

President Babingida,

Secretary-General,

Colleagues and distinguished guests,

Thank you President Babingida. You do us all great honour by addressing this gathering. Your efforts and those of your compatriots in fighting apartheid over many years are widely recognized as is your leadership in bringing democracy and economic progress to your own powerful nation.

Nigeria provided, in the person of General Olusegun Obasanjo, a wise and experienced Co-Chairman of the Eminent Persons Group of this Commonwealth. Another son of Nigeria, Chief Emeka Anyaoku, has been a principal architect of the international pressure against apartheid, and his historic selection as Secretary-General of the Commonwealth helps ensure that leadership will continue.

President Babingida, I would like to thank you, your Foreign Minister and the people of Nigeria for your long-standing dedication to equality and justice in South Africa and your gracious hospitality here in Abuja.

On behalf of all of us and all of the family of the Commonwealth, I want to express the honour we feel at having Nelson Mandela join this meeting. Rarely, in the modern world, has there been leadership of the quality you display every day, in prison, in negotiation, in your personal example, and we look forward to your counsel and your success.

Finally, I would like to pay tribute to Sir Shridath Ramphal - Sonny - who has invested his enormous skills and energy in this issue above all others. Through fifteen years and eight meetings of Head of Government, his sensitivity, his eloquence and his intelligence have helped the Commonwealth form and articulate a unique and constructive approach to the problem of apartheid and the future of South Africa. I speak for us all in wishing him equal success in his future endeavours.

This Committee of Commonwealth Foreign Ministers is meeting at a time when hope for a peaceful settlement in South Africa is unparalleled. When we last met, in Kuala Lumpur, none of us would have been so bold as to dare think that Nelson Mandela would be sitting in our midst, fresh from meetings with the South African President at which a common commitment was made to a peaceful process of negotiations.