



University of London

## INSTITUTE OF COMMONWEALTH STUDIES

### COHP Transcript: The Rt Hon Joe Clark APPENDIX ONE

#### Content Summary:

*Supplementary material provided by the Rt Hon Joe Clark on 11 August 2014 concerning the Commonwealth Committee of Foreign Ministers on South Africa, established in 1987.*

#### Commonwealth Committee of Foreign Ministers on South Africa Snapshot:

In the 1980s Canada sought a way of meaningfully contributing to the fight against apartheid. It quickly became apparent that it alone could not implement enough pressure to bring about change. As a result, Canada turned to its historical allegiance to the Commonwealth, of which South Africa was a former member, to induce change in the oppressive apartheid system.

Although earlier efforts were undertaken by the Commonwealth to fight apartheid, it was at the 1987 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Vancouver that progress was made to develop a Commonwealth-wide response. From this meeting came the *Okanagan Statement on Southern Africa and Programme of Action* which established the Commonwealth Committee of Foreign Ministers on Southern Africa (CFM). Between 1988 and 1989, the CFM became the principal instrument for the Commonwealth to bring pressure against the apartheid system. The Committee was comprised of the Foreign Ministers of Canada, Australia, Guyana, India, Nigeria, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Among this selected group of Commonwealth representatives, Canadian Secretary of State for External Affairs (SSEA) Joe Clark was appointed chairman. As described in the *Okanagan Statement*, one of the main purposes of the CFM was to evaluate the application of sanctions as a tool in the fight against apartheid. In addition, the Committee was tasked with developing a response to the suffering caused by South Africa's wars of destabilization and assisting Namibian independence efforts. Lastly, it was decided that the CFM would focus on supporting the victims of apartheid and find ways of counteracting the government's propaganda and censorship programs. It was hoped that the CFM would pressure the South African regime and encourage Commonwealth members and other nations to follow suit.

While the CFM's mandate was clear, a challenge to the success of a unified Commonwealth policy against apartheid emerged. Britain, who remained an

important trading partner with South Africa, was of the position that collective and complete trade sanctions against South Africa would reduce the leverage that Britain had as a significant trading partner.<sup>1</sup> Instead, they favoured more 'positive' measures that would focus on assistance to Front-Line States suffering from South Africa's wars of destabilization.<sup>2</sup> The problem, however, lay in the fact that most Commonwealth members, including many of the Front-Line States, opposed any course of action that did not include a complete embargo on all goods to and from South Africa. The task fell to Canada and its ally on the CFM Australia to find a balance between the two sides.

The first meeting of the CFM was held in Lusaka, Zambia in February 1988.<sup>3</sup> One of the main results of this meeting was the creation of a series of studies to help the CFM fulfil its mandate. In addition, the CFM agreed to begin its consultation with Front-Line States about their security needs and reaffirmed the Commonwealth's support for Namibian independence. During this inaugural meeting, preliminary meetings were also held with representatives from such groups as the South African Council of Churches, African National Congress, and the Anti-Apartheid Movement to seek new ways of fighting the apartheid system. These consultations with groups fighting apartheid continued throughout each of the CFM meetings.

The main thrust of the second meeting of the CFM in Toronto in August 1988 was to discuss the findings of a number of the reports that had been commissioned in Lusaka.<sup>4</sup> At this meeting, the Interim Report on the application of trade restrictions found that "trade sanctions are having a discernible impact on South Africa [and] that its economy is coming under pressure." The Committee also reviewed a report by Nigerian General Olusegun Obasanjo entitled the Security Needs of Front-Line States. As a result of these recommendations, the CFM committed to providing further assistance to South Africa's neighbours, notably through its promise to help protect Mozambique's communications network and by increasing funding for the Special Commonwealth Fund for Mozambique. In Toronto, the CFM also reviewed a report on South Africa's relationship to the international financial system. Based on the findings of the study, the Ministers agreed that the upcoming June 1990 rescheduling of South African debt presented an opportunity to apply further pressure and called on banks and other lenders to hold the government to this rescheduling and to apply the highest possible interest rates on debt repayments.<sup>5</sup> The final result of note at the Toronto meeting was the tightening of a number of existing sanctions including the prohibition on the transfer of technology which could be used to circumvent earlier sanctions on arms, oil, and computer parts.

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<sup>1</sup> The British position on the use of sanctions is stated in a British internal background paper provided by Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Sir Geoffrey Howe, to SSEA Joe Clark on 21 January 1988. See DFAIT Archives, RG 25 (28212), vol. 42, file 23-1-Africa/SN, "South Africa: The Current Position"

<sup>2</sup> Linda Freeman, *The Ambiguous Champion: Canada and South Africa in the Trudeau and Mulroney Years* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), p.207.

<sup>3</sup> Information pertaining to the first meeting of the CFM in Lusaka can be found in LAC, MG 26 R5-5, vol. 3, file 3, "Commonwealth Committee of Foreign Ministers on Southern Africa, First Meeting: Lusaka, 1-2 February 1988."

<sup>4</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, information presented on the proceedings of the Toronto meeting of the CFM is drawn from LAC, MG 26 R5-5, vol. 3, file 3, "Commonwealth Committee of Foreign Ministers on Southern Africa, Second Meeting: Toronto, 2-3 August 1988."

<sup>5</sup> LAC, MG 26 R5-4, vol. 12, file 5, "Apartheid and International Finance."

At the third meeting of the CFM in Harare, Zimbabwe in February 1989 the Committee continued to voice its opposition to the apartheid regime and made a series of recommendations for other countries to do the same.<sup>6</sup> Notable among the proceedings of the meeting was the discussion of Canada, Australia, and Nigeria's efforts to fight censorship and propaganda through the training of journalists in South Africa. The CFM encouraged other Commonwealth members to initiate similar programs. In Harare, the Committee also concluded that existing sanctions "were beginning to promote recognition within the white community that in the absence of fundamental political change, it cannot hope to see such externally imposed constraints removed." The Committee also stated that it was pleased that its report on sanctions had informed many countries of their increasing links with South Africa and the need to reduce them.

While many subjects were addressed at the fourth and final meeting in Canberra, Australia in August 1989, the main issue became the discussion of the now completed Sanctions Report.<sup>7</sup> With many members calling for the implementation of wider sanctions and Britain opposed to such a measure, the task was set for the CFM to present a possible solution. The report recommended a phased movement towards a total trade embargo against South Africa. While the Committee had agreed to strengthen existing sanctions in previous meetings, Canada and Australia were reluctant to fully endorse the recommendations of the report. During his opening remarks to the Committee, Clark was clear in stating that, while a useful contribution, the findings of the report represented the opinion of its creators and not the respective governments of the Committee.<sup>8</sup> Rather than highlight the division within the group, Canada continued to support the use of measured sanctions to strengthen the Commonwealth's negotiating power with South Africa. To downplay any conflict, Canada assuaged members of the CFM by committing to a number of other projects including a further examination of South Africa's international financial connections.

Shortly after the final meeting of the CFM, the South African government began a series of negotiations between 1990 and 1993 that led to the end of the apartheid system. While the fall of apartheid had many contributing factors, the efforts of the Commonwealth certainly played a role. Through the tightening of sanctions, assistance provided to Front-Line States, publicised support for anti-apartheid groups, aid delivered directly to those affected, and persuasion of other nations to take similar actions, the CFM was able to consistently challenge the apartheid government's efforts to preserve the status quo.

Yet the CFM meetings were also significant in terms of the organization of the Commonwealth itself. From the outset, there was disagreement between Britain and other members in regards to sanctions. In the *Okanagan Statement* which established the CFM, declarations about the need to examine the role of sanctions were always prefaced by phrases such as "with

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<sup>6</sup> All References to the third meeting of the CFM in Harare are taken from LAC, MG 26 R5-5, vol. 3, file 3, "Commonwealth Committee of Foreign Ministers on Southern Africa, Third Meeting: Harare, 6-8 February 1989."

<sup>7</sup> LAC, MG 26 R5-5, vol. 9, file 5, "Final Report of the Expert Study on the Application and Impact of Sanctions to the Commonwealth Committee of Foreign Ministers on Southern Africa."

<sup>8</sup> LAC, MG 26 R5-5, vol. 3, file 3, "Speech by the Right Honourable Joe Clark, P.C., M.P., Secretary of State for External Affairs at the Opening of the Fourth Session of the Commonwealth Committee of Foreign Ministers, Canberra, August 7, 1989."

the exception of Britain.”<sup>9</sup> Traditionally, the solution for this issue would have been for Britain to unilaterally determine Commonwealth policy. Yet the fact that the CFM was created in the first place indicated that there were challenges to the centralized authority of the organization. In this context, Canada, together with Australia, was able to fulfil an important role. In effect, Canada acted as an honest broker within the Commonwealth, one that could find balance between the two opposing sides. Throughout the process, Canada focussed on those issues that had the support of all Commonwealth members, including assistance to apartheid victims and the Front-Line States. Although the debate over the extent of sanctions was abruptly ended by progressive steps taken by the South African government, Canada did not reject the use of sanctions during the CFM meetings. At the same time, Canada acknowledged the argument made by Britain that the end of Commonwealth trade relations would result in the end of its leverage in negotiations. Instead of siding with one or the other, Canada advocated for the use of sanctions as a negotiation tool that could be incrementally applied as needed.<sup>10</sup> The ability to take this centrist position was important in the evolution of the Commonwealth. Unlike Canada’s other colonial connection to La Francophonie, where authority continued to reside in Paris, there was a shift in power within the Commonwealth. The fight against apartheid created a common purpose for members but also indicated a decentralization of control over the direction of the Commonwealth. The CFM meetings demonstrated that a new order of countries could help to build consensus among members and lead the organization.

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<sup>9</sup> LAC, MG 26 R5-7, vol. 9, file 1, “*Okanagan Statement on Southern Africa and Program of Action.*”

<sup>10</sup> As early as 1985, Canada made it clear to Britain that, although it sought unity within the Commonwealth, Britain would have to become more flexible in its stance on Commonwealth policy towards South Africa. See LAC, MG 26 R5-5, vol. 10, file 20, “Memorandum to Cabinet, South Africa Policy Review – Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, October 1985, Secretary of State for External Affairs.”