Portuguese speaking countries. The recent successful visit to Britain by the President of the Ivory Coast was just one outward and visible sign of our developing relations with Francophone West Africa. And we have just opened up a small post in the Congo. President Machel's visit to Britain and Malcolm Rifkind's to Angola shows that we are equally serious about cooperating with the Lusophone states.

Our commitment to Africa reflects our extensive interests there. The continent has a major place in British foreign policy [as it does in the Community's relations with the developing world. Mozambique and Angola are expected to join the successor to the present Lomé Convention. I hope they do so for then all of black Africa - apart from Namibia - will be able to benefit from the important aid and trade arrangements in Lomé. Africa and its people have much to offer us. And we in turn have much to offer Africa.] Taken together the countries of sub-Saharan Africa are the largest recipients of British bilateral aid outside India and the sub-continent. And much more help from Britain reaches Africa through multilateral agencies, non-governmental flows and private investment. The government's abolition of exchange controls has helped significantly. Contrast that to the abysmal Soviet record in providing economic aid to Africa. In 1981 only 6% of Soviet civilian aid went to sub-Saharan Africa. Even worse, that was worth only 2% of Western aid to those countries.

But to be effective aid from wherever it comes cannot be a one-way process. It requires partnership between donors and recipients. This is why the Community attaches such importance to developing a genuine dialogue within the Lomé partnership with the ACP States: we need to identify the most effective use of the substantive resources and trade opportunities we provide. As I said at Chatham House on 4 November, in the present situation, where money is bound to be tight, it is more than ever important that aid should be seen to be well used. Effective aid requires requires too a sense of economic reality among the recipients, a recognition that long-term development could require painful short term adjustments. I am pleased by the courageous steps in this direction. And I am encouraged that a number of African countries are now beginning to adopt the right approach in cooperating with the IMF. [I know that the Fund's conditions will often be tough but they are sympathetically applied against the background of the political and social realities of the countries concerned.] We in Britain stand ready to provide more high-level expertise to help with the process of adjustment and to help towards the goal we all share, sustainable non-inflationary growth.

I see other encouraging trends in Africa. (Many of the countries have dreadful problems to cope with: population explosions, poverty, drought, ethnic problems. But the good news is not always so evident: democracy in, for example, Nigeria and the Gambia; economic success in Gabon, Cameroon; multiracial cooperation in, for example, Zambia and Kenya. And so on. Solid achievements which can serve as models for all the countries of the continent. They ^{]- which} show what can be done when sensible policies are pursued, when foreign interference in internal affairs is rejected. And above all when the peaceful route to change is followed.

Edmund Burke, reflecting on the French Revolution, said that "A state without the means of some change is without the means of its conservation". That message needs to ring most loudly in southern Africa; and in particular in South Africa itself. Change there is inevitable. And desirable. I find it unthinkable that a minority will be able indefinitely to deprive the majority of its rightful say in running the country. And apartheid is not only morally abhorrent; it is in practical terms untenable and incompatible with economic dynamics.

[Developments in the southern tip of Africa are of fundamental importance to Britain. Not only are a number of Commonwealth countries directly involved but our political, economic and strategic interests throughout the continent are affected by the way things go there. I therefore intend to devote the rest of my speech today to southern Africa.]

The question that we must face and that above all the people of the region must face is how change is to come about. [Whether it is to occur peacefully and in a way which preserves economic and social development. Or whether the evolutionary process falls prey to the forces of revolution, and to the counsels of despair, exacting a dreadful price from all southern Africans.]

The trend I fear at the moment is a trend towards greater violence, terrorist attacks and destabilisation. The British government deplures that trend. In particular all parties should strictly respect the sanctity of national borders. Cross border violence is in any case counter productive. The black guerillas should understand that attacks on South Africa merely strengthen intransigence. They will make the whites even more fearful of making concessions. And the South Africans for their part have to see that destabilisation of their neighbours risks precipitating the situation they fear most: making the Russians and their surrogates a more powerful factor in the equation. Punitive raids may buy a little time, provide a breathing space. But the long term costs are those of fear, bitterness and hatred. [These costs will be paid by all concerned, in the region and outside. And will make peaceful change much more difficult.]

The key to peace is mainly in the hands of the South African government and people. Nobody can force them to use it. But use it they must if they are to secure their long-term stability and prosperity. I have been encouraged by the internal economic forces which have already brought about a degree of change in South Africa. The demand for black workers, the increase in their purchasing power, the development of black trade unions - all give impetus to a powerful dynamo for change inside South African society. These are trends which I welcome. [And they should be welcomed by all South Africans. To allow the dogma of apartheid to block the benign forces of the market place would be to the benefit of no one. In the end, the result might by some standards in South Africa be ideologically sound but in an economic waste land.]

In my view therefore economic forces offer some hope that the evils of apartheid can be moderated. But political reform is also necessary. I am not going to suggest formulae for reform or try to prescribe precise remedies. We have never deviated from our view that it is for those in South Africa to judge what is best for them, but we have made clear on a number of occasions that we are looking for progress towards constitutional arrangements acceptable to the people of South Africa as a whole. There was strong white support for the new constitutional proposals in the referendum on 2 November. But only part of the population has been consulted about these proposals, and they have been seriously criticised by the majority of South Africans because they make no provisions for them. I see that the South African Prime Minister said that the vote was a mandate for 'evolutionary reform' It would I think be inappropriate for me to comment on the outcome of the referendum or on that statement. But we do hope that the referendum will facilitate the process of change which we would like to see. We shall of course continue to take a keen interest in developments.

For apartheid and the absence of a form of government which has the consent of all the people cast a long shadow over Britain's relations with South Africa. Our rejection of apartheid and of the oppression linked with it reflects the firm view of a wide spectrum of British public opinion. It also represents the clear consensus within the Commonwealth. The Prime Minister and I will in New Delhi be reaffirming the government's commitment to the Gleneagles Agreement on Apartheid in Sport. I hope our sports bodies will take account of this and reflect too on the wider implications of their decisions about South Africa, not least for other Commonwealth sportsmen. In particular, we shall continue to advise the Rugby Football Union against an England tour of South Africa next year. As for other issues this government will uphold the United Nations arms embargo. We shall eschew any military collaboration with South Africa. And we shall not help with South Africa's nuclear programme.

But we are not going to cut off contact with South Africa. One of the messages I want to leave with you today is that you can only influence someone if you are ready to talk to him. [That applies to the Western governments in their approach to relations with the Soviet Bloc.] And it applies with equal force to the Western governments and to the other states of southern Africa in their relations with South Africa.

You cannot get your point across by refusing even to discuss your differences. Equally we do not think that the case has been made for economic sanctions against South Africa. I have a general objection to interference in commercial relations for political purposes; not least because such interference has normally proved ineffective. I must be frank and admit that sanctions would of course damage important British commercial and economic interests. But they would also inevitably damage Commonwealth countries bordering on South Africa like Zimbabwe and Botswana - and others too.

In any case I believe we should not interfere with the economic forces that are at work for change in South Africa. Nor is it in our interests, or that of South Africans to provoke through drastic action a violent economic collapse there. Rather positive change in South Africa is likely to come about through a growth in contact with the rest of the world, not by treating it as a pariah. And through development of its economy, not by the imposition of a commercial siege. [That is why we support the European Code of Conduct for companies with interests in South Africa. Not as a punitive measure but as a positive way for improving the situation of Black workers.]

There are no quick or easy solutions to the problems of southern Africa. Those who say there are have been badly briefed or are naive. But our policy for the region is consistent and aimed at the long-term. It is a policy of contact and involvement, of working with all the parties in and around South Africa to produce faster change by peaceful means. This is nothing new. We have been working with other Western nations in the Contact Group of Five - including Canada, another leading Commonwealth member - to bring about a fair and lasting settlement in Namibia. The UN Secretary-General's recent successful visit to the region resulted in the resolution of virtually all the outstanding problems on Namibia. I understand the impatience felt by some African states. But the work of the Contact Group has contributed in no small way to the progress already achieved.

It is of course easier to state the objective than to achieve it. The main obstacle is the demand for an agreement on the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola as a precondition for a Namibia settlement. We have made clear that for us the only conditions for Namibian independence are those in Security Council Resolution 435. But as a matter of practical politics we have to recognise that the main parties each have their own security problems. These have to be satisfactorily resolved if there is to be an enduring agreement. I believe that military disengagement and the establishment of greater trust in the area hold the key to this. That is why we want to see the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Angola. But of course the continued presence of South African troops in Angola and continuing armed conflict there make the withdrawal of Cuban troops more difficult. I therefore urge the South Africans to pull back their forces from Southern Angola as a vital step. [I do not believe this would prejudice their position. Indeed] it would be a valuable step in the process leading to a Namibian settlement and greater regional stability. Conversely, I find it hard to see how their continued presence in Angola can serve South Africa's long term interests.

The British government and its partners in the Contact Group are committed to continuing their efforts to achieving a Namibian settlement acceptable to all. [There are some in this country who would argue that it is better for the West that South Africa retain control of Namibia, that an independent Namibia would fall under Soviet domination. I reject these notions. Indeed I believe the reverse to be true. A settlement which enables the people of Namibia freely and without any kind of external interference to determine their own future would be clearly in Western interests.] It would reduce, not increase, the opportunities for external meddling and for further violence. And it could help to promote the removal of the Cubans from Angola. But perhaps even more important, a Namibia brought peacefully to independence and in a way which safeguarded the human rights and political freedoms of the minority communities would make an important psychological, political and economic contribution to the region's future. Indeed in that sense, Namibia could be the key to the future of southern Africa. If that key can be turned, then the prospects for the region achieving peaceful change, for avoiding Kalashnikov diplomacy will be much better.

In particular the door would open to far greater cross-border cooperation. The black states in the area already understand the importance of working together. The Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference is just one of the ways in which they are helping one another with their mutual problems. We welcome this. More to the point, we are offering concrete support eg for the Limpopo railway project. This sort of cooperation makes sense for the futures of these countries. The inescapable facts of geography and economics have also willy-nilly resulted in a measure of practical cooperation between South Africa and its black neighbours.

That cooperation must be developed and expanded. The future for the region as a whole and in all senses - political as well as economic - is likely to depend on it. [If the black states and South Africa want to influence one another, they must talk to each other, express their concerns and explain the constraints under which they work. Nothing can or will be solved in an atmosphere of isolation and mutual suspicion.]

A peaceful future for southern Africa will also require the recognition of the responsibilities of statehood and of the meaning of sovereignty. Those concepts are incompatible with support for or toleration of the work of organisations using violence in the name of politics. They are incompatible with punitive military raids, retaliatory or not. And they are incompatible with policies designed to keep your neighbours off balance, to choke their economic development or to destabilise their governments. These concepts must be recognised and acted upon on both sides of South Africa's borders. If they are not, the slide to military confrontation, to violence and instability, from which there can be no real winners will continue. [In short, South Africans must use the telescope, not the microscope. They need a wide-angle lens, not a narrow focus, if they are to acquire the breadth of vision necessary to allow long-term change through mutual confidence and understanding rather than through confrontation and subversion.]

The British government stands ready to encourage and support cross-border contact and cooperation in southern Africa. The US Administration have demonstrated the same attitude. We are willing to do what we can with our other allies, inside and outside the Namibia Contact Group, to help remove the mutual suspicion and distrust which impede progress. For the Western countries, share with all the Africans of the region - including those of every community in South Africa - an overriding interest in peaceful change and the avoidance of bloodshed. Many Commonwealth states hold strong and uncompromising views about South Africa. I understand those views. I sympathise with their total rejection of apartheid. I believe that the Commonwealth model for successful international cooperation across cultures and races in solving political problems has relevance for southern Africa. But that model is unlikely to be taken up and used for the benefit of all the people there unless the Commonwealth demonstrates recognition of the political realities of the region.

We in Britain are using our best efforts to promote and encourage the changes necessary in South Africa itself for the future peace and stability of the region. And we are encouraging the black African states to play their part, realistically but without any sacrifice of principle. But this cannot be the sole responsibility of the West. In the end the problems are African ones. The first steps have to be taken by Africans - white Africans and black Africans.