

External Affairs
Supplementary Paper

No. 62/8 Southern Rhodesia

Statement by W.H. Barton, Chargé d'Affaires
a.i., in Plenary Session of the United
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Before expressing the position of the Canadian Government on the matter before us today, I should like to acknowledge the diligence and vigour with which the Special Committee of Seventeen has been carrying out the mandate entrusted to it by the General Assembly. It is a particular pleasure to my Delegation to recognize the service of the Chairman, Ambassador Jha, in view of his forthcoming appointment as High Commissioner for India in Canada.

I think that all members of this Assembly agree that the political situation in Southern Rhodesia is an extremely difficult one. At a time when the principles of democratic freedom have been adopted throughout most of Africa, a minority of 200,000 obviously cannot expect to exclude a majority of two and one-quarter million people indefinitely from participating in the political life of the country. Moreover, we do not believe that the present leaders of Southern Rhodesia intend to do so. Even under the 1961 constitution, accepted by a two-to-one majority of the present electorate, it is anticipated that effective participation in the electoral process by a substantial majority of the population will be achieved within the next decade. The real issue is not whether Southern Rhodesia is moving in the right direction, but whether it is moving fast enough.

The Assembly has before it a report of the Seventeen Member Committee which expresses the view of the majority of that body that the trend of constitutional development is not satisfactory and advances a number of drastic recommendations which it believes should be given immediate effect.

The first question which the Committee considered in its discussion of Southern Rhodesia was whether or not the territory is self-governing. The British Government has pointed out, patiently and repeatedly, that Southern Rhodesia has been a self-governing colony since 1923 and that Britain cannot interfere in its internal affairs or legislate for it without the consent of the Southern Rhodesian Government. The Special Committee, on the other hand, has concluded, and the Assembly will be asked to support its conclusion, that because the majority of the people are not yet included in the franchise, Southern Rhodesia has not attained a full measure of self-government.

It seems to my Delegation that the reality behind these two contradictory positions has an important bearing on the question of whether the Assembly can take any constructive action at this time. In the first place, since the present government of Southern Rhodesia has full control of its internal affairs, the Assembly must realize that the political changes which it desires can be brought about only with the cooperation of that government. Secondly, it is not only pointless, but against the interests of

this Assembly, for it to request Britain, as the Administering Power, to impose various constitutional changes on the Government of Southern Rhodesia, when Britain has no power to do so. The British Government can only exert influence on the Southern Rhodesian Government by persuasion and negotiation. It has no military forces stationed in the territory. Even if it had, can it seriously be imagined that military action could or would be taken against the Southern Rhodesian Government? And if it were, would the chaos, confusion and suffering resulting from such action really be in the interest of the people of Southern Rhodesia?

We believe that the transition to fully-representative government must be achieved peacefully. Any attempt to bring it about suddenly without the consent of the present government could only be made by force. Given the existing situation it would inevitably fail and would delay the transition for many more years.

Notwithstanding the situation in law and in fact, the majority of the Special Committee in its report, and the sponsors of the draft resolution in Document A/L.386 have implied that the United Kingdom Government is somehow capable of taking immediate steps to alter completely the constitution of Southern Rhodesia. This, of course, is untrue. Nor does the General Assembly by itself have the power to order the Southern Rhodesian Government to alter its constitution.

In these circumstances it is the view of my Delegation that the Assembly, in considering any proposed resolution on Southern Rhodesia, should be guided by two criteria:

1. Will the action called for by the terms of the resolution improve the situation of all the peoples of Southern Rhodesia?
2. Can the action proposed in the resolution be put into effect?

I am sure it is evident from what I have said that in our opinion the resolution in Document A/L.386 does not fulfil either of these requirements.

What, then, can we do? We think that the most useful action that this Assembly might take at this time would be to support the present efforts of the British Government to bring about a solution to the political problems of the constituent territories of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, which are closely inter-related.

The British Government, with the overwhelming support of the British people, has played an honourable and constructive role in bringing to full independence over 600 million people in the past fifteen years. The governments of all her former dependencies maintain close and friendly relations with her. With its fine record and experience in resolving difficult colonial problems the British Government merits the confidence of the Assembly in solving those which remain.

The United Kingdom is still responsible for 42 of the 56-odd non-self-governing territories in which the United Nations is interested, and its full cooperation is needed if this Assembly is to play a constructive part in their advance to independence. It would be most unfortunate if, by passing a resolution making impossible demands on the United Kingdom, the Assembly should jeopardize the basis of this cooperation.

If we pass resolutions concerning Southern Rhodesia which are impossible of fulfilment and have little relation to the realities of the situation we need not be surprised if our action contributes to the building up of the dangerous situation which we all wish to avoid. It is the hope of the Canadian Government that action by the General Assembly will promote the achievement of a settlement and not add to the formidable problems of the peoples of Southern Rhodesia.

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