



South African Embassy

7 July 1987

Dear Geoffrey

I am taking the liberty of writing to you personally on the subject of demonstrations outside our Embassy on Trafalgar Square which have gone on for over a year.

Ambassador Killen and Ambassador Worrall spoke to you about the disruption the demonstrations were causing and you have no doubt been informed of the repeated representations addressed to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and to Ambassador Moberly in Pretoria and Cape Town in the face of an apparent inability on the part of the responsible authorities to take effective action against the demonstrators.

I am deeply concerned that the Ambassador and his staff are being prevented from carrying out their normal official functions as a result of the noise produced by loudhailers outside the Embassy building. I am equally concerned about the harassment to which members of the Embassy as well as visitors to the Embassy are subjected on a daily basis.

Following the defacement of South Africa House on 6 May, the demonstrators were moved to a place across the street from the Embassy but they have now been allowed to return to their original position. The Embassy has been told that there is nothing the authorities can do about this development. I find this difficult to believe since the responsible authorities are evidently empowered to act in the case of other demonstrations in London. For instance, I am told that a demonstration recently took place against the presence of Mr Oliver Tambo at a meeting of businessmen in London. Embassy officials were informed that the police had indicated that participants in the demonstration were not to engage in certain activities. These activities are, however, permitted in respect of the demonstrations

at South Africa House. Thus the demonstrators have been allowed to expand their demonstrations to include other dissident groups; they are allowed to distribute politically offensive literature; they are allowed to solicit passersby for signatures and donations and they are allowed to use loudhailers and musical groups on a regular basis.

The right to demonstrate in the United Kingdom appears also to confer, in the case of the picket at South Africa House, the right to engage in threatening behaviour and disturbance of the peace. Cases of severe harassment to which visitors and Embassy staff, loyal employees and mostly British nationals, have been subjected, have been reported to me.

There is an obligation on governments to ensure that diplomatic missions are enabled to function properly. Demonstrations are one thing; disruption of the functions and activities of Embassy officials by threatening behaviour, noise and harassment, is another and should not, in terms of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, be allowed to happen.

I appeal to you to take whatever action is necessary to bring the disruption and harassment to an end. If the laws of the United Kingdom do not provide the powers necessary to do so, surely international law embodied in the Vienna Convention does.

I should appreciate your personal involvement in resolving this situation.

Yours sincerely

R F BOTHA

The Right Honourable Sir Geoffrey Howe QC MP
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and Commonwealth Affairs
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