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15

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SOUTHERN AFRICA

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IMMEDIATE

15.11.8

CONFIDENTIAL
FM CAPE TOWN
TO FLASH FCO
TELNO 260
OF 141150Z MAY 86
INFO PRIORITY LUSAKA, HARARE, WASHINGTON

FLASH

MY TELNO 259:(NOT TO ALL):COMMONWEALTH GROUP

SUMMARY

1. FURTHER DETAIL OF YESTERDAY'S TALKS WITH PJK BOTHA. COMMONWEALTH GROUP UNCERTAIN AS TO NEXT MOVES BUT HOPE FOR FURTHER DISCUSSIONS WITH SOUTH AFRICAN MINISTERS.

DETAIL

2. LORD BARBER CAME TO SEE ME THIS MORNING HAVING FIRST CLEARED HIS LINES WITH OBASANJO. BOTH OF THEM HAD SPOKEN TO RAMPHAL ON THE TELEPHONE TO SAY THAT THE REPORT HE HAD BEEN GIVEN YESTERDAY FROM ONE OF HIS OWN STAFF WAS OVER-DRAMATIC. THERE WAS NO NEED FOR ANY INTERVENTION FROM LONDON AT THIS STAGE.

3. ACCORDING TO BARBER, PJK BOTHA HAD BEGUN YESTERDAY'S DELAYED MEETING BY REMONSTRATING OVER LEAKS TO THE PRESS ABOUT THE EPG NEGOTIATING CONCEPT APPARENTLY ORIGINATING IN LONDON. PJK BOTHA SUGGESTED THAT THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT MIGHT HAVE HAD A HAND. THE GROUP STRONGLY DENIED HAVING SPOKEN TO THE PRESS THEMSELVES. BARBER ASSURED PJK BOTHA THAT HAVING SEEN THE SECRETARY OF STATE TO ENQUIRE ABOUT REPORTS OF SOUTH AFRICAN MESSAGES TO THE TOKYO SUMMIT GOVERNMENTS, HE WAS CERTAIN THAT THE BRITISH WERE NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR ALLOWING DETAILS OF THE EPG IDEAS TO REACH THE PRESS.

4. PJK BOTHA HAD THEN SPOKEN ABOUT THE DILEMMA FACING THE GOVERNMENT IN RELEASING MANDELA AND ALLOWING THE ANC A FREE HAND. SOME OF HIS COLLEAGUES WOULD NEED A GREAT DEAL OF PERSUADING. HE WAS CLEARLY UNWILLING TO GO INTO SUBSTANCE ON THE NEGOTIATING CONCEPT ITSELF BEYOND TAKING ISSUE WITH THE DESCRIPTION 'ACKNOWLEDGED' BLACK LEADERS. PJK BOTHA ALSO SAID THAT BEFORE THE GOVERNMENT COULD BE EXPECTED TO TAKE SUCH MOMENTOUS STEPS A START SHOULD BE MADE ON DE-ESCALATING VIOLENCE.

5. DISCUSSION THEN WAS TAKEN UP ALMOST ENTIRELY WITH THE QUESTION

5. DISCUSSION THEN WAS TAKEN UP ALMOST ENTIRELY WITH THE QUESTION OF MANDELA. PAK BOTHA PROPOSED THAT IN ORDER FOR BOTH GOVERNMENT AND GROUP TO BE CLEAR AS TO MANDELA'S POSITION, THE GROUP SHOULD SEE HIM IN COMPANY WITH THE MINISTER OF JUSTICE AND THE PRESIDENT'S LEGAL ADVISOR. OBASANJO SEEMED TO ACCEPT THIS AND NONE OF THE REST OF THE GROUP DEMURRED AT THE TIME. ON RETURNING TO THEIR HOTEL, HOWEVER, THEY REALISED THAT FOR THE GROUP TO BE ACCOMPANIED BY GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES MIGHT COMPROMISE THEM IN MANDELA'S EYES, AND THEY THEREFORE RANG PAK BOTHA'S OFFICE TO REVERSE THEIR INITIAL AGREEMENT TO THIS.

6. HIRSCHBERG (DFA) THEREUPON CAME ROUND TO THE HOTEL. HE BEGGED THEM TO UNDERSTAND THAT THE GOVERNMENT WERE BEING ASKED TO TAKE THE MOST FAR-REACHING DECISIONS. THEY COULD NOT BE RUSHED. THE ONLY CHANCE WAS TO GIVE THEM MORE TIME AND TO PROCEED STEP BY STEP.

7. THE GROUP ARE SEEING THE MINISTER OF JUSTICE THIS AFTERNOON FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION OF ARRANGEMENTS ABOUT VISITING MANDELA. THE CO-CHAIRMEN WERE ALSO HOPING TO SEE MRS HELEN SUZMAN THIS MORNING TO HEAR MORE ABOUT HER RECENT INTERVIEW WITH MANDELA. THERE IS NO DATE FIXED FOR A FURTHER ROUND WITH PAK BOTHA, BUT LORD BARBER SAYS THE GROUP ARE CONFIDENT OF SEEING HIM AGAIN IN ORDER TO FOLLOW UP ANY TALK WITH MANDELA. (IN THE EVENT, THE EXPECTED WORKING LUNCH YESTERDAY WITH MEMBERS OF THE CABINET'S CONSTITUTIONAL COMMITTEE WAS LIMITED TO ONLY TWO OTHER MINISTERS BESIDES PAK BOTHA, NAMELY HOME AFFAIRS AND FINANCE).

COMMENT

8. LORD BARBER WAS ADAMANT THAT ALTHOUGH THIS WAS A DISAPPOINTING START IT WAS CERTAINLY TOO EARLY TO ASSUME THAT THE GROUP WOULD GET NO FURTHER. HE SAID THE EVIDENCE SEEMED TO SUGGEST GENUINE DIVISIONS AMONG MINISTERS. WE KNEW THE MEETING YESTERDAY HAD BEEN DELAYED BECAUSE PAK WAS SEEING THE PRESIDENT. HE THOUGHT IT ENTIRELY POSSIBLE THAT THERE HAD BEEN A MINISTERIAL DISCUSSION WHICH LEFT MATTERS UNCONCLUSIVE. THIS WOULD EXPLAIN WHY PAK HAD BEEN SO UNFORTHCOMING AND WHY FEW OTHER MINISTERS HAD TURNED UP TO MEET THE GROUP. BUT IN MY VIEW IT DID NOT NECESSARILY MEAN THAT A FIRM DECISION HAD BEEN TAKEN TO REJECT THE NEGOTIATING PACKAGE. THE WHOLE PACKAGE COULD WELL BE SO DIFFICULT FOR MINISTERS THAT THEY HAD NOT REALLY FOCUSED ON IT COLLECTIVELY TILL NOW. HE WAS WILLING TO ACCEPT THAT PAK BOTHA WAS GENUINE IN WANTING TO CARRY THE PRESIDENT AND OTHER COLLEAGUES TOWARDS A PACKAGE OF THIS KIND. THIS WOULD ALSO EXPLAIN HIRSCHBERG'S HEARTFELT PLEA FOR MORE TIME.

9. WE HAVE HAD SEPARATE CONFIRMATION FROM ONE OF THE DEPUTY MINISTERS THAT THE NATIONAL PARTY IS SPLIT ON THE QUESTION OF RELEASING MANDELA AND ENGAGING THE ANC IN NEGOTIATION. THE ISSUES ARE BEING OPENLY CANVASSED WITHIN THE PARTY. IT IS ALL TOO LIKELY THEREFORE THAT A SIMILAR SPLIT EXISTS AMONG THE SENIOR MINISTERS.

10. HE TOLD LORD BARBER THAT ONE REAL DIFFICULTY FOR THE GOVERNMENT WAS THEIR BEING ASKED TO COMMIT THEMSELVES BEFORE THEY HAVE ANY THINKING WHETHER OR NOT THE ANC ARE INTERESTED IN THE EPG'S NEGOTIATING CONCEPT. SHORT OF A CLEAR OUTRIGHT REJECTION BY THE GOVERNMENT WHICH MADE THE GROUP CONCLUDE THEY HAD ALREADY FAILED, MY OWN VIEW WAS THAT THE GROUP SHOULD PUT THE CENTRAL IDEAS IN THEIR NEGOTIATING CONCEPT TO THE ANC IN THE LIGHT OF WHATEVER FURTHER TALKS THEY MAY HAVE WITH THE GOVERNMENT THIS WEEK. NOT EVEN TO TEST THE ANC REACTIONS WOULD SEEM LIKE DOING ONLY HALF THE JOB. I AM SURE IT WOULD BE EASIER FOR PAK BOTHA TO CONVANCE WAVERERS AMONG HIS COLLEAGUES IF HE WERE IN A POSITION TO SAY THAT THE PACKAGE WOULD ACTUALLY RUN WITH THE ANC. BARBER SAID THAT HE WOULD PUT THESE POINTS TO HIS COLLEAGUES.

Hogbech