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LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

23 June 1989

PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH MR. DE KLERK

The Prime Minister had a meeting this morning with Mr. De Klerk which lasted for some one and three quarter hours. We had arranged that Mrs. De Klerk would accompany her husband so that she could meet the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister gave Mr. and Mrs. De Klerk a conducted tour of Downing Street, followed by coffee. The meeting proper started when Mrs. De Klerk left. The South African Ambassador remained throughout, except at the very end when the Prime Minister and Mr. De Klerk had a private word.

The Prime Minister said that Mr. De Klerk faced a very difficult task. A great deal would be expected of him in terms of rapid change in South Africa. At the same time everything he promised would be viewed with great scepticism and suspicion. She welcomed many of the public statements which he had made, but did not think his emphasis on group rights and the need to avoid tyranny by any one group over others was very helpful. People would say he was asking black South Africans not to use their power in order to oppress others, when white South Africans had done precisely that. In effect, it would look as though white South Africans were expecting blacks to behave better towards them than they had behaved towards the blacks. It was important that Mr. De Klerk should be aware of the sort of things which would be said so that he could be prepared to deal with them.

Mr. De Klerk was rather taken aback by this opening salvo, but said that he would like to put things in perspective. The biggest step which South Africa had taken in 40 years was to switch to the policy of power sharing before the 1987 elections. This had administered a major shock to the system and explained the rise of the ultra-conservative parties. But power sharing would work only if there was no domination by any one group. Those with vested rights had to be offered security and the assurance that they would not become the oppressed. It was a balance of power that white South Africans were seeking. You could not have simple majority system in South Africa or one man one vote in a unitary state. There had to be a system which preserved the essential interests of each racial group.

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The Prime Minister said that the vital step which Mr. De Klerk must take after the elections in September was to show that his government was ready for negotiations, without hedging them with limits and constraints or trying to prescribe their outcome in advance. The outside world would also be looking for the early release of Mandela, Sisulu and Mpetha. The worst possible thing would be for Mandela to die in prison. She assumed that Mr. De Klerk had thought through how to handle these matters so that things could get off to a positive start. We understood that it was not helpful to Mr. De Klerk to have external pressure before the elections. We would do our best to restrain this. But the world would be expecting a great deal and would be disappointed unless there was rapid movement. The settlement in Namibia must also be seen through to a successful conclusion. Good progress over Namibia would make it easier to restrain the Commonwealth from trying to insist on further sanctions. Mr. De Klerk should not for a moment underestimate the continuing pressure for financial sanctions.

Mr. De Klerk said that he recognised the need for an early breakthrough in South Africa's relations with the rest of the world. He was also fully aware of the importance of the Namibia settlement. The South Africa government was very grateful for the role played by the Prime Minister in keeping it on the rails at a crucial moment. He accepted the importance of getting a process of negotiation going within South Africa. It would not be possible to move straight to a structured negotiation. He would need first to mobilise the moderates for a constructive approach. It was essential to have wide participation in negotiations, otherwise they would be a flop. He would try to discourage black representatives from setting preconditions for negotiations: all disputed issues should be on the agenda of the negotiations themselves. The Prime Minister interjected that Mr. De Klerk might have to offer some concessions as an earnest of good faith. Mr. De Klerk appeared to accept this.

Mr. De Klerk continued that he accepted that negotiations must be seen to be broadly representative. Only then would their results be accepted. He favoured a process of informal negotiations in the first instance, to discuss how the actual negotiations should be conducted. One possibility would be to hold elections throughout the country, in order to choose delegates to a constitutional conference. He noted that Chief Buthelezi was opposed to this. This would enable urban blacks to have a say. In response to the Prime Minister's question whether ANC representatives would be acceptable if elected, Mr. De Klerk said they would be, always assuming that they did not boycott the elections. What the South African government could not accept was that negotiations should be with the ANC only. There had to be a place for anybody and any organisation prepared to negotiate a peaceful settlement. But the first task was to try to build up trust. It was the absence of trust which explained the failure of earlier attempts to negotiate.

Mr. De Klerk said that he would like to add two further important thoughts. First, he could not accept a situation where the authority of the government was put aside and negotiations were held in a vacuum, as had happened in Zimbabwe or Namibia. There must not be a breakdown of authority and everything must be approved and channeled through Parliament. The object was to agree on a new constitution by following constitutional processes. Second, he had to emphasise that the course he was following would not produce significant results in the short term. There should be a period of informal discussion leading to wider meetings with Buthelezi and other leaders. There would be an impression of movement but no great events or decisions. He would need a honeymoon period before he could produce the bold steps which were needed, and it would take more than six or nine months. As for Mandela, he could not be released into a void. That would only lead to a revolutionary onslaught. His release must lead to an improvement in the climate for negotiations and moderate black leaders in South Africa must be seen to have contributed to it. He was grateful for the Prime Minister's comments about external pressures. They were indeed unhelpful. She was right to insist that South Africans must be left to sort out their problems themselves.

The Prime Minister said there would be no prospect of negotiations before Mandela was released. She could not emphasise the importance of this too strongly. Those like her who had fought off sanctions had waited a long time for a renewal of reform in South Africa. Their position would be greatly undermined unless Mandela was released rapidly and a framework for negotiation established. We had to be able to say that it was clear that the new government represented a genuinely new approach. We could not go on urging restraint on the international community without some visible progress. De Klerk would find he had messed up his chances and the goodwill which his statements had created if he failed to match up to expectations on this point. De Klerk said he understood this. But he did not want Mandela's release to be part of an international deal. It should be seen as something which had come about because things were happening in South Africa. The Prime Minister said that there was bound to be some commotion when Mandela was released: the South African government must react calmly.

Mr. De Klerk said that he had a number of other ideas. He attached great importance to the recent report of the South African Law Commission which had recommended a Bill of Rights. He was now considering asking the Commission to report on how to co-ordinate concepts of individual and group rights. The Law Commission was an authoritative body and its views had carried great weight. He also recognised the need to follow the Prime Minister's example in restructuring South Africa's economy. The Prime Minister said that Britain would continue to provide help on such matters as housing and education for black South Africans. We were opposed to disinvestment. But Mr. De Klerk must realise how vulnerable the South African economy would be to financial sanctions.

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The Prime Minister asked whether Mr. De Klerk's meeting with President Bush was yet assured. Mr. De Klerk said he thought that it was, although no announcement had been made. The Prime Minister said that, although the President was himself opposed to sanctions, he was under great pressure from Congress. She thought he would look to Mr. De Klerk to give some indication of his good faith ahead of their meeting. Mr. De Klerk asked whether the Prime Minister meant that he should go with a peace offering. The Prime Minister said she did indeed have something of this sort in mind.

The Prime Minister said that she welcomed the news from Angola. Mr. De Klerk agreed that it was a positive step. He believed that Savimbi was working on plans for a federal state.

Mr. De Klerk concluded by saying that he did not want there to be any misunderstanding about his position. He had a bottom line. His people must continue to play a leading role in South Africa. He would not go the way of other African States. Whites had to have unity and a guaranteed future.

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The Prime Minister cautioned Mr. De Klerk to be very careful in contacts with the press. It might be better to stick to an agreed statement rather than expose himself to too much questioning. She and Mr. De Klerk then discussed the line which No.10 would take on the press. I enclose a copy of the statement which was issued at the end of the meeting.

I am copying this letter and enclosure to Brian Hawtin (Ministry of Defence) and Trevor Woolley (Cabinet Office).

C. D. POWELL

Stephen Wall, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH MR. DE KLERK

The Prime Minister and Mr. de Klerk met for one and three quarter hours today for a very thorough, friendly and constructive discussion.

It was evident that there is a new mood in South Africa and a determination to resolve the great issues of the day through negotiation. It is for the people of South Africa themselves - all of them - to decide on the way ahead. Our hope - which the Prime Minister expressed - is that these new opportunities will be grasped and there will be an end to violence.

The Prime Minister welcomed progress over Namibia and the fact that South Africa was adhering strictly to the agreements, and stressed the importance of bringing the Namibia Agreement to a successful conclusion. This would have a very positive effect on the future prospects for Southern Africa as a whole.

As in the past, the Prime Minister raised the great importance we attach to the early release of Mr. Mandela.

The Prime Minister expressed our wish to maintain regular contacts with South African Ministers and representatives of all groups in South Africa so long as they do not pursue their goals by violence. She and Mr. de Klerk agreed to stay in touch.

The Prime Minister was encouraged by the meeting.

23 June 1989