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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

9 June 1986

Prime Minister

You might like to discuss this with the Foreign Secretary tomorrow, particularly the suggestion in the last paragraph which should be on early discussion in OJ of possible means.

Dear Charles,

South Africa: COMGEP

CD 10/6 Map

The co-Chairmen replied on 5 June to Pik Botha's letter, and the Group have as you know now finalised their report. I enclose a copy of the reply to Pik: in essence it says that unless the South African Government is prepared to accept the negotiating concept in toto the Group see no merit in further discussions.

The Commonwealth Secretariat's original draft went into great detail and included recommendations for sanctions. Lord Barber told the Foreign Secretary privately over the weekend that by threatening to disassociate himself from its conclusions he had managed to remove a number of more objectionable elements from the report and in the end had felt it just possible (and on the whole best) to sign the final document. The alternative would, he was sure, have been a far less temperate document from the rest of the Group.

Lord Barber told the Foreign Secretary that he had hoped for a more constructive approach. But the majority had had enough: they had become thoroughly disillusioned as a result of the South African raids, Botha's firmly negative statement, and the booklet recently released by the South African Government information machine which contains highly disobliging remarks on the ANC etc (eg the comment that there was no possibility of the SAG negotiating with Communists, whereas privately the SAG representatives had told the Group that in any negotiations it would be for the ANC to decide who should represent them). The general feeling in the Group was that they were being strung along. Lord Barber and Mr Malcolm Fraser would have been prepared to keep the initiative going, but they were clearly in the minority.

The Foreign Secretary accepts Lord Barber's judgement that COMGEP, at least in its present form, is unlikely to be able to play any further role (though we should take care to avoid finally slamming the door on this possibility - there is a remote chance, depending on the tone of the report itself, that the South Africans might respond

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positively to the COMGEP reply). Sir Geoffrey discussed with the Prime Minister some time ago whether the UK should take an initiative, in the shape of a visit to South Africa. They then concluded that the arguments were on balance against the idea (though a further message from the Prime Minister to President Botha was by no means to be excluded). The Foreign Secretary doubts whether a further message would help at present, and suggests that we should hold the idea in reserve for the time being. Meanwhile, however, our Ambassador at Cape Town was asked late last week to let the South Africans know which way the wind was blowing, so that they should understand how little time remained.

We now need to consider our own position. The Foreign Secretary suggests that in public we should argue that the ball is in the South African court. We should emphasise the Group's real achievements in engaging both sides in a serious dialogue and mapping out a strategy to break the downward spiral of violence and repression. We should also stress the important role which we have played in supporting the Group. We should say that the Group's basic approach of seeking to promote dialogue and a suspension of violence remains valid but that time is needed for reflection by all concerned to reconsider their positions and establish whether further progress may be possible later. We shall be reviewing our policy in the light of the Group's report and consulting with our major Western partners in preparation for the Commonwealth review meeting in August. We should underline the need to avoid ill-considered and hasty conclusions and for carefully constructed and practical international policies. We should decline to be drawn on our attitude to further measures beyond those already taken (UN arms embargo, Gleneagles, Luxembourg, Nassau).

It is clear that by their raids and response to the Commonwealth Group the South Africans have ensured that the pressure for further measures will intensify through the summer. As the Prime Minister knows, emotion in the Commonwealth is already running high. All the other members of the "Old Commonwealth" favour sanctions. Ramphal has been talking to the Americans (Dr Crocker was in London last week) in terms of the review meeting being only an interim step and of seeking to bring forward the next CHOGM, the aim clearly being to increase the pressure on HMG. The Foreign Secretary's talks with his colleagues in The Hague this weekend showed that the Twelve ought to be slightly more manageable, but that further policy discussion is inevitable; the subject of South Africa is bound to figure at the European Council at the end of this month and at the Foreign Affairs Council on Monday. The French have not yet lived up to Chirac's initial approach (viz their recent abstention on a draft Security Council Resolution including mandatory sanctions). Genscher told the Foreign Secretary in Halifax

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(and Ruhfus repeated in The Hague) that he thought it would be necessary to take at least some measures and would like to see this done in a sensible and concerted way. Shultz too appeared resigned to the inevitability of further measures. You will have seen the reports from Washington that momentum is gathering in Congress. Dr Crocker told Sir Geoffrey on 4 June that although President Reagan was determined not to commit himself to measures which would seriously impair the South African economy it might be necessary to stave off Congressional pressure by opting for less - for example a ban on landing rights for South African aircraft - than the provisions of the bill tabled there after the raids.

As the Foreign Secretary told the Prime Minister on the evening of 4 June, apart from the collapse of COMGEP (which will be seen abroad to be the result of South African intransigence) there are a number of events in the weeks ahead which are very likely to add to the momentum for sanctions - for example, the Paris UN Conference on sanctions in mid-June (which coincides with the 10th anniversary of the Soweto uprising), and the OAU Summit in late July. There is also a very high risk of increased violence in South Africa around the Soweto anniversary on 16 June. Finally, recent reports suggest that the South African Government are preparing to take a harsh line in dealing with any unrest, with much greater readiness to resort to force, and will not refrain from further cross-border raids if they judge them necessary (in this connection, the official Angolan news agency have alleged that the South Africans mounted a sea-borne attack on the port of Namibe on 5 June in which ships and oil tanks were destroyed and damaged). If so we may face further action in the Security Council with fresh demands for mandatory sanctions.

The Foreign Secretary considers that the above factors reinforce the need to prepare our position as thoroughly - and as quickly - as possible. We have a range of options:

(a) we might seek to keep our options open and put off a decision until the Commonwealth review meeting (unless we have been forced to take up a position in EC Political Cooperation or there has been a debate or debates in the Security Council requiring us to vote on draft resolution(s)). In the Foreign Secretary's view this is an undesirable posture. Our aim should be to shape events rather than react to them. If we adopt a passive approach until the Commonwealth review meeting, we are far more likely to end up with a worse outcome in terms of British interests than if we act meanwhile to seize the initiative;

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(b) to take up a position immediately that we are not prepared to consider any further measures beyond those already in place against South Africa and seek to stick to it. While there is some logic in favour of this course, the Foreign Secretary does not believe that it would best promote Britain's central interests. Our preferred objective should be to organise our main Western partners in such a way as to obtain a united front as close to our preferred position as possible. As appears from paragraph 6 above, there is little or no chance of achieving such agreement on the basis of adamant opposition to any further measures; we should almost certainly find ourselves without company and facing the prospect of having to veto a series of Security Council resolutions without even American support;

(c) to be ready to play a part which enables us to control the movement of events in our own best interests. In the Foreign Secretary's view we shall need to be prepared to take at least some additional measures. We should of course aim to identify measures whose effects on British economic interests we assess to be marginal, avoiding those whose effects are more serious. Sir Geoffrey believes we are more likely to achieve such an outcome if we are ourselves ready, at the right time and place, to come forward with the right set of strictly limited proposals: small measures volunteered in this way could well have greater impact than more substantive steps seemingly forced out of us - and be all the more likely to hold the line at an acceptable place.

Sir Geoffrey observes of course that before long we should have exhausted the scope for minor, relatively painless measures; and that further measures must do at least some damage to the South African economy without in practice promoting the cause of peaceful reform in South Africa. Our aim must be to promote movement towards the creation of a genuinely non-racial society in South Africa. General economic sanctions would, of course, make that aim more difficult to achieve.

Against this background Sir Geoffrey considers it important that MISC 118 should complete its work as soon as possible so that Ministers are in full possession of the facts and prepared for a very early discussion, perhaps in OD. There would be advantage if we were able to discuss possible limiting action that might be put to us by our Western partners, France, Germany and Japan, well in advance of the Commonwealth review meeting. Since the increased pressure for action against South Africa will inevitably lead to discussion among our Community partners, we should be well placed to exercise the leadership inherent in the Presidency to seek their support for our position.

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Finally, we cannot wholly exclude the possibility that developments between now and then might oblige Ministers to take rapid decisions in response, for example, to a meeting of the Security Council. So far, there has been no pressure to advance the date of the review meeting from August, and we should resist this strongly if it develops. But given the risk that events might move very quickly Sir Geoffrey considers that it would be sensible if colleagues were to consider this as soon as possible in OD.

I am copying this letter to Michael Stark (Cabinet Office).

*Yours ever,*

*Colin Budd*

(C R Budd)  
Private Secretary

C D Powell Esq  
PS/10 Downing Street

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# COMMONWEALTH GROUP OF EMINENT PERSONS

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5 June 1986

The Hon. R F Botha  
Minister of Foreign Affairs  
Republic of South Africa

My dear Foreign Minister

Thank you for your letter of 29 May 1986 following the discussions between Ministers of the South African Government and the members of the Commonwealth Group in Cape Town on 19 May.

We note that your letter provides a restatement of points which Ministers raised with our Group at the 19 May meeting. Essentially there are two key elements to the points raised by Ministers: that there should be a renunciation of violence and that a de-escalation in the level of violence was necessary before other action might be taken by the Government. The Group explained in some detail its position on these matters and the difficulties which they raised.

Nevertheless, we are convinced that it is possible to achieve negotiations about the democratic future of South Africa if that is the Government's genuine wish, and it is willing to create the circumstances in which co-operation would become possible with the acknowledged leaders of the people of South Africa who would speak and act for negotiation.

We strongly believe that the negotiating concept which we left with the Government is sound and would assist in achieving negotiations in a non-violent atmosphere. This would require acceptance by the South African Government

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Members:

The Rt. Hon. MALCOLM FRASER (Co-Chairman); General OLUSEGUN OBASANJO (Co-Chairman)  
The Rt. Hon. LORD BARBER, Dame NITA BARROW, Mr. JOHN MALECELA, Sardar SWARAN SINGH, The Most Rev. Archbishop EDWARD W. SCOTT DD

of the spirit and reality of what we have said about violence and a recognition that this applied to all sides. It would also require a deliberate attempt on the part of the South African Government to repair the damage that has been done by its actions of the last few weeks.

We find it difficult to understand how the term suspension of violence provides difficulties for the South African Government particularly as our negotiating concept would involve black leaders arguing in support of the maintenance of peace during the negotiating process. We reiterate that the Lancaster House negotiations continued without the suspension of violence as have many others in situations of conflict.

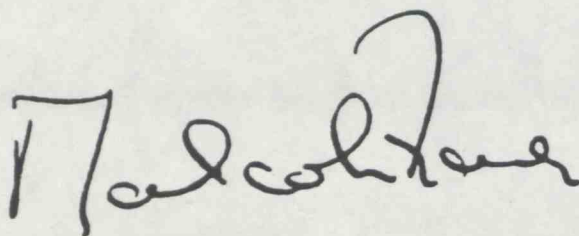
As to the second point, we reassert that a prior reduction in the level of violence before the Government itself takes specific action in regard to the concept would not be feasible. Acts of aggression were committed against neighbouring countries on the very morning when we discussed the concept with Ministers. This underlines the essential elements of the concept requiring a suspension of violence on all sides and highlights the unreality of asking others to de-escalate violence before action as proposed by the Group is taken by the Government. A suspension of violence or a commitment to non-violence, if in the Government's view the meaning is the same, would obviously in the present context require a commitment to suspend the violence arising from the administration of apartheid. In addition, in the light of recent events, the Government of South Africa would need to give a firm commitment to desist from further aggression against neighbouring states.

In your letter you mentioned two further matters. The first concerned intimidation. In our view the suspension of violence would necessarily involve the end of all intimidation. We emphasise it is only the Government that can establish the circumstances in which normal political activity and freedom of assembly and discussion can take place. This of course is an essential part of our concept.

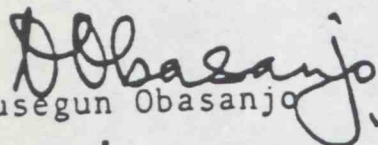
You then raised questions about the nature of the negotiations. All along we have said that the specific elements of a political settlement are for South Africans to determine. Our charter was never to prescribe the form of the democracy that should evolve in South Africa. That is for South Africans alone. We had noted your assurance that there would be an open agenda at the negotiations against the background of dismantling apartheid and with the objective of the establishment of a just democratic structure.

In the absence both of movement on the part of the Government on the first two major points and a positive response to the concept as a whole, we are unable to see merit in further discussions. This is especially so since actions of recent weeks have made the negotiating climate much more difficult.

Yours sincerely



Malcolm Fraser



Olusegun Obasanjo



SEK. AFRICA Relations Pt 9

