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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

25 June 1986

Dear Charles,

Meeting Between the Minister of State and
the President of the ANC

Mrs Chalker saw Mr Tambo yesterday afternoon (24 June) as agreed. The meeting lasted an hour. Mr Tambo was accompanied by Mr Thabo Mbeki (ANC Director of Information) and Mr Aziz Pahad, both members of the ANC's National Executive. The atmosphere was calm and serious.

Mrs Chalker began by stressing the Government's concern about the violence in South Africa, especially that directed against innocent people. HMG wished to see an end to violence on all sides. We understood the anger and frustration in the townships, but the changes that we all wanted to see would only be delayed if South Africa became locked in a spiral of violence and repression. We condemned all bombings, whether they were in Johannesburg and Durban or Lusaka and Gaborone.

She underlined that the Government wished to see an end to apartheid. We were doing all we could with the Commonwealth and our European Partners to achieve this.

Mrs Chalker confirmed our wish to exchange views with the ANC, but clearly stated that such contacts did not constitute recognition of the ANC by the British Government.

Mr Tambo said that he was very grateful to be invited to the Foreign Office to meet Mrs Chalker. There was everything to be gained from exchanging views and seeking a way out of what was a common problem. He had always thought that Britain should have a particular interest in South Africa's problems, but he was not convinced that we had always taken sufficient account of the plight of "his people". It was particularly important to be able to speak to the Government itself and not just to other British people. The ANC was not the only black group but it had a majority of support among blacks in South Africa. Lord Barber would confirm this. The British Government's refusal to deal with the ANC had been seen by black South Africans as an expression of hostility.

/Mr Tambo

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Mr Tambo emphasised the non-violent roots of the ANC culminating in the award of the Nobel Peace Prize. He and others had been trained by Britain in the democratic tradition. Violence had been a reaction to the brutality of apartheid. The South African régime used violent methods. Large numbers had been killed. He believed that the violence would end once the system of apartheid was removed.

Mrs Chalker expressed her deep concern for the victims of today's bombings in Johannesburg and asked who was responsible. Mr Tambo said that he did not yet know who was responsible. But even assuming that the ANC was responsible, the violence had to be seen as a reaction to what was happening under the State of Emergency. Mrs Chalker replied that each time there was a promising development violent acts had set back the prospects for progress. To make a breakthrough, a framework for dialogue had to be set up which could only happen if there were a cessation of violence. (The discussion about violence and the need to end it took up the first half hour of the meeting. Mr Tambo was left in no doubt about the depth of our concern.)

Mr Tambo urged that Britain should adopt sanctions. He believed that they would bring the South African Government to consider a negotiated settlement. As long as that Government believed that President Reagan and Mrs Thatcher would not adopt sanctions, they would not budge. He wanted to see "effective pressure" (his own words). He was concerned that the US and UK would seek to ignore the ANC and hold discussions only with those like Buthelezi. His people were looking for a sign of change in direction by Britain. If we were seriously to threaten sanctions, then he believed the South African Government would respond. If they would release Mandela and the other political prisoners, this would enable the leadership of the black people to look ahead to the future.

Mrs Chalker explained why we did not believe that general economic sanctions would work and underlined the damage they could do to black people in South Africa and to South Africa's neighbours. Mr Tambo replied that the blacks were willing to make the necessary sacrifices. The leaders of the Front Line States said the same. He did not believe that the Afrikaners would hold out until their economy was destroyed. Business pressure on them would increase. Only a minority would stay in the laager. Their views were divided and they would not cling on to what P W Botha admitted was an "outmoded" system at the expense of their prosperity. The ANC did not want to inherit a ruined economy. It was necessary that President Botha should accept reality.

/Mr Tambo

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Mr Tambo said that long experience showed that just talking to the South African Government would not be effective. It had to be combined with pressure. Finally he wanted to stress how necessary it was for the British Government to have exchanges with the ANC about the situation if there was to be any chance of successfully influencing developments. It was not asking for recognition. He was grateful nevertheless for this opportunity to put his views across. All his people believed that Britain could play a decisive role if we could be persuaded to act firmly.

In conclusion, Mrs Chalker underlined the sincerity of the Government's efforts in seeking the abolition of apartheid and the unconditional release of Mandela. She would report Mr Tambo's views to the Government. She could make no promises about future meetings. But she had found the exchange of views valuable.

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

Yours ever,

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