

Statement

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STATEMENT

BY THE RIGHT HONOURABLE JOE CLARK,

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS,

AT THE OPENING SESSION

OF THE COMMONWEALTH FOREIGN MINISTERS MEETING

ON SOUTHERN AFRICA

TORONTO, ONTARIO

August 2, 1988.

Secretary of State
for
External Affairs

Secrétaire d'État
aux
Affaires extérieures

Canada

I would like first to introduce the Ministers present I would like to thank General Obasanjo for coming to help us in our deliberations.

It is a great pleasure to welcome you, colleagues, officials, and a number of very special invited guests to Canada.

Prime Minister Mulroney chaired the Conference which created the Committee and has asked me to convey this personal message to you:

"In Vancouver, the Heads of Government determined that continued high level impetus was required to meet the challenges posed by the system of apartheid in South Africa. They asked you to assume this task. I know that you made a very useful beginning in Lusaka.

South Africa continues to shock us all in its disregard for equality. Its thorough and systematic violation of the fundamental principles of human rights is totally unacceptable. It is the antithesis of everything for which the Commonwealth stands.

The Government of South Africa has given further clear evidence that it has not taken the fundamental decision to abandon apartheid. It still refuses to sit down with black leaders to forge a new South Africa. Like Nelson Mandela, the majority of the population remains in a kind of prison. Pretoria is unwilling even to let church leaders deliver letters to the president calling for political freedom. In this deteriorating situation, your committee's task is ever more urgent.

The people of South Africa are looking to the Commonwealth, through you, to combat apartheid with vigour. My commitment, and that of my Government, to maintain this vigil and to press for an end to apartheid is resolute and unqualified. I wish you success in your endeavours to bring us closer to that objective."

At Vancouver our Committee was charged with pursuing Commonwealth goals to reach into South Africa to aid the victims and opponents of Apartheid, to promote dialogue, and counteract South African censorship and propaganda: we were to widen, tighten and intensify sanctions to make them more effective: we were to increase our support to South Africa's neighbours in the face of destabilization by Pretoria: and we were to press for Namibian independence.

That is our specific mandate, and it reflects real pressure and initiatives against apartheid. In Canada's case alone, our trade with South Africa has been cut in half in two years; our aid has increased by millions of dollars, and extended to new fields like support for court challenges, for political detainees, for trade unions. We have introduced new sanctions, including last week a tightening of the Gleneagles Agreement to affect professional athletes in tennis and golf. We are looking at ways to restore the Limpopo Line. We have raised the sanctions and other issues directly at the Economic Summit, and in other meetings. The Prime Minister has been to southern Africa, and met the leaders of that region, including, in his office in Ottawa, Oliver Tambo of the African National Congress. Those are some actions, in the last three years, by Canada alone.

The point of this Committee is that Canada has not been alone. Nor have the Front Line States. Nor have the individual victims of apartheid. The issues of southern Africa seem to have been thrust forward on the international scene - because, for a quarter of a century, those issues were on the sidelines, and apartheid endured, blighting lives, building tensions, inviting violence. The agency through which those interests have come together most dramatically is this Commonwealth. We are different races working together as equals - the antithesis of apartheid. More than that, we are the family in which South Africa was raised; the family to which South Africa, free of apartheid, would be welcomed home.

Other nations, not on this Committee, have more economic power than the eight countries working together here. But it is becoming clear that the influence of the Commonwealth extends beyond our economic weight. All members of this Committee are conscious of our opportunity and responsibility to demonstrate a leadership which others may follow. Whatever our differences of perspective or prescription, we are together determined to provide that active, constructive leadership.

In February in Lusaka, the Committee identified areas where concrete action could occur. Today and tomorrow we will consider individual new steps which governments of the Commonwealth can adopt. We intend to maintain steady and building pressure until the system of apartheid is ended.

That goal reaches beyond governments, to mobilize individual citizens and organizations.

To that end Canada, as host of this meeting, has organized parallel events here in Toronto. Their theme is "help rekindle the light" of freedom. Today a forum at City Hall will examine censorship and propaganda and give the public a chance to meet and talk with prominent South Africans, and others. A festival of the arts which opened yesterday brings Apartheid and the battle against it into sharp relief.

A tolerant and free society is based on respect for other people. As it is codified in terms set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, all individuals, irrespective of race, religion, sex or other characteristics, are, in a fundamental way, equal. That very principle of equality is blatantly denied and violated by the apartheid system which is rooted in racial inequality.

On behalf of the Committee, I welcome to Canada the South Africans both black and white who experience the full weight of apartheid: who have fought back: who represent the hope of the future for South Africa. We look forward to hearing your views and exchanging ideas with You. You bring an immediate reality to our deliberations.

One of those we invited is not here. Cyril Ramaphosa leads the United Mine Workers. The Government of South Africa would not let him travel to Toronto. It is clear that Pretoria does not want us to hear what he has to say. We regret Mr. Ramaphosa's inability to join us. The action taken against him is eloquent testimony to the nature of Apartheid.

In Lusaka we decided that here in Toronto we would Toronto give particular attention to the problems posed by censorship in South Africa and the efforts of the Government of South Africa to mislead the world about the realities there. Our decision was timely. There have been new uses of old measures to control the press. Newspapers have been closed and others have been threatened to get across the message that the truth will not be tolerated. The new State of Emergency regulations added restrictions. The Government of South Africa will not permit the South African media to oppose or to expose apartheid.

From the South African Government we hear no willingness to negotiate a new form of government to represent all South Africans with those whom the majority can choose for itself in a free and unqualified manner. Legitimate black leaders respond from jail, or exile, or through the filters of banning and censorship.

In presenting a false image to the world, the Government of South Africa is also pretending to itself. By exposing South African propaganda perhaps we can force that government too, to recognize the realities it tries to hide. We will have before us a Canadian strategy paper which will, I hope, help to guide our thoughts on this important subject.

I would like to close by renewing my welcome to Canada and to Toronto. Toronto has become Canada's largest city, and it has done so by attracting people to it from around the world. A city which takes so much pride in its diversity is an appropriate setting for a meeting of a Commonwealth Committee focussed on problems which have grown out of racism.