

PRIME MINISTER

COMMONWEALTH GROUP OF EMINENT PERSONS

The attached note deals with our tactics towards the Eminent Persons Group over the next few months. It is based on the assumption that we try hard to persuade the South African Government to respond positively to the EPG's proposals and engage in a continuing dialogue.

The particular points on which the Foreign Secretary seeks your agreement are the timing, the venue and the level of the Commonwealth Review *meeting*.

On the timing, the Foreign Secretary does not think it feasible to let it slip beyond July. The crucial question is whether we could achieve a better result by spinning it out longer. It seems to me that by July we shall have a clear idea of whether the South African Government is prepared to get locked into further discussions, in which case we will want the process to continue; or whether they have turned down the EPG's proposals, in which case we might as well draw a line under the process.

On venue there is some pressure from the Commonwealth Secretariat for Ottawa or Delhi. London would be more convenient and more appropriate, and we would be in the Chair. The only argument against it is that having the meeting in London might attract more interest in the subject here.

On level, the Foreign Secretary suggests that the review should be conducted at Foreign Minister level. This would certainly be more convenient for you, though I rather wonder whether the other Heads of Government concerned will agree to it since they clearly enjoy their role in all this. And if the going gets tough, we may need you. It seems to me this could be left open until later.

Agree:

- to go along with holding the Review Conference in July? *I am very reluctant to do so - it is desperately busy.*
- to work hard to have it in London?
- to postpone any decision on level? *Yes*

*CDP*

CDP

14 April, 1986.

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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

15 April 1986

JH  
C.R.C. LPO  
LDCO HMT  
DTI LCG  
LPSO CO  
MOD

*Dear Sir,*

**COMMONWEALTH GROUP OF EMINENT PERSONS**

Thank you for your letter of 14 April enclosing a note on the modalities of the Commonwealth review meeting which will consider the forthcoming report of the Commonwealth Group of Eminent Persons.

The Prime Minister will be very reluctant to see the review conference take place in July, and would like us to encourage delay until September at least. This is as much on timetable grounds as anything else, given that she believes that it will, in practice, have to be at Head of Government level: the others will probably want this, and it might be helpful also from the point of view of our relations with South Africa. It might therefore be left to others to make the running on the level of representation. She is firmly of the view that the meeting should take place in London and that we should work hard to secure this. Ottawa would obviously be better than Canberra or New Delhi, if one had to look at alternatives.

I am copying this letter to the Private Secretaries of other Ministers in OD and to Michael Stark (Cabinet Office).

*Yours sincerely,  
Charles Powell*

(CHARLES POWELL)

C. R. Budd, Esq.,  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

14 April 1986

*Dear Charles,*

Commonwealth Group of Eminent Persons

Thank you for your letter of 26 March (not to others) in which you asked for the Foreign Secretary's considered views on the handling of the modalities of the Commonwealth review meeting which will consider the forthcoming report of the Commonwealth Group of Eminent persons (COMGEP).

/ As you will see from the enclosed FCO paper, as well as the modalities of the review meeting Sir Geoffrey has given careful thought to what we can continue to do meanwhile to ensure a positive approach by COMGEP, which in turn means encouraging a constructive response from the South African Government to the proposals which have been put to them by the Group. We are in touch separately about this. The Foreign Secretary also suggests that the exact tactics for handling the Commonwealth review meeting will need to be decided in the light of the report's findings, but that we would be wise to take advance action to try to steer the meeting towards an acceptable outcome.

There is an urgent need for us to take national decisions on what level, venue and timing we want to see for the meeting. If we are to avoid a consensus forming on these without us we need to begin immediately to lobby for our preferred options. If the Prime Minister is in agreement with the Foreign Secretary's recommendations on these points Sir Geoffrey would propose to speak immediately to the Canadian Foreign Minister to seek his support.

In view of the wider foreign policy interest in this meeting I am copying this letter to the Private Secretaries of the other Ministers in OD and to Michael Stark in the Cabinet Office.

*Yours ever,  
Colin Budd*

C D Powell Esq  
PS/10 Downing Street

(C R Budd)  
Private Secretary

THE HANDLING OF THE COMGEP REPORT AND ENSUING REVIEW OF THE  
COMMONWEALTH ACCORD

Introduction

1. The Commonwealth Accord commits the seven Heads of Government (who each nominated a member of COMGEP), or their representatives, to review progress towards the objectives of the Accord after six months. It was subsequently agreed the six months should start from 1 January 1986. No decision has yet been taken on where, when or at what level this review should be conducted. However, we know that others including the Commonwealth Secretary General and the Indians are beginning to give some thought to the matter; some may well want to steer the review towards agreeing to further measures against South Africa.

2. We have so far taken the position that it is too early to discuss the modalities of the review and that it must be considered in the context of the results of the COMGEP exercise which is still under way.

3. Before considering what line we should take on the modalities and the substance of the Commonwealth review we need to consider the possible scenarios for the review. Broadly there are three possible scenarios in which we could find ourselves. These are:

Scenarios

(A) The SAG reacts constructively to COMGEP's proposals. COMGEP's report recommends continuing its effort to promote dialogue. No call for further measures against South Africa for the time being.

(B) The SAG give a nuancé/temporising reaction to COMGEP's proposals. COMGEP produces a partly negative report. It criticises the SAG's position. But it leaves open the possibility of pursuing dialogue. It gives implied support for further measures against South Africa.

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(C) The SAG react negatively to COMGEP's proposals. COMGEP produces a negative report. It condemns SAG's position. It concludes that there are no possibilities for pursuing dialogue. Implicitly or explicitly it calls for further <sup>measures</sup> sanctions against South Africa.

#### Assessment of Scenarios

4. Realistically, the most likely scenarios are either (B) or (C). Recent reports from our Ambassador in South Africa hold out little hope of an early change in the SAG's position on such key questions as the release of Nelson Mandela, the unbanning of the ANC and indeed of willingness to enter into genuine dialogue with those who speak for the Blacks in the townships. They also bring out the increasing radicalisation and organisation of the township Blacks and hence the growing likelihood of serious violence. Another massacre like that at Uitenhage or Sharpeville between now and the COMGEP report would dramatically worsen its context and probably its conclusions. [redacted] the ANC have pressed COMGEP not to extend its mission beyond the six months it was given. The more radical members of COMGEP, probably including Mr Fraser, are likely to be strongly influenced by this. The Group will in any case be predisposed to wind up their work at the end of their initially allotted span, unless they are convinced that the SAG is willing to negotiate seriously on the basis of the Group's proposals.

5. However, despite the difficulties our objective must still be to try and bring about scenario (A) or as close to it as possible. The more progressive element in the SAG, eg Pik Botha, appear to have grasped the importance of avoiding a negative reaction and of replying in terms which at least hold open the possibility of further dialogue (if they do this COMGEP may well seek to clarify and firm up such a prospect by making a further visit to South Africa before it reports). Also the Commonwealth Secretariat, at least in theory, should have a vested interest in COMGEP continuing its mediating role. If COMGEP finishes so does the prominent role which it gives the Commonwealth and Mr Ramphal.



Action prior to Commonwealth Review

6. In the run up to the Commonwealth Group's report we should continue to do the following:

(i) work on the SAG to give as constructive a reaction as possible.

(ii) work on COMGEP through the Secretariat and Lord Barber to produce a report which keeps open the possibility of the Group continuing to pursue its mediatory role and makes no recommendations about sanctions.

(iii) work on other states eg US, FLS, EC to give public support to COMGEP's initiative and so extend the body of international opinion that is supportive of it continuing its work.

Modalities of the Review

7. Our attitude to the modalities of the review will of course depend on how COMGEP progresses. But if we wait until COMGEP's report before expressing any views we risk a consensus being reached without us by the other six Commonwealth countries which could prove very difficult to reverse later.

Timing - The Commonwealth Secretariat are likely to press for July. There are various considerations. Unrest and violence in South Africa may well flare up in June. The UN is also holding its sanctions conference that month. Momentum for further measures against South Africa may well begin to build up again internationally from then. A too obvious attempt by us to delay the meeting beyond July could well prove counter-productive and only stoke up the pressures on us. It seems most unlikely in any case that we could postpone the review beyond September or that we could achieve a better result by spinning out the process for an extra month or two.

Level - It would seem best for us to have a review at the level of Foreign Minister rather than Head of Government. This level worked well at the recent EC/FLS meeting in Lusaka. It would reduce the risk of the press building up the meeting. It could also enable us to delay or defer any final decisions. The possibility of a Heads

of Government Meeting could be held in reserve, if necessary for a later stage.

Venue - The Commonwealth Secretariat apparently favour Ottawa or Delhi. London, however, or Ottawa look best for us. In Canberra there might be unhelpful influence from Fraser and Hawke. In any of the Third World capitals there would be great domestic pressure for sanctions and a tendency to focus on the UK. In London there would be pros and cons for us. We would be better informed about the attitudes of those participating and in a better position to try to influence them. The Prime Minister would be on hand if her intervention was needed. We would also be in the chair (for which reason the Commonwealth Secretariat is against it). But it might increase domestic parliamentary and public interest in and pressure on the meeting. In Ottawa we might expect the Canadians to do their best to play a constructive role in the chair, but we would have less direct influence on the proceedings. On balance, London should be our preference with Ottawa an acceptable fall back.

#### Substance of Review

8. If we have the most favourable outcome, scenario (A), our aim would almost certainly be to try to get the agreement of the other six Commonwealth Governments to have the COMGEP mission continued, though not necessarily in the same form. At the same time we would argue strongly for deferring consideration of further measures against South Africa.

9. The case of scenario (B) would be more complex. We would need to decide beforehand whether to press for a continuation of COMGEP, seek some successor mechanism or try to end any Commonwealth initiative. An end to COMGEP or any mechanism for promoting dialogue would make it more difficult for us to argue internationally for emphasis on a policy of dialogue. It would also increase the immediate pressure to take further measures. On the other hand ending the initiative might free us to some extent from the Commonwealth link and reduce the opportunities for other Commonwealth governments to put direct pressure on us. On the other



hand, it might diminish our potential influence on the attitudes of others. We shall have to judge these questions nearer the time.

10. If the COMGEP report contains elements on which we can build, the best course might be to seek support before the review (from the Canadians, Kaunda etc) for an acceptable package outcome that would continue the emphasis on facilitating dialogue in South Africa. This could be either through an extension of COMGEP's mandate or some other means. We should need to explore the alternatives if the Eminent Persons would not agree to devote more time to the job. Two alternative possibilities might be (i) the appointment of a single Commonwealth mediator or (ii) having a group of Commonwealth countries play this role. (One problem with the former would be the difficulty of getting agreement to anyone likely to be acceptable to the South African Government or having the necessary skill and experience.) A pre-emptive approach with this objective in mind might enable the UK to be seen in a more favourable light at the review as a prime mover in any final agreement. We would, of course, aim to deflect the question of further measures, if necessary by seeking further deferment of their consideration.

11. If we have scenario (C), the worst possible outcome, there will be no chance of getting COMGEP to continue its mission. In that case we should probably wish to draw as clean a line as possible under the exercise to avoid further Commonwealth involvement or indeed any further high level Commonwealth meetings on the subject until the next Heads of Government meeting in 1987. The pressures to take further measures would be very great. Ministers might have to weigh up at the time the relative costs to us of the different courses of action. We would need to make, through contacts with the Commonwealth governments beforehand, an assessment of the likely strengths of these pressures and find ways of minimising the difficulty for the UK.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

12. (i) We should continue to do everything possible prior to the Commonwealth review to get COMGEP firmly engaged in its task of promoting dialogue (para 6). This will require a constructive response from the SAG and a positive approach by COMGEP.

(ii) We should avoid a consensus forming, without our agreement, on the modalities for the Commonwealth review. We should begin immediately to try to influence the other Commonwealth governments concerned towards having the review at foreign minister level, and in London or if not preferably Ottawa. On timing, it would not seem to our advantage to try to delay it beyond July (para 7).

(iii) We should await COMGEP's report and further developments in South Africa before deciding our exact tactics for the review. A key decision will be whether or not to press for COMGEP to continue, or whether to explore the possibility of some successor mechanism (para 10). In the worst case we may need to try and draw a line under further Commonwealth involvement. We should aim to adopt a pre-emptive approach, and through consultations beforehand, move towards agreement on a new Commonwealth position which would stay in place for as long as possible.

Foreign and Commonwealth Office  
11 April 1986

SOUTH AFRICA Relations PT9



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*CPK*



PRIVY COUNCIL OFFICE  
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17 April 1986

*CPK*  
*18/4*

*Dear Colin,*

**COMMONWEALTH GROUP OF EMINENT PERSONS**

The Lord President has seen the recent exchange of correspondence on the modalities of the Commonwealth review meeting which will consider the forthcoming report of the Commonwealth Group of Eminent Persons.

The Lord President feels that, however difficult it might be, the timing of the review conference should be played longer rather than shorter; and he agrees with the Prime Minister that London is very much the first choice for the location of the meeting.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Charles Powell, to the Private Secretaries to members of OD Committee, and to Michael Stark in the Cabinet Office.

*Yours sincerely*

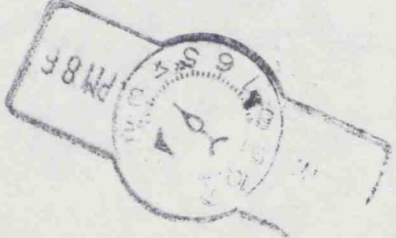
*Joan*

JOAN MACNAUGHTON  
Private Secretary

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28 April 1986

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Colin R Budd Esq  
Private Secretary to the  
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28/4

Dear Colin,

COMMONWEALTH GROUP ON EMINENT PERSONS

Thank you for sending me a copy of your letter of 14 April to Charles Powell. I have now seen his reply of 15 April.

My Secretary of State strongly supports the recommendations of the paper which you enclosed, in favour of trying to steer the COMGEP report and the review meeting towards an acceptable outcome. He agrees that we must do everything possible to encourage a positive approach by COMGEP, and a constructive South African Government reaction to the Group's proposals, with the objective of pre-empting calls for further economic measures against South Africa.

Officials are now in touch about implementing the legislative ban on the import of Krugerrands. This and other measures which we have already been obliged to implement have just about exhausted what we can do without serious damage to our considerable South African trade and investment interests. Officials in the MISC 118 Group are, of course, still examining the likely consequences of possible further measures. But our preliminary view is that we should have extreme difficulty in agreeing to any further economic measures against South Africa.

I am copying this letter to the other recipients of yours.

Yours ever,  
Michael

MICHAEL GILBERTSON  
Private Secretary

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BICENTENARY

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