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6 January 1987

The Rt. Hon. Sir Geoffrey Howe Q.C., M.P.
Secretary of State for Foreign
and Commonwealth Affairs
LONDON

Dear Geoffrey

I thought I should write to you about certain passages in your speech to the European Parliament in Strasbourg on 10 December 1986 which are a source of concern.

You say, in respect of your mission to Southern Africa, that your mandate was to see whether you could build on the work of the EPG in helping to create the conditions in which genuine dialogue could begin between the South African Government and authentic leaders of the Black population.

If we accept that the EPG sought to achieve agreement between all the parties on reciprocal commitments - the so-called matching commitment formula - then you will recall that I told you on your departure from South Africa that we accepted this approach and that the formula which you yourself had enunciated at your press conference on 29 July 1986 and had also put to President Kaunda, offered real prospects for progress, particularly if the phrase 'abandon violence' could be substituted for your phrase 'to call a halt to violence'. I wrote to you in this sense on 20 August as well and it was also the subject of a letter which President Botha wrote to Mrs Thatcher on 11 August.

How / ...

How then can you say in your speech, as you did, that the response of the South African Government to your efforts on behalf of the community was 'less than encouraging'? I would have thought that our response was most encouraging - given the fact that it accepted your and the EPG's approach with only a single phrase in the proposed formulation still to be agreed upon. I find your remarks and the wall of silence which has followed the communications to you and others of our response to your formula, difficult to understand. Why this reaction? If our response, which we saw as positive and encouraging, was in your view neither positive nor encouraging, it would have been helpful if you had told us.

I am also concerned about the following remark in your speech:

'We have got to continue to take every opportunity to press, as I did during that mission, for the release of Mr Mandela, for the release of other political prisoners, and for the lifting of the ban on the ANC, the PAC and other political parties'.

In your Pretoria press statement of 29 July 1986 you said:

'What is needed is that the South African Government should agree to release Mandela and other political prisoners, to unban the ANC and other political parties and to enter into peaceful dialogue - against a matching commitment from the ANC to call a halt to violence and to enter into peaceful dialogue'. (My underlining)

You referred to the element of reciprocity in your press statement as 'crucial', yet you now appear to have abandoned it entirely. Unilateral action on the part of the South African Government must be pressed for. How do you explain this apparent contradiction, bearing particularly in mind that you described your mandate both in your press statement and in your 10 December speech as an effort to build on the work of the EPG that is to achieve reciprocity? Does the European community not share the objective of bringing an end to violence? If we are agreed that this objective can best be achieved by reciprocal commitments, this approach, I feel, is what we ought to be concentrating on.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

R F Botha
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS