

Annex to Cabinet Conclusions, November 5, 1948

Message from the Government of Canada to the Governments of the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, India, Pakistan and Ceylon, November 5, 1948

1. The Cabinet has given consideration to the proposals on Commonwealth consultation recited in the Annex to the minutes of the meeting of Prime Ministers held in London on October 21.
2. For the most part, this document describes certain of the existing arrangements for consultation among the nations of the Commonwealth. As the document itself says, "the exchange of information is fuller at the present time than it has ever been" and in this observation the government of Canada fully concurs.
3. As was emphasized by Mr. St. Laurent at the recent meetings in London, the present arrangements for consultation have proved in practice to be workable, flexible and effective. Consultations are daily taking place in London and elsewhere at ministerial and official levels.
4. While it is true that, so far as Canada is concerned, most of the proposals re-state existing practices in Commonwealth consultation, the fact of their being stated formally might create the impression in some quarters that they represent something new or different.
5. The proposal contained in paragraph 2 is to the effect that regular meetings of ministers to discuss foreign affairs should be held once or twice a year. No doubt occasions will arise, in the future as in the past, when it will be desirable for Ministers of Commonwealth governments concerned with external problems to meet together. We regard as impracticable, however, any attempt to fix definite timetables for regular meetings of ministers who have to carry heavy responsibilities at home, particularly if all Commonwealth countries are to be represented at every meeting. It is our view that such meetings should and will be held among ministers when it is desirable and practicable for them to take place. The value of all conferences must be measured carefully in terms of the likelihood or otherwise that practical results would be achieved which might not be achieved in other ways. Moreover, definite provision for regular meetings at fixed intervals might create the impression in certain quarters that the nations of the Commonwealth were being organized in order that some one of them might speak for the others. Such a situation would be as unacceptable as it would be unworkable.
6. The proposal contained in paragraph 6, which relates to matters of defence, must be considered

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