



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

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Dear Charles,

Prime Minister<sup>2</sup>

Possible South African accession to  
Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)

Last September South Africa was faced with the imminent prospect of loss of her rights of membership in the International Atomic Energy Authority (IAEA). President Botha issued a statement expressing willingness to negotiate on the possibility of signing the NPT. This staved off the immediate pressure; the IAEA General Conference voted to postpone a decision until the following year.

Despite nudging by ourselves and others the South Africans until recently did nothing to build on this declaration of intent. But, with the next IAEA General Conference due to meet in September, the pace has quickened. Mr Steyn, Minister of Economic Affairs and Technology, came to London for discussions with Mr Mellor at the end of June. More significantly, talks are scheduled to be held in Vienna on 12 August between the South Africans and representatives of the three depositary powers (US, UK and USSR). The South Africans will be represented by Mr Pik Botha and Mr Steyn while we, the Americans and the Russians will field official teams. The South Africans say that, in the light of the outcome, they will aim to make a rapid decision.

We assess that the South African interest in acceding to the NPT is threefold:

- to stave off moves, which will otherwise probably succeed, to expel them from the IAEA;
- to improve their international credibility, not least with the incoming US Administration;
- more importantly, to secure assurances of future nuclear cooperation from Western countries, notably in supplying technology and equipment for nuclear power stations which they are apparently now planning to build and in keeping open the possibility of selling their uranium in Western markets.





We have long encouraged South African accession, as have many others including the front line states. Regionally this could provide valuable assurances to South Africa's neighbours. Globally it could strengthen the non-proliferation regime as the first accession by a threshold state and help to avoid South Africa's further isolation from the rest of the world.

In handling the South African approach we face two main problems. First, South Africa may wish to maintain a secret nuclear weapons programme. It will therefore be essential to ensure that accession is followed by negotiation of a full scale safeguards agreement with the IAEA which goes as far as possible to allay suspicions about South Africa's nuclear intentions. Without this, South African accession is likely to be denounced as fraudulent and the credibility of the non-proliferation regime weakened.

In the meanwhile no government is likely to be willing to address the second problem, which is South Africa's wish for assurances on nuclear cooperation under the terms of Article IV of the Treaty. This gives all parties the right to participate in "the fullest possible exchange of equipment, materials and scientific and technological information for the peaceful uses of nuclear energy." If South Africa accedes we will therefore face a conflict between our treaty obligations under the NPT and our commitment to Community and Commonwealth measures prohibiting new nuclear cooperation. Other Community and Commonwealth governments will face a similar problem. At this stage, no government will be prepared to give assurances about relaxing nuclear sanctions.

The South Africans will have to decide for themselves whether they can negotiate a safeguards agreement which credibly covers all of their facilities and material; and whether this is likely to lead other governments over time to dismantle nuclear sanctions. To encourage them to take this step - and to stave off their expulsion from the IAEA - we, as a depositary power, can say in Vienna that we shall do our best to ensure that the nuclear cooperation issue is properly discussed with other Governments concerned. We would also be prepared to support South Africa's right to participate in the 1990 NPT Review Conference. The US representatives are unlikely to be able to go further than this in Vienna: the Soviet team may well be more reticent.





6. Our public line will be that

- the talks were held at South African initiative;
- the UK participated as one of three NPT depositary powers;
- along with most other countries (including the front line states) the UK has called for South African accession;
- this should be effected in a manner which strengthens the non-proliferation regime;
- the UK underlined that the next step must be for South Africa to accede to the NPT and negotiate a full-scope safeguards agreement covering all her nuclear facilities and material;
- (If asked) the UK did not make any commitments on South Africa's rights after accession.

I am sending copies to Stephen Haddrill (D/Energy), Neil Thornton (DTI) and Brian Hawtin (MOD).

*Now over*

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