

Statement

Department of
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Address

by the Right Honourable Joe Clark,
Secretary of State for External Affairs,
at the opening of the first meeting
of the Committee of Commonwealth
Foreign Ministers on Southern Africa

LUSAKA, ZAMBIA

February 1, 1988.

Secretary of State
for
External Affairs

Secrétaire d'État
aux
Affaires extérieures

Canada

Mr. President, Secretary-General, Colleagues, Distinguished Guests:

Thank you President Kaunda. You have set the stage for our meeting here in Lusaka with, as always, a clear and stirring statement of the moral imperatives which must guide and drive our efforts. I am extremely pleased that we are here in Lusaka, in Southern Africa. It is a particularly appropriate location given your constant leadership along with that of the leaders of the other front line states on the questions with which this committee is charged. Thank you for your kind hospitality.

The Commonwealth Foreign Ministers Committee has a clear mandate from the Vancouver Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting to provide impetus and guidance in furthering the objectives of the Okanagan Statement on Southern Africa and Programme of Action. This is a serious responsibility.

The overall conditions in South Africa remain as before. A minority of the population pretends to operate a representative democratic political system while blatantly denying political rights to the overwhelming majority of the population. That double standard is based on race and is totally repugnant. Racial discrimination which is codified in law is absolutely intolerable to people who believe in freedom.

While the system of apartheid remains intact, the Government of South Africa has stopped trying to justify apartheid, either to South Africans or the rest of the world. Instead it has tried to pretend that apartheid no longer exists. But the majority of the population is still without political rights, the Government of South Africa continues to press the fiction that large numbers of South Africans are not South Africans, controls on where people can live remain, and gross social and economic inequities dominate the realities of daily life.

Social and political unrest are the natural result of apartheid and the Government of South Africa has responded with systematic repression. Instead of negotiating with those who seek change, the government jails them. That cannot continue. Nineteen months ago the Eminent Persons Group warned that "there could be little doubt that the alternative to a negotiated solution would be appalling chaos, bloodshed and destruction". The issue is not whether change will come, but when, and how, and at what cost in additional suffering.

It is clear nonetheless that international pressure is beginning to be felt. There is no doubt that economic sanctions increase the cost of maintaining apartheid. Even more, however, sanctions and other measures demonstrate the repugnance that people everywhere feel towards apartheid. There are major psychological effects. To the opponents of apartheid these measures demonstrate that they are not alone, that their cause is shared by the world, and that there is a basis for hope. To those who try to excuse apartheid it is a reminder that the principles of rights and freedoms which underlie the civilized conduct of human beings can never justify the practice of apartheid.

There are other hopeful signs. More individuals in the white community are accepting the inevitability of change and are increasingly willing to take initiatives to engage in dialogue with real leaders of the majority. The Dakar meeting was an example. The international community must help this process continue and the Commonwealth must contribute.

The international community must help the victims of apartheid in South Africa. Programs to provide comfort, both psychological and material, to help overcome the additional suffering imposed on those who dare to try to bring about change, are essential for humanitarian reasons. Even more important, they are a practical demonstration to those involved in the struggle to change South Africa that the world supports their cause and cares about their fate.

South Africa's neighbours suffer terribly. The Commonwealth, and the international community in general, must help insulate the front line states from South African pressure and increase their security. The Ministerial Consultative Meeting of the Southern African Development Consultative Conference made abundantly clear the seriousness of the problems involved and the effort that will be required.

While making these efforts, it is important that pressure on South Africa to end its callous disregard of the territorial integrity of its neighbours must be maintained and intensified. The independence of Namibia must remain a major objective on the international agenda. We must find new ideas to break the present impasse.

The Commonwealth has had a long history of opposing apartheid. This Committee's work is only beginning. At this first meeting we will be looking at all the objectives and issues of the Okanagan Statement. I expect that we will set in train initiatives in a number of areas. This will be the start of a process taking us to the Heads of Government Meeting in Kuala Lumpur. My colleagues and I intend to ensure that the Commonwealth will retain its leading role in ending apartheid. At the same time through our efforts we will want to keep this issue before the public in all parts of the world.

We all know that the Government of South Africa must itself recognize the inevitability of change in South Africa. It must negotiate with all legitimate leaders of the South African people, including those it has jailed and forced into exile, towards the creation of a non-racial representative government for all South Africans. It must make a commitment to dismantle the structure of apartheid and permit a non-racial society to emerge. Without early movement towards this bright future South Africa could well descend into an even more chaotic chapter of human history. With a non-racial future South Africa's contribution to Africa and to the world can be enormous.

The Commonwealth Committee of Foreign Ministers can help. The Commonwealth can do more to bring a non-racial democratic South Africa closer. That is what we are here to do. Thank you.