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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

1 June 1987

Prime Minister  
CDP 1/6.

Dear Charles,

at trap

Your letter of 26 May enclosed a copy of President Botha's letter of 25 May to the Prime Minister, and requested comments and a draft reply in due course.

President Botha has written (we believe in identical terms) to all seven Heads of Government attending the Venice Summit. The Foreign Secretary considers that his letter breaks no new ground. It states that the SAG remain committed to a process of "evolutionary" reform. But there is no indication that he is prepared to take any of the fundamental steps that we have always considered necessary both to remove key apartheid legislation and to create the conditions for genuine national dialogue. Nothing he says would draw black leaders any nearer to the negotiating table.

The letter states that efforts by the major democracies to help break the cycle of violence and promote dialogue would be welcome. But it makes no reference to the principle of matching reciprocal commitments. It concludes with a request for a message to be sent from the Venice Summit condemning violence by the black opposition.

The Foreign Secretary considers President Both's motives are largely tactical: to place his position on record before Venice so that he can later claim, if necessary, that the West had failed to respond to his approaches. It is hard to believe that he has any real expectation of the Summit Seven issuing the kind of statement he suggests. There is a real risk however that the terms of his letter could reinforce Canadian determination to promote a statement at Venice critical of the SAG, and could awaken interest in a statement among some other partners, especially following Friday's news of the South African raid on Maputo. The State Department have told our Embassy at Washington that Dr Crocker might also see this as an opportunity to raise again his idea for a declaration of principles, which we have so far successfully opposed.

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The Foreign Secretary has therefore instructed our Posts in the capitals of the Economic Seven countries to lobby host governments reaffirming our opposition to any statement on South Africa at Venice, and arguing that President Botha's message, demonstrating as it does the wide divergence of views between the two sides in South Africa, strengthens the argument that a Western statement at this point would serve no useful purpose.

It would not be normal for the Prime Minister to reply to pre-Summit messages of this sort until after the Summit has taken place. The Foreign Secretary sees no advantage in the Prime Minister making an exception in this case. He is conscious that any reply might prompt President Botha into a further intervention before Venice and unhelpfully focus more attention on the South African question there. He also considers there is some risk of the SAG leaking any correspondence. He therefore recommends that if the Prime Minister wishes to reply, she should postpone doing so until after the Venice Summit, when we will be in a position to take into account the outcome of discussions there. (This is what happened last year, when the Prime Minister responded to a similar letter of 29 April 1986 from President Botha on 9 May, shortly after the Tokyo Summit). We understand that President Reagan is unlikely to be advised to reply before the Summit.

I am copying this letter to the Private Secretary to the Cabinet Secretary.

Yours ever,

(A C Galsworthy)  
Private Secretary

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S. AFRICA : Relations PT14

