

Sanctions Against South Africa

In 1985, before the General Assembly of the United Nations, Prime Minister Mulroney stated Canada's intention to employ selective sanctions in concert with other countries.

The Heads of State and Government of Commonwealth countries met in Nassau in October 1985. The discussions focussed on measures that could be adopted to encourage peaceful change in South Africa. The resulting Commonwealth Accord on Southern Africa contained nine measures, all agreed to by Canada and most already adopted by Canada as government policy. It also suggested further measures that might be taken if South Africa had not demonstrated progress to end apartheid within six months.

The Nassau Summit established the Eminent Persons Group whose mandate was to explore the possibility of a dialogue across lines of colour, politics and religion, with a view to establishing a non-racial and representative government in South Africa. The Group consisted of seven members with extremely varied backgrounds from seven very different Commonwealth countries; it included Archbishop Ted Scott of Canada.

The Group presented a discouraging report. Its members concluded that the authorities in Pretoria had not made "adequate, concrete progress" to end the apartheid system. The Group carried out its deliberations against a background of increasing unrest and violence within South Africa and finished its work as the South African Government was carrying out attacks against three sovereign neighbouring states (Botswana, Zambia and Zimbabwe). The Group came, somewhat reluctantly, to the conclusion that further measures to encourage change in South Africa were necessary; the alternative, in their view, was "to stand by and allow the cycle of violence to spiral".

In accordance with the Commonwealth Accord agreed to in Nassau, the President of Zambia and the Prime Ministers of Australia, The Bahamas, Canada, India, the United Kingdom and Zimbabwe reviewed the report of the Eminent Persons Group during the London Summit of August 1986. The conclusions of the Group were generally accepted. Six of the seven governments represented decided jointly to implement an agreed series of measures and to commend those measures to the entire Commonwealth as well as to the wider international community. The British Government agreed to implement two of the measures on its own and a third in conjunction with its partners in the European Community.