

The Commonwealth Committee of Foreign Ministers on Southern Africa (CFMSA) met in special session on February 16 in London, to discuss Commonwealth policy in light of recent developments in South Africa, including the statement made by President de Klerk on February 1, 1991, which committed the South African government to repeal the remaining legislative pillars of apartheid. Members will recall that both the Prime Minister and I welcomed the courage and leadership shown by President de Klerk in making these announcements, as we have welcomed the determination of black leaders to work more closely together. I want to report briefly today to Parliament on the work of that Committee, which Canada chairs, and to table the Communiqué. Participating in the Committee were Commonwealth Foreign Ministers from Australia, India, Malaysia, Nigeria, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe, the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth and the former Foreign Minister of Guyana. We benefited from the participation of Thabo Mbeki, Director of the International Department of the African National Congress and Ron MacLean, Canada's Ambassador to South Africa.

The situation in South Africa is changing quickly and profoundly. Many white South Africans, personified by President de Klerk, have re-examined their conscience and undertaken to change not only public policy, but personal practices and beliefs.

Many black South Africans, particularly Nelson Mandela, demonstrate a generosity and vision that are extraordinary in people so long oppressed. Others, including leaders of Inkatha and the Pan African Congress are beginning to show flexibility, a willingness to experiment, to compromise.

And still other South Africans, black and white, are victims of anger, ignorance, fear.

The world is involved in South Africa precisely because the system of apartheid is so powerful and so deliberate a denial of basic human equality, so singular an instrument of racial prejudice. Just as many South Africans show remarkable responsibility in facing their new challenges, so must the world community weigh and apply our influence with great care. The moral imperative remains: To end apartheid. Now, with change in the air, the question of how we contribute to that goal becomes more complex.

Commonwealth Foreign Ministers, after extensive debate, agreed unanimously on a position that recognizes a commitment to real reform, but will only reward actual changes which dismantle the system of apartheid. We believe our strongest sanctions should remain until the system is effectively abolished, but that lesser sanctions should be lifted in response to tangible proof of a determination to end apartheid irreversibly.