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10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

20 March 1986

Dear Mr. President.

PRIME MINISTER'S
PERSONAL MESSAGE
SERIAL No. TS6/86

Lord Barber has given me a full account of the Commonwealth Group's recent visit to South Africa. He had high praise for your Government's helpful attitude. The Group had seen everyone they wanted to see and had been given a fair hearing.

I understand that the Group will now be considering what they have learned and how they should take their initiative forward. Their aim seems to be to submit their report to Heads of Government by mid-June. In the meantime they wisely intend to continue to avoid all publicity.

Lord Barber explained to me the ideas which they set out during their discussions in Cape Town. He stressed that they had tried to build wherever possible on what they understood to be the positions of your Government. The results seem to me to contain much that is potentially helpful, particularly the insistence that the ANC and others must suspend violence as part of the action needed to bring about negotiations.

I do not know what response the Group will get from others. But they saw the ANC in Lusaka before arriving in South Africa and I understand that they are not unhopeful that a concept on the lines suggested might be accepted by the ANC. If they felt that your Government's reaction opened the way to negotiations, I understand that they would go back to the ANC to try to secure a firm and public commitment to suspend violence for the duration of negotiations.

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I very much hope, therefore, that you will be ready to engage in further discussions and negotiations about the Group's 'possible negotiating concept'. I continue to believe that their initiative offers a unique opportunity to make progress and that even those who were initially sceptical now share this view. The Group's mix of African and Western representation and support gives it international credibility. By its discreet behaviour and exploratory style the Group has demonstrated its serious interest in contributing to a dialogue rather than making propaganda. In my view, there is no other way forward on offer which stands a remotely comparable chance of success or of securing the same international support for the peaceful resolution of South Africa's problems which you seek. Everything which I have heard convinces me that such an outcome can be attained.

The Group's report will clearly be of major importance both in itself and in determining the degree to which other governments are prepared to give dialogue in South Africa a chance to work. Your response to their 'possible negotiating concept' will be the determining factor in shaping that report and subsequent steps. They will also be looking for firm evidence that the far-reaching measures of reform within South Africa which you have outlined will be implemented rapidly. I shall go on arguing, as I did at Nassau, that your Government must be enabled to achieve a peaceful outcome. But I shall only stand a chance of convincing my Commonwealth colleagues of this if I can point to a constructive response from you to the Group's ideas.

I am the first to recognise that this faces you with very difficult and far-reaching decisions which involve the whole future of your country. But I think it vitally important that your Government should give the Group a response which would enable them to continue discussions with you. I understand that they are planning to meet again on 21 April. Some indication of your approach in advance of

that meeting will therefore be vital for the future direction of their work.

If there is any way in which I can help, please do not hesitate to let me know.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely
Nagendra Chatter

The Hon. P. W. Botha, DMS.