

Statement

Secretary of
State for
External Affairs



Déclaration

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d'État aux
Affaires
extérieures

90/28

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NOTES FOR A SPEECH

BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS,

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE JOE CLARK,

ON THE OCCASION OF

THE OPENING OF THE SIXTH SESSION OF THE

COMMITTEE OF COMMONWEALTH FOREIGN MINISTERS

ABUJA, NIGERIA

May 16, 1990.

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.

In 1961 South Africa left the Commonwealth after its apartheid policies had been roundly rejected. That same year the ANC and PAC were banned. Now almost thirty years later, they are unbanned, Nelson Mandela is free, and the negotiations, which the black opposition has sought for so long and at such a high cost, seem to be close at hand. While the political climate has been radically transformed since February 2, it is important to remember, however, that legally very little has changed and apartheid is still the law of South Africa.

But there can be no dispute that a new chapter has been opened, and its principal authors are Nelson Mandela and President de Klerk. We fervently hope that this is also the final chapter of the history of apartheid in South Africa.

It was clear to any observer of the May 2 to 4 talks between teams representing the ANC and the South African Government that there is rapport and respect between the opposing sides.

Importantly, each side also accepts the legitimacy of other parties who have not yet taken a seat at the table. Each side has provided a clear commitment that the mechanism of change should be peaceful negotiations. Ensuring peace will not be easy in turbulent South Africa. But some of the obstacles to peace, some of the root causes of violence, may be cleared away if the Government carries out its commitment to work towards the lifting of the State of Emergency and the review of existing security legislation. The ANC has also undertaken to exert itself toward the resolution of the existing climate of violence.

Of course, no one should underestimate the difficulties that lie ahead. Not all of the pitfalls are centred around the negotiating table. The tragic near-civil war in Natal has not accounted for most of the political violence in the country, and has also become a serious impediment to successful negotiations. The violence in Natal calls for imagination and resolution by all parties and the government, and help from the international community wherever appropriate.

On negotiations, sharp differences remain, and are deeply rooted in different understandings of the very concepts of democracy, equality, majority rule, constitutions, and possibly even of justice. But there appears to be a determination on all sides that the common commitment to seeking a peaceful settlement will eventually win the day, and see all South Africans as victors.

We can all take heart from the recent experience of Namibia. Its long awaited transition to independence is a convincing demonstration to South Africans that fundamental change can be achieved through a peaceful, democratic and negotiated process. Its unanimously-adopted constitution is exemplary in providing for entrenched human rights and effective democracy. The repatriation of Namibian exiles and refugees - once the necessary amnesty and legislative changes were in place - was a model of smooth cooperation between the international community and the Namibian groups involved, which I hope can soon be repeated for South Africans.

I am particularly glad that Foreign Minister Gurirab is with us at this meeting to give us the benefit of his unique Namibian perspective on our agenda.

In the light of the changing circumstances in South Africa, what is the role of the Committee of Foreign Ministers, and indeed the wider international community?

I believe that while a chapter is being closed on the decades of impasse on apartheid, the transition period we are now entering presents even greater challenges. The new situation creates a responsibility for this Committee to continue its leadership role as never before.

This Committee must continue to act as a catalyst in each of the areas under our original mandate from the 1987 Vancouver Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting, a mandate reconfirmed last October in Kuala Lumpur. It is important that our work have an influence on others in the international community, and ours is the first major international meeting on South Africa since the ground-breaking "talks about talks". In helping to analyze what has and still needs to be changed, and determining ways in which the Commonwealth can support a peaceful negotiated settlement, we have the capacity to influence others and South Africa itself.

We bear a particular responsibility on the question of how best to manage sanctions. It was this Committee, meeting in Canberra last August, which first talked about the need to keep up the pressure through sanctions until progress towards the dismantling of apartheid became "irreversible".

At Kuala Lumpur, the wider Commonwealth built on this formulation by agreeing that any relaxation of existing sanctions would have to await "evidence of clear and irreversible change". And in December, in a consensus resolution at the United Nations Special Session on Apartheid, the international community as a whole agreed that existing measures should not be relaxed until there is "clear evidence of profound and irreversible changes".

Sanctions have clearly worked, some forms better than others. This Committee provided a standard by which others were judged, and kept the issue of sanctions squarely on the international agenda. At the initiative of Australia, we led the way in highlighting the importance of financial sanctions. The Government of South Africa appears committed to fundamental change, but the pressures must continue until the pillars of apartheid themselves are gone. During this meeting we will want to examine the future management of Commonwealth sanctions with the aim, as ever, to use this instrument in support of a peaceful, negotiated settlement.

In these new circumstances, we must give new priority to our mandate to reach into South Africa and help prepare the majority for a post-apartheid society. The challenge is enormous.

That task includes levelling the playing field going into negotiations. The white community remains in full control of the government and the private sector, with its attendant organization, financial and manpower resources.

Many of the best legal minds will be enlisted in the government team. In putting forward their detailed view as to how to ensure a truly non-racial democracy, the ANC and others will be at a comparative disadvantage. Successful negotiations will require a greater equality of resources and expertise, and increased dialogue across different constituencies.

The Commonwealth can assist; for our part Canada spent \$1.6 million over the past two years on dialogue-related projects inside South Africa. Events of recent months have made that task more urgent, and this year alone we will spend \$1.8 million, with increased emphasis on projects directly related to negotiations and constitutional options. My Department's chief legal advisor, the former Canadian Ambassador to South Africa, Mr. Ted Lee, has at my request just completed a mission to the region to assess areas where Canada's expertise might be of use.

On the basis of his recommendations, we have already funded meetings between human rights lawyers inside South Africa and the ANC legal team in preparation for talks. We have also given a large grant to the Centre for Applied Legal Studies for conferences targetted on key constitutional issues, and provided two Canadian constitutional experts to assist in a major seminar this month. We are looking at ways of linking up other experts with the Law Reform Commission in South Africa.

Another area in which the assistance of the Commonwealth is vitally important is education, training and work experience for black South Africans. The ultimate success of a non-racial South Africa will depend on the capacity of both blacks and whites to exercise both political and economic power. Economic exploitation lies at the heart of apartheid and, by and large, black South Africans have been shut out of the experience of running industries and businesses. They have also been excluded from the leadership in the public service. In our discussions in Lusaka, Mr. Mandela and I agreed that there was an urgent need for additional programs to provide potential black leaders of industry and public service with practical experience in running large corporations in both the private and public sectors.

The issue of apartheid has always loomed large on the horizon of the Commonwealth. When South Africa left the Commonwealth in 1961, Canadian Prime Minister John Diefenbaker promised there would always be a light in the window for South Africa to return, once apartheid was ended.

That light has never dimmed. Through Gleneagles, through Nassau and the Eminent Persons Group, through the Vancouver and Kuala Lumpur meetings, through Namibia's joining the Commonwealth family, and finally through this Committee's ongoing work, that light has grown ever brighter. We have strengthened that flame, not only as a beacon of hope to South Africans yearning for a non-racial, democratic future, but also because we know that a free South Africa would enrich our family and our world.

That is the work which draws us here, to the heart of the most populous nation in Africa, a Commonwealth which unites all the cultures and traditions of the world, and which is determined to work with all the people of South Africa to bring that nation to equality and power for its people.