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CHURCHES DISAPPOINTED BY CANADA'S STAND ON S. AFRICA

Commonwealth meeting didn't push hard enough for sanctions against apartheid, activists say

By JEOMA ROSS
 Whig-Standard Staff Writer

MANY Canadian church people — who had been watching and listening intently for news from this week's Commonwealth conference on South Africa in Australia — feel disappointed at its outcome.

The four-year-old Commonwealth Committee of Foreign Ministers on South Africa, chaired by Secretary of State for External Affairs, Joe Clark, reconvened in Canberra, Australia, this week to receive an independent expert study on the effect of sanctions on South Africa.

The Canadian churches, who openly favor sanctions, are keenly interested in the outcome of conference and, specifically, in Mr. Clark's statements.

For over 15 years, the Canadian churches, either singly or through the collective organ of the Canadian Council of Churches, have been voicing their opposition to the apartheid policies of the South African government. In recent years, they have added to their traditional role of educating home congregations a fairly new field for religious groups — lobbying the government.

In 1985, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney announced at the United Nations that Canada was committed to implementing full economic sanctions if apartheid was not dismantled. This tough stance was partially due to the impact of the Prime Minister's meeting with South African Archbishop and Nobel Peace Prize winner Desmond Tutu, said Jim Kirkwood, Africa Secretary for the United Church of Canada.

Two years ago, before the Commonwealth Conference in Vancouver, the Canadian Council of Churches, made up of 18 member major churches including the Catholic conference of Bishops and the Anglican and United churches, sent an "up-beat, congratulatory" letter to the prime minister, said Jim Hodgson. He is associate secretary for the commission of ecumenical education and communication at the council.

"It seemed we were all on the same side," he said.

SINCE then, Mr. Mulroney and Mr. Clark have gone from being allies in the battle to traitors in the eyes of the churches.

Gary Kenny of the Inter-Church Coalition on Africa, a working group of the council, said that the churches now feel the government has abandoned the struggle against apartheid.

"The initiative on the part of the government and the Commonwealth has been lost," said Mr. Kenny.

Before this week's conference opened in Australia, both the Canadian Council of Churches and the Taskforce on the Churches and Corporate Responsibility, a coalition working in conjunction with the council, wrote to Mr. Clark expressing their concern about the change in the government's stand on apartheid.

In the council's letter to Mr. Clark, the churches expressed their "profound disappointment" at what they see as the government's abdication of its leadership role in the fight against apartheid. The letter said that in the face of increasing repression by the South African government, the Canadian government "has not fulfilled its promises to get tough with South Africa."

The letter from the taskforce, a church watchdog of corporate affairs and investment, is more technical in the details of its recommendations to the government. It calls for increased financial restrictions against South Africa and companies dealing with South Africa.

The foreign ministers agreed this week to ask banks to impose tough repayment terms on the billions of dollars owed them by the South African government.

Mr. Kenny dismisses the information that came out of the foreign ministers' conference as "PR."

"Our general reaction is profound disappointment. There's no new action on trade sanctions."

He said the churches were encouraged by the fact that the ministers had highlighted economic sanctions but are frustrated that the sanctions remain on a voluntary basis.

In the past few years the churches have solidified their position as individual denominations outlined their stances. The last couple of years has also seen "remarkable co-operation" between the church groups and other non-

governmental organizations working on South Africa, said Mr. Kenny.

An example of this joint action is the press release issued last week by the Toronto Committee for the Liberation of Southern Africa which quotes the taskforce's letter in making its calls for stronger sanctions and insisting that Mr. Clark not try to cover up the report for the foreign ministers about sanctions.

THE report, a copy of which was obtained by the Globe and Mail before the conference began, said that the sanctions already in place are having some effect on the