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RECORD OF A CALL ON MR RIFKIND BY AIR VICE MARSHAL SLATTER AND  
AIR COMMODORE PILE: THURSDAY 15 SEPTEMBER 1983

Present: Mr Rifkind . Air Vice Marshal Slatter  
Miss Solesby CAfD Air Commodore Pile  
Mr Lamport  
Mr Brown CAfD

1. Mr Rifkind began by asking the two officers how their meeting with Wing Commander Briscoe earlier in the morning on his arrival in London following release from detention had gone. AVM Slatter said that W Cdr Briscoe had reported that the morale of the officers remaining in detention was good. In reply to questions by Mr Rifkind, AVM Slatter confirmed that during their trial the officers had considered the possibility of redetention but had hoped the Zimbabweans would not take this step and were therefore surprised when it occurred. The trial itself had been impeccably conducted. Apart from the brutality of their initial period in detention they had been correctly treated, except that Wing Commander Cox and Lieutenant Lloyd had at one point had some difficulty in obtaining access to their lawyers. Those still in detention were allowed visitors twice a week.

2. Mr Rifkind said the British Government was delighted that the officers had been released; we did not see this as being the end of the matter. We wanted those remaining to be set free, including Lieutenant Lewis-Walker. In reply to Mr Rifkind's question the officers said that there was no logic behind Lieutenant Lewis-Walker's continued detention. They thought that the tribunal to review his case was to meet on 16 September. Mr Rifkind said that the British Government would continue to press for release however long it took. But we wanted to act in the most effective way and had to take account of Zimbabwean sensitivities. Progress had been good so far but we now had a harder nut to crack. The Zimbabweans appeared to suspect a greater degree of involvement in sabotage by those remaining than by those already released. AVM Slatter said that Mr Ognall QC

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had described Zimbabwean insinuations of guilt as monstrous, and pointed out that any evidence should have been produced in court or subsequently by Mr Ushewokunze. Mr Ognall had offered to say this in public.

3. Mr Rifkind said that our own intention was to take a low-key line in public since whatever was said could have an effect in Zimbabwe. We could only speculate about the internal discussions now taking place in Harare but we knew Mugabe was very sensitive to pressure and therefore our advice to the officers was to say nothing whatever which might carry political overtones. We were making our own representations to the Zimbabweans on a confidential basis and any public comments now by the officers could be counter-productive. The officers agreed to follow this advice and said that press pressure seemed to have lifted.

4. Mr Rifkind asked about the officers' plans. AVM Slatter said that his wife was not yet fit to travel from Zimbabwe where she had been involved in a road accident. His children were in school in South Africa and he hoped to go there soon. Eventually he hoped for work in Britain or the United States. Mr Rifkind and Miss Solesby cautioned AVM Slatter about visiting South Africa while some officers remained in detention. It would strengthen the hands of those in Harare who argued against further releases. AVM Slatter undertook to think again. Mr Brown said that he would speak to the Home Office about AVM Slatter's status here with regard to employment. Air Commodore Pile said that his children had now joined him in Britain and his wife would come here as soon as she had settled their affairs in Zimbabwe. They would like to settle in Britain. He understood that Wing Commander Cox hoped to join the RAF eventually.

5. Responding to Mr Rifkind's invitation AVM Slatter said he would like to mention three points. Firstly he wanted to express the gratitude of all the officers for HMG's support (especially in his own case as he was not a British subject). The Prime Minister's

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message to Mugabe had been a tremendous boost to morale. He would like an expression of warm gratitude to be passed to the Prime Minister, Mr Rifkind undertook to do this. Secondly, AVM Slatter wished to make clear that they had discovered from other prisoners in jail that torture was widespread in Zimbabwe. Victims were both white and black, but especially Ndebele. Torture appeared to be applied to anyone who obstructed the authorities. There had never been a thorough and comprehensive inquiry into the Thornhill sabotage. Air Commodore Pile described the procedures of the initial board of inquiry, of which he had been president, and said that he gained the impression that some Zimbabwean authorities, including perhaps those controlled by the Home Affairs Minister, Mr Ushewokunze, were determined to implicate senior white officers in the affair. In reply to Miss Solesby he confirmed that those not present at Thornhill when the sabotage took place were AVM Slatter and himself, and Wing Commanders Briscoe and Cox.

6. AVM Slatter said that thirdly he wishes to raise the matter of their pensions. He and AC Pile had insisted, so far as they could, on honourable retirement from the AFZ. If this was agreed there should be no difficulty over their pensions or over remitting funds to this country, but if the government proved difficult he hoped he could count on HMG's support. Miss Solesby said that our High Commissioner in Harare had this question very much in mind. Mr Ewans had asked to call on the Defence Minister about it and was in touch with the officers' lawyers.

7. Finally, in reply to Mr Rifkind's question about what additional steps HMG could take to obtain the release of the remaining officers, AVM Slatter said that he had discussed this question with Mr Ewans in Harare and formed the view that since the matter was now in the political sphere there was no advice he could usefully offer. He was happy with the way the British Government was acting. Mr Rifkind confirmed that we would continue to use such opportunities as presented themselves and urged the officers to contact the FCO if they had any points they wanted to get across.

Central African Department  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office  
16 September 1983

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

16 September 1983

Prime Minister  
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Zimbabwe Air Force Officers

Air Vice Marshal Slatter and Air Commodore Pile called yesterday on Mr Rifkind. You may like to see the enclosed record. (I shall be showing a copy to the Foreign Secretary over the weekend).

Air Vice Marshal Slatter asked in particular that the personal thanks of all the officers who had been detained might be passed to the Prime Minister. The knowledge of her personal interest had been a great reassurance to them and had been deeply appreciated. Mr Rifkind said that he would ensure that their thanks were passed on to the Prime Minister.

*[Handwritten signature]*

(R B Bone)  
Private Secretary

A J Coles Esq  
 10 Downing Street



FILE

RM

10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Private Secretary*

19 September, 1983

ZIMBABWE AIR FORCE OFFICERS

Thank you for your letter to John Coles of 16 September, with which you enclosed a record of a meeting between Mr. Rifkind, Air Vice Marshal Slatter and Air Commodore Pile. The Prime Minister has noted this without comment.

W. P. S. RICKETT

R.B. Bone, Esq.,  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

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10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Private Secretary*

13 September 1983

ZIMBABWE: AIR FORCE OFFICERS

Thank you for your letter of  
12 September.

The Prime Minister agrees that  
Mr. Rifkind should be asked to receive  
Air Vice Marshal Slatter.

Roger Bone, Esq.,  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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Prime Minister

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Agree that Mr.

London SW1A 2AH

Rifkind should receive

Air Vice Marshall Slatter?

12 September 1983

A.S.C. 12/9

How to...

Yes no

Zimbabwe: Air Force Officers

Air Vice Marshall Slatter, the senior of the two Zimbabwe Air Force officers who arrived in the UK on 10 September has asked to call on the Prime Minister. He has made this request both to FCO officials and through Sir Dudley Smith MP. Air Vice Marshall Slatter is concerned to do all he can to work for the release of the remaining officers and he clearly sees a call on the Prime Minister as helping that cause.

I have not been able to consult Sir G Howe on this. Ministers here, however, advise that the request should be treated cautiously. Our overriding consideration must be to obtain the release of the remaining officers as quickly as possible. The publicity which a call on the Prime Minister would obtain would not help, and could damage, the prospects for release. It would be bitterly resented by Mr Mugabe who is already hyper-sensitive about our reactions to this case. It would be contrary to our overall approach of keeping the temperature down at this stage, and could undo the good effect which Mr Luce's conversation with Mr Mugabe at the airport on 10 September seems to have had. Nor is the position helped by the fact that Air Vice Marshall Slatter is a South African as well as Zimbabwean citizen.

Our advice, therefore, is that the Prime Minister should not receive Air Vice Marshall Slatter. It would, however, be right for Slatter to be received by a Minister in order to show the continuing concern of HMG, and we suggest that this might be done by Mr Rifkind.

(R B Bone)  
Private Secretary

A J Coles Esq  
10 Downing Street