

SRW

OPS cc MASTER

Subject: South Africa
Relations
A 9



CCFCO

10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

18 April 1986

PRIME MINISTER'S
PERSONAL MESSAGE
SERIAL No. T75/86

Dear Mr President

Thank you for your letter of 10 April. I am much encouraged that you felt able to respond in a positive way. You know the importance I attach to the Commonwealth initiative. It is well worth making a serious effort to see if progress can be made by this route. If the present effort founders, I see nothing to replace it except a rising chorus of calls for economic sanctions.

I do urge you to communicate your interest in their "Negotiating Concept" direct to the Commonwealth Group as soon as possible. While I follow closely what they are doing and am trying to channel their efforts into constructive directions, the Group are, as you know, independent of governments. There is a real risk that in the absence of what can be seen by the Group as a whole as a positive South African response, there will be pressure at the next meeting on 30 April to wind up the exercise. Tony Barber is already doing all he can to ensure that the Group produces a helpful report. It would only increase suspicions of Britain's role if I tried to insert myself as honest broker between them and the South African Government.

You are the best judge of where your interests lie. I have drawn encouragement from what you have told me in your letter and recognise the difficulties for you. But I ought to say frankly that I do not believe that in its present form your offer is likely to be seen by the Commonwealth Group as giving them enough to go on. They will say that what you are

SRW

asking for is an indefinite cessation of violence in return for which you would "consider" moves along the lines suggested in the negotiating concept. I entirely agree that a cessation of violence is what we should be aiming for. But I suspect that the Group would not regard your formulation as a fair exchange, especially since the Commonwealth accord speaks in terms of a suspension of violence. I would encourage you to explore with the Group exactly what a suspension of violence would entail.

I well understand how concerned you feel at the possibility that the South African Government might be blamed if it had to take action to restore control should a call for suspension of violence prove ineffective. I of course accept the right of any government to take reasonable measures to maintain law and order and would stand up publicly for that. But I fear that the Commonwealth Group as a whole would see the condition you suggest as a request for a blank cheque and will not be disposed to give you a blanket assurance. Certainly the British Government would try to ensure that you were given credit for acting in good faith, especially if the measures sought by the Commonwealth Group were being implemented. There is bound to be some risk in taking such a step. But they have to be set against the dangers of rejecting the proposal.

I do not need to assure you of my own commitment to western democratic values and unwavering opposition to communism, to terrorism and to totalitarianism of all kinds. If a dialogue can be established between your government and genuine representatives of black South Africans, this should surely encourage legitimate black political aspirations at the expense of the ideologues: frustrated nationalism is in my experience the most fertile ground for Soviet communism in Africa.

For our part we shall continue to emphasise to the ANC our condemnation of violence and our commitment to dialogue. There is a readiness on their part to talk; but

realistically they will need something they can show to their supporters to justify calling for a suspension of violence. I realise the difficulties; but I cannot believe that, given the political will, it is impossible to find a way of resolving the question of who accepts who's conditions first. The Commonwealth Group could play a valuable mediating role over this. We shall give them every encouragement to do so.

Your letter reinforces my belief that the Commonwealth initiative can succeed and that a breakthrough can be achieved. I do therefore urge you to send an early response to the Group and to cast your offer in as positive terms as possible. I believe that they too will be ready to show some flexibility. Certainly I shall do my best to encourage them to consider very seriously any firm proposal you might make to them and to explore it thoroughly with black African leaders with whom we are in contact.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely
Ranganath Lalitha