

I am particularly glad that Foreign Minister Gurirab is with us at this meeting to give us the benefit of his unique Namibian perspective on our agenda.

In the light of the changing circumstances in South Africa, what is the role of the Committee of Foreign Ministers, and indeed the wider international community?

I believe that while a chapter is being closed on the decades of impasse on apartheid, the transition period we are now entering presents even greater challenges. The new situation creates a responsibility for this Committee to continue its leadership role as never before.

This Committee must continue to act as a catalyst in each of the areas under our original mandate from the 1987 Vancouver Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting, a mandate reconfirmed last October in Kuala Lumpur. It is important that our work have an influence on others in the international community, and ours is the first major international meeting on South Africa since the ground-breaking "talks about talks". In helping to analyze what has and still needs to be changed, and determining ways in which the Commonwealth can support a peaceful negotiated settlement, we have the capacity to influence others and South Africa itself.

We bear a particular responsibility on the question of how best to manage sanctions. It was this Committee, meeting in Canberra last August, which first talked about the need to keep up the pressure through sanctions until progress towards the dismantling of apartheid became "irreversible".

At Kuala Lumpur, the wider Commonwealth built on this formulation by agreeing that any relaxation of existing sanctions would have to await "evidence of clear and irreversible change". And in December, in a consensus resolution at the United Nations Special Session on Apartheid, the international community as a whole agreed that existing measures should not be relaxed until there is "clear evidence of profound and irreversible changes".

Sanctions have clearly worked, some forms better than others. This Committee provided a standard by which others were judged, and kept the issue of sanctions squarely on the international agenda. At the initiative of Australia, we led the way in highlighting the importance of financial sanctions. The Government of South Africa appears committed to fundamental change, but the pressures must continue until the pillars of apartheid themselves are gone. During this meeting we will want to examine the future management of Commonwealth sanctions with the aim, as ever, to use this instrument in support of a peaceful, negotiated settlement.

In these new circumstances, we must give new priority to our mandate to reach into South Africa and help prepare the majority for a post-apartheid society. The challenge is enormous.

That task includes levelling the playing field going into negotiations. The white community remains in full control of the government and the private sector, with its attendant organization, financial and manpower resources.