

CONFIDENTIAL
FM CAPE TOWN
TO PRIORITY FCO
TELNO 236
OF 250920Z APRIL 86

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No. Curra o.s.

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MY TELS NO. 233 AND 234: SOUTH AFRICAN REPLY TO COMMONWEALTH GROUP.

1. FURTHER READING OF PIK BOTHA'S LETTER CONFIRMS MY INITIAL IMPRESSION THAT IT IS WEAK ON COMMITMENT TO THE EPG IDEAS BUT STRONG IN OFFERING FURTHER TALKS. HEAD OF CHANCERY HAD AN OPPORTUNITY OF A LONG PRIVATE TALK WITH THE DEPUTY DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF THE DFA LAST NIGHT HOWEVER, WHICH THROWS SOME MORE LIGHT ON THE GOVERNMENT'S THINKING.

2. VON HIRSCHBERG SAID THAT HE HOPED THAT THE CO-CHAIRMEN WOULD RECOGNISE HIS MINISTER'S RESPONSE AS A POSITIVE ONE. IT WAS INTENDED TO BE. THE SOUTH AFRICANS WERE GENUINELY INTERESTED IN THE POTENTIAL OF THE COMMONWEALTH GROUP. THEY FACED MAJOR PROBLEMS IN GETTING BLACKS INVOLVED IN DIALOGUE. PROGRESS WAS NECESSARY FOR THE FUTURE OF SOUTH AFRICA. HIS MINISTER BELIEVED THAT THE COMMONWEALTH GROUP INITIATIVE COULD PLAY A VITAL PART. BUT IT WAS GOING TO BE ENORMOUSLY DIFFICULT TO MAKE PROGRESS. TO DO SO WOULD REQUIRE BOTH SKILL AND TIME. THE COMMONWEALTH GROUP SHOULD BE IN NO DOUBT THAT THE SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT WAS SERIOUSLY INTERESTED. THE EVIDENCE FOR THIS WAS ALREADY THERE. THE SOUTH AFRICANS WOULD NOT HAVE ALLOWED THE GROUP THE ACCESS GIVEN TO THEM AND STATEMENTS SUCH AS THAT RECENTLY MADE IN PARLIAMENT BY THE PRESIDENT WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN MADE IF THE GOVERNMENT WERE NOT INTERESTED IN TRYING TO MAKE POSITIVE PROGRESS. TO SOME EXTENT THE SOUTH AFRICANS HAD LOCKED THEMSELVES INTO THE GROUP INITIATIVE BY WHAT THEY HAD ALREADY DONE. IF IT NOW FAILED THE SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT WERE UNDER NO ILLUSIONS THAT THEY THEMSELVES WOULD ALSO BE DAMAGED.

3. NEVERTHELESS IT WAS NECESSARY TO LOOK AT ALL THIS FROM A SOUTH AFRICAN POINT OF VIEW. SEEN FROM HERE THE SITUATION WAS THAT THE SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT WERE MAKING REAL CHANGES. IN PARTICULAR SINCE THE GROUP INITIATIVE WAS LAUNCHED THEY HAD CALLED OFF THE STATE OF EMERGENCY, RELEASED DETAINEES UNDER THE EMERGENCY, ANNOUNCED THE ENDING OF PASS LAWS AND INFLUX CONTROL. THERE WAS A DANGER THAT AS THEY HAD DONE THIS THEY WOULD NOW BE GIVEN NO CREDIT FOR THESE MOVES. AN ALTERNATIVE WOULD HAVE BEEN FOR THEM TO DO NOTHING AND TO TRY TO BARGAIN WITH THESE PROMISES OF CHANGE. THEY HAD NOT CHOSEN THIS COURSE BUT THEY NOW NEEDED TO POINT OUT THAT THEY DESERVED CREDIT FOR WHAT HAD ALREADY TAKEN PLACE. THIS WAS ONE OF THE AIMS IN HIS MINISTER'S LETTER.

4. VON HIRSCHBERG SAID THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAD CONSIDERED THE RESPONSE CAREFULLY. ONE VIEW WAS THAT THE ANC WERE NOT SERIOUSLY INTERESTED IN DIALOGUE. THE FEAR WAS THAT THEY WOULD CONTINUOUSLY WIDEN THEIR DEMANDS COUNTING ON PRESSURE ON THE SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT TO MAKE CONCESSIONS WITHOUT THEMSELVES OFFERING ANY-

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THING. HARDLINERS IN THE ANC HAD A VESTED INTEREST IN CONTINUING CONFRONTATION WHICH THEY PROBABLY BELIEVED WOULD IN THE END BRING THEM TO POWER. THE SOUTH AFRICANS COULD NOT AFFORD TO FOLLOW THIS COURSE. THEY THEREFORE NEEDED SOME INDICATION THAT THE ANC COULD DELIVER. BUT THE SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT RECOGNISED THAT WE AND OTHERS WERE LOOKING FOR A POSITIVE REPLY. THEY HAD THEREFORE DECIDED NOT TO MAKE DEMANDS IN THEIR REPLY. IT WAS BETTER TO INDICATE THAT DISCUSSION SHOULD CONTINUE. HOPEFULLY THIS WOULD BE A POSITIVE WAY OF TAKING THE INITIATIVE FURTHER. HIS MINISTER WAS VERY INTERESTED IN THE IDEA OF A SYNCHRONISED APPROACH. THIS COULD BE TACKLED IN THE WAY OF DIALOGUE. IF THERE COULD BE UNDERTAKINGS TO STOP THE VIOLENCE THIS WOULD BE OF REAL INTEREST TO THE SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT. BUT THEY HAD RESPONSIBILITIES TO MAINTAIN LAW AND ORDER. THEY SAW A RISK IN A PROCESS OF SYNCHRONISATION THAT THIS MIGHT BE USED AGAINST THEM. THEY COULD BE WORSE OFF IF AN INITIATIVE GOT UNDER WAY AND THEY WERE THEN DEEMED TO HAVE FAILED TO COMPLY WITH UNDERTAKINGS BECAUSE THEY HAD TO DEAL WITH CONTINUING VIOLENCE. THEY NEEDED TO BE SURE THAT THE ANC WOULD BE PREPARED TO HONOUR ITS UNDERTAKINGS. THIS WAS WHERE THE PROCESS OF SYNCHRONISATION CAME IN AND WHERE THEY FELT THAT THE COMMONWEALTH GROUP COULD PLAY A KEY PART.

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SOUTH AFRICA

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S AF D

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UND

ECD(E)

NEWS D

LEGAL ADVISERS

PLANNING STAFF

PS

PS/LADY YOUNG

PS/MRS CHALKER

PS/PUS

MR DEREK THOMAS

MR FERGUSSON

MR REEVE

CABINET OFFICE

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