

Namibia's transition to independence got off to a near tragic beginning in April, at a time when UNTAG had only just begun its deployment. A tense period followed but, since June, real progress has been made and the prospects for free and fair elections under UN supervision and control look more favourable. The Commonwealth has a particular interest in Namibia, and we will do whatever we can to ensure its independence.

In South Africa itself, signals are mixed. The forced incorporation of black communities into the so-called homelands continues. The government has announced it will appoint seventy officials to inspect violations of the Group Areas Act. The National Party's reform manifesto remains rooted in the idea of group rather than individual rights.

There has been a consolidation of a new leadership in Pretoria. Some but not all of the cells holding political prisoners have been opened. Virtually all of those detained without charge under emergency regulations have been released. However, many of them traded one form of imprisonment for another when they subsequently were served restriction orders. Other political prisoners, such as Nelson Mandela, remain behind bars - rather than behind the negotiation table where they belong. President Botha's coffee table is no substitute, but their meeting was a symbolic recognition that Nelson Mandela remains central to any solution in South Africa.

A national election has been called for September, from which the majority is excluded. Importantly, though, a key issue is whether and how to allow the black majority a voice in writing a new constitution and in working out a common destiny. But that majority is not content to sit on the sidelines and wait for the white electorate to decide its fate. Neither will it negotiate a settlement that remains within the framework of apartheid. But its many leaders are taking more seriously the idea of national constitutional negotiations. There is more talk about talks. In the meantime, the mass democratic movement continues to keep up the pressure for change from within, and is now engaged in a non-violent campaign to demonstrate the realities of racial segregation.