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SUBJECT CC MASTER

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From the Private Secretary

17 June 1990

Dear Resident Clerk,

PRIME MINISTER'S TALK WITH NELSON MANDELA

Nelson Mandela telephoned me at home shortly before midnight last night, having obtained my number from Anthony Sampson. His main purpose was to ask whether there was any possibility of his seeing the Prime Minister early this morning before his departure for Canada. He had seen a number of European Heads of Government over the past week or so, and was rather concerned about what might happen on sanctions at the forthcoming meeting of the European Council. He would very much like to have an opportunity to put his case to the Prime Minister before then. This was not in any way a substitute for their planned meeting on 4 July: he would restrict himself to this one matter. I explained that a meeting was really not possible since he was near Tunbridge Wells and the Prime Minister was out at Chequers, but promised to arrange for him to speak to the Prime Minister on the telephone early today.

The conversation took place at 0730 this morning. Mr. Mandela opened with a few courteous remarks and said how much he was looking forward to his meeting with the Prime Minister on 4 July. The Prime Minister said that we were very concerned that Mr. Mandela was taking on too much, with all his foreign travels. He had a great and historic task ahead in South Africa, and he must be fresh and ready for it. He would need perseverance and will. Mr. Mandela said that the British Government's help in bringing him to the UK for a brief rest was very much appreciated. He had spent a lovely day and felt much refreshed.

Mr. Mandela continued that he would want to brief the Prime Minister fully on political developments in South Africa when they met on 4 July. His immediate concern was to discuss the attitude which the British Government would take on South Africa at the forthcoming European Council in Dublin. He supposed that the Prime Minister would take the approach that sanctions should be eased. There were certain considerations which he would like to lay before her which might affect that view. He appreciated the Prime Minister's concern for all people in South Africa who were adversely affected by the application of sanctions. He was also sure that she could play an important role in facilitating the process of negotiations in South Africa. He hoped very much

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she would do this, but the action which she took over sanctions would have a bearing on her ability to do so. He could understand that the Prime Minister would want to put her own view to her European colleagues that sanctions should be eased. All he would ask her was not to press other Governments to lift sanctions, before he had been able to discuss the situation more fully with her.

Mr. Mandela went on that he was very aware of the threat to President de Klerk from the right wing in South Africa and the ANC were addressing that. They were calling on the white community to support de Klerk. He would brief the Prime Minister on this but could not do so until after the European Council. He repeated that he was well aware of the Prime Minister's position on sanctions and of her concern for South Africa. But the timing of action would be very important if it was not to be counter-productive. The Prime Minister had played a great part in securing his release and that of his colleagues, and ensuring that the South African government would sit down and talk to them. He was very anxious that her influence should be preserved.

The Prime Minister said that Mr. Mandela must understand that we had concerns too, for instance the ANC's continued support for the armed struggle. We had experience of armed struggle in what we ourselves suffered at the hands of the IRA. We had very much hoped that the ANC would agree to suspend it by now. Mr. Mandela said that he had held very confidential talks with President de Klerk the day before he had left South Africa covering these matters. The problem was that the South African government seemed unable to restrain the police. He would be able to give the Prime Minister details of police activities against the ANC: the action being taken by vigilante groups: and the threats of the right wing to destroy the ANC and hang Nelson Mandela. This was not an easy background against which he could persuade the ANC to end the armed struggle. But he wanted to assure the Prime Minister of his good faith about negotiations. The ANC had taken the initiative in sitting down to talk with the South African government. He had been working on this since 1986. It was "my baby" and he was keen that it should succeed. He would be able to give the Prime Minister much more information when they were able to meet face to face.

The Prime Minister agreed that it would be better to have a much longer talk on 4 July without any time pressure. She knew that Mr. Mandela felt very strongly on certain issues, and so did she. The armed struggle was a particular concern to us and she must urge Mr. Mandela to suspend it at the earliest possible opportunity. Mr. Mandela said that he was ready to accommodate President de Klerk in this regard. The ANC would take the first opportunity to move away from the armed struggle once the armed forces and the police were restrained. He would urge "let's call off violence" as soon as there was an atmosphere conducive to peace. It was very likely that he and President de Klerk would succeed in removing the obstacles to negotiations, in which case the ANC would announce the end of hostilities.

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The Prime Minister said that President de Klerk had gone a long way to meet the ANC, and it was vital that he should receive some support from the international community. She would be blunt with Mr. Mandela: sooner or later one had to say publicly what one was prepared to say privately, otherwise there would be no progress. Mr. Mandela said that he appreciated that, adding that he would very much like to have been present when the Prime Minister met President de Klerk. The Prime Minister continued that she was not insensitive to the ANC's troubles. She had told President de Klerk that it would not be right for her to visit South Africa for the time being, because it would probably lead to demonstrations with the risk that the police would use force. She did not want to do anything to set back the process of negotiations on which Mr. Mandela had embarked. Mr. Mandela said he would like to talk to the Prime Minister about a visit. He hoped that she would come, but it must be fruitful. The Prime Minister said she thought the day would come, but it was not now.

Mr. Mandela said that he just hoped that at the European Council the Prime Minister would limit herself to indicating her own view on sanctions, but would not press others to lift them until after he had been able to brief her. He and the Prime Minister looked at the problem from different angles, but had the common aim of dismantling apartheid and allowing every South African to determine his or her own future. The Prime Minister said there was no question of lifting the major United Nations sanctions. But the most important thing for South Africa in the present situation was investment. Action by the European Community and others to discourage investment had not been enshrined in law and it had been left to every Government to decide what to do. She saw investment as the only way to increase the standard of living of everyone in South Africa. That was why we had ended our voluntary sanctions on investment. She would certainly want the European Council to give some encouragement to President de Klerk and she would not be alone in that. She could not change her stance on sanctions. In practice quite a number of countries were covertly ignoring their obligations in this field, while we were perfectly open about our views and actions. Mr. Mandela said that he very much wanted to preserve the British Government's role in achieving a peaceful solution in South Africa. The ANC were the people best able to help President de Klerk. He understood the Prime Minister's wish to see de Klerk rewarded, but she should avoid action which would be counter-productive in the South African situation. The right wing were putting out feelers to the ANC because they wanted to be involved in discussions about the future. It would be a mistake to let them think that all international pressure was off South Africa.

Mr. Mandela concluded that he was well satisfied with their talk and would leave the matter in the Prime Minister's hands. The Prime Minister said that Mr. Mandela must understand how concerned we were by the ANC's failure to suspend violence, and that we could not alter our position on sanctions. She could not, at this stage, say what might emerge from the European Council. She wished Mr. Mandela every success in his visits to Canada and the United States, and looked forward to seeing him on 4 July.

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The Prime Minister commented to me afterwards that she was a bit disappointed with Mandela, who seemed to have rather a closed mind. For his part, he will now have experienced first hand the Prime Minister's strong views on the armed struggle and on sanctions, and this will no doubt influence his approach to the meeting on 4 July. It is also clear that his visits around Europe have left him distinctly nervous about the likelihood that the European Community will now start to ease sanctions. The Prime Minister hopes that the Foreign Secretary will make clear to his European colleagues that we do indeed believe that the right course for the Community is to start the process of easing sanctions, as a signal of support for de Klerk's efforts.

We are not proposing to tell the press about this discussion. But if Mandela himself speaks to the press, either at Heathrow or in Canada, we shall confirm that the talk took place and give our own account of it.

You will want to make sure that the Foreign Secretary sees this record during the weekend. I should also be grateful if you could arrange for it to be sent by the quickest possible means to Sir Robin Renwick.

I am copying this letter to Simon Webb (Ministry of Defence) and to Sonia Phippard (Cabinet Office).

Yours sincerely,
Chris Patten

(C. D. POWELL)

The Resident Clerk,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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PRIME MINISTER

Nelson Mandela telephoned me out of the blue at about a quarter to midnight tonight. He is resting here briefly before travelling on to Canada. He said that he was very anxious to see you before leaving. He had seen many other European Heads of Government and there were some important points he wished to put to you. This was without prejudice to your meeting on 4 July. He wondered whether you could see him at 0800 tomorrow morning. He was extremely apologetic for the appearance of discourtesy in suggesting it at such short notice.

I discovered that he was somewhere near Tunbridge Wells and has to be at Heathrow at about 1000-1030 tomorrow morning. I explained this really seemed to me to rule out a meeting. But I thought you might be prepared to speak to him on the telephone. He said that you might find this discourteous on his behalf. I said that I was sure that this would not be a problem, but I did not think a meeting was physically possible in the time concerned. If necessary I would be happy to travel out very early tomorrow morning to Tunbridge Wells or Heathrow to take a message on your behalf. He was rather insistent that he should speak to you directly.

I left it that I would put the idea of a telephone call to you and let him have an answer at about 0800 tomorrow morning. A call might take place at about 0830-0845.

I hope this is all right. If you see this note, it would be very kind if you could alert the switchboard before 0800 as to whether you would be prepared to take a call, in which case I will arrange it.

C. D. POWELL
16 June 1990

Pembury

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