



CONFIDENTIAL

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

13 May 1986

Jean Charles,

COMGEP Visit To South Africa

The Foreign Secretary thought the Prime Minister ought to be aware, before she sees the Commonwealth Secretary-General at her lunch for the UN Secretary-General tomorrow, of news about the current COMGEP visit to South Africa which Mr Ramphal gave to Sir Antony Acland this evening.

According to Mr Ramphal (who had only received an outline account over the telephone from South Africa). COMGEP had an extremely difficult meeting with the South African Foreign Minister this afternoon. In it, Pik Botha represented the South African Government's attitude to the COMGEP mission in terms entirely different from those used by von Hirshberg in London. Mr Botha said that publicity about the possibility of a breakthrough by the COMGEP mission had undermined his own position; addressing Lord Barber in particular, he said that Britain had sought to stir up such publicity in order to give the Prime Minister credit for what COMGEP might have achieved. Mr Botha also appeared to be fundamentally hostile to the idea of releasing Mandela, saying that the South African Government did not know what Mr Mandela's attitude to negotiations would be but it was unlikely to be favourable.

Mr Ramphal continued that there had been a sharp exchange between Mr Botha and Mr Fraser about the purpose of the Group remaining in South Africa. General Obasanjo was extremely depressed. Overall, the impression was that Pik Botha had been reined in by his colleagues in the South African Government, and that his interview with the Group was a contrived backtracking exercise.

Nevertheless Mr Ramphal said that he had urged the Group to stick to their mission, and he was confident that they would not do anything rash without consulting him. They had an appointment with the South African Minister of Justice tomorrow, but no further contact with Pik Botha was planned.

In reply, Sir Antony Acland commented that this was very disappointing news. He thought that it was right for Mr Ramphal to urge the Group to stick at their mission, and to ensure that the South African Government had a clear

/view

CONFIDENTIAL

Prime Minister (2)
CDP
13/5
[Ramphal is coming to lunch tomorrow]
mt



CONFIDENTIAL

view of both sides of the equation. The British Government's impression was that publicity for the Group's mission had originated mainly in South Africa.

We have known for some time of the deep divisions within the South African Cabinet and the difficult task which Pick Botha faces in seeking to carry his colleagues and the President with him. There could well, also, have been an element of hard bargaining in this initial contact. Despite Mr Ramphal's gloomy tone, the Foreign Secretary does not believe that this is necessarily the end of the story as far as the COMGEP mission is concerned. He will wish to reflect further overnight on what, if anything, HMG might do to help keep the show on the road. Meanwhile we need the earliest possible independent picture of what has happened and we have asked for a report from our Ambassador, taking account of Lord Barber's impressions, to reach us as soon as possible.

I am copying this letter to Michael Stark (Cabinet Office) and Sir Percy Cradock.

Yours ever,
Tony Galsworthy

(A C Galsworthy)
Private Secretary

C D Powell Esq
PS/10 Downing Street

CONFIDENTIAL