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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

5 April 1983

The Prime Minister has asked me to reply to your letter of 21 March about the recent visit to the United Kingdom by General Matthei, the Commander in Chief of the Chilean Air Force.

General Matthei was invited to visit this country last year by the then Chief of the Air Staff, Sir Michael Beetham, but his duties in Chile prevented him from coming. Accordingly, he was asked again this year by the present Chief of the Air Staff, Sir Keith Williamson, for a visit which was essentially a professional Air Force to Air Force occasion.

The visit does not, of course, imply that this Government condones Chile's poor human rights record. Indeed, the Government has consistently taken the opportunity to express its concern on this issue and did so once again earlier this month when supporting the resolution on Chile at the United Nations Human Rights Commission in Geneva.

General Matthei's visit was part of a long-established pattern of professional exchange visits by the Chiefs of Air Staff of this country and other friendly countries.

A. J. COLES

W. Sirs, Esq.

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CONFIDENTIAL



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE
MAIN BUILDING WHITEHALL LONDON SW1

Telephone 01-~~980 7922~~ 218 6169

D/S of S/PS/10

31st March 1983

Dear John,

*Type letter
mg*

In your letter of 24th March addressed to Richard Mottram you asked for a draft reply which you could send on the Prime Minister's behalf to Mr William Sirs, the General Secretary of the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation, who wrote to her on 21st March about the visit of General Matthei to this country.

I attach a draft, which has been prepared in consultation with the FCO. General Matthei's visit, from 11th to 18th March, became public knowledge while he was here; but the response has been, generally speaking, reasonably subdued.

The visit, primarily an Air Force to Air Force occasion, was regarded as successful, and the atmosphere was good; General Matthei himself expressed his delight at the visit. As you will know from my Secretary of State's letter to the Prime Minister of 10th March, the visit was at the personal invitation of the Chief of the Air Staff to discuss professional matters. General Matthei did, however, make an informal call on Mr Geoffrey Pattie, the Minister of State for Defence Procurement, on 14th March when there was a general discussion of possible aircraft sales to Chile, and the future intentions of Argentina. General Matthei also told Mr Pattie that he believed that there had been a substantial improvement in human rights in his country.

The attached draft seeks to correct Mr Sirs' impression that the invitation extended last year to General Matthei by the Chief of the Air Staff was withdrawn by the FCO. In fact, the General was obliged to turn down the invitation because of the economic problems in Chile at that time, which had triggered off a Cabinet crisis.

A copy of this letter goes to Roger Bone in the FCO.

*Yours ever,
Barry Neale*

(B P NEALE)
Private Secretary

A J Coles Esq

CONFIDENTIAL

DRAFT REPLY TO MR WILLIAM SIRS

The Prime Minister has asked me

~~I have been asked~~ to reply to your letter of 21st March ~~to~~
the Prime Minister about the recent visit to the United Kingdom by
General Matthei, the Command~~er~~in Chief of the Chilean Air Force.

General Matthei was invited to visit this country last year
by the then Chief of the Air Staff, Sir Michael Beetham, but his
duties in Chile prevented him from coming. Accordingly, he was
asked again this year by the present Chief of the Air Staff, Sir
Keith Williamson, for a visit which was essentially a professional
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The visit does not of course imply that this Government
condones Chile's poor human rights record. Indeed, the Government
has consistently taken the opportunity to express its concern on
this issue, and did so once again earlier this month when supporting
the resolution on Chile at the United Nations Human Rights Commission
in Geneva.

General Matthei's visit was ~~merely a routine~~ part of a long-
established pattern of ^{professional} exchange visits by the Chiefs of the Air
Staff of this country and other friendly countries.

MR 5/4.

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W-SIRS

da

Reminded - 31/3
Coming today
31/3

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

24 March 1983

Visit of General Matthei to Britain

I enclose a copy of a letter which the Prime Minister has received from the General Secretary of the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation expressing dismay that General Matthei has visited Britain.

I should be grateful if you could let me have a draft reply for my signature on behalf of the Prime Minister by the end of the month.

A. J. COLES

Richard Mottram, Esq.,
Ministry of Defence.

218-6169

SP



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

24 March 1983

I am writing on behalf of the Prime Minister to acknowledge your letter of 21 March. This is receiving attention and you will be sent a reply as soon as possible.

A. J. COLES

W. Sirs, Esq.

JFA

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TELEPHONE:
01-837 6691 (3 LINES)

YOUR REF:

OUR REF: WS/MU/SS



R24/3
TELEGRAPHIC ADDRESS:
"STEELCON, LONDON W.C.1"
TELEX 22141

THE IRON AND STEEL TRADES CONFEDERATION

General Secretary

W. Sirs

*Swinton House,
324 Gray's Inn Road,
London, WC1X 8DD*

21st March 1983

Rt.Hon.Margaret Thatcher MP
10 Downing Street
SW1

Dear Mrs.Thatcher,

Visit of General Matthei to Britain

I was dismayed to discover that General Matthei, one of Chile's military rulers, has after all visited Britain. So widespread was the revulsion at the prospect of a visit from the general last year that the Foreign Office withdrew his invitation.

I can only recall my view expressed to Mr.Pym at the time that hospitality for fascists from Chile sits very uneasily with the stance of your government during the Falklands campaign which was projected as an anti-fascist crusade. Fascism is fascism and wherever it appears we should oppose and not encourage it.

Yours sincerely

Wm Sirs

W. SIRS
General Secretary