



University of London

## INSTITUTE OF COMMONWEALTH STUDIES

**VOICE FILE NAME: COHP (Ambassador Abdul Minty)**

Key:

**SO: Sue Onslow (Interviewer)**

AM: Abdul Minty (Respondent)

**SO: Dr Sue Onslow interviewing Ambassador Abdul Minty in Geneva, on 12<sup>th</sup> February 2013. Ambassador Minty, thank you very much for agreeing to be interviewed for our oral history project on the Commonwealth. Please, if I could begin by asking you about leading Commonwealth personalities whom you met and knew? First and foremost, these are Julius Nyerere and Kenneth Kaunda. President Nyerere was one of the patrons of your World Campaign, and possessed a clear vision of African solidarity.**

AM: When Nyerere came to London for constitutional talks (for the independence of Tanganyika), I met him and because we had an office of the Anti-Apartheid Movement, we interacted with him regularly. And so we got to know him and other Commonwealth leaders who came there for similar talks. So that relationship continued subsequently. Then, since I went to virtually every Commonwealth summit save two until 1994. What I had to do - was to provide information to the developing countries, as to what was happening in South Africa. None of them had embassies, or missions, or interest sections there, so they would work in a relatively isolated position. So Nyerere always asked (for information) and we planned in advance and I discussed regularly at the United Nations, Dar-es-Salaam, and elsewhere; so we worked together very, very well. Then later they invited me to also go and see the Front Line

States. I went to their meetings; and always worked with the OAU and also the OAU Liberation Committee.

**SO: So, Sir, when did your collaboration - if I may call it that without suggesting any pejorative sense - begin with Nyerere?**

AM: In 1961...

**SO: In 1961? So this was after the Anti-Apartheid Movement was established and you had become the movement's Honorary Secretary?**

AM: No, no, even before I was Honorary Secretary. He was one of the main speakers when we launched the Boycott Movement in 1959, and because, as I say, (the African leaders) were then coming regularly for constitutional talks in London, so we met them then. When we had our campaigns: they would support us, Kenneth Kaunda too; and of course all the Commonwealth conferences then were in London, so we went to brief them before each conference. So, we had to go to the fancy Grosvenor Hotel and some others - I had never been in those places - to brief them, to tell them what we were doing. Then we had this great campaign with Barbara Castle, working day and night. We had a vigil outside the Commonwealth Prime Ministers summit (in March 1961) to exclude South Africa from the Commonwealth. That was our first major campaign and we succeeded. It was Macmillan who was the Chairman of the conference because the British government were hosts, and they were always the Chairman of the conference. Nobody thought we would succeed, but Barbara Castle was tireless. I was working with her at the Labour Party Conference and as she sat on the platform, she wrote hundreds of letters and signed them, and I sat there passing her letter after letter. So we got playwrights, actors of various kinds, artists, we had a 72-hour vigil outside the Commonwealth conference where all personally stood for one hour each day and night, and then Mr Macmillan was told by African leaders and others that, "You say you don't support..., but outside are these people who are very prominent and are all asking for it." So, of course South Africa then withdrew its application. We followed the South African Prime Minister: South African Prime Ministers hadn't attended previous meetings, only Foreign Ministers would attend but Verwoerd came, so we followed him; and his supporters burnt our office. So a couple of persons were convicted of

setting fire to it and we lost some money and documents. But anyway that was a price we had to pay.

**SO: Sir, going through the Anti-Apartheid Movement papers in the Bodleian Library in Oxford, I was particularly struck by your preparation of briefing material before each Commonwealth Prime Ministers Conference. In particular, I am aware you went to the Singapore CHOGM meeting in 1971, flying via India, and requested to meet the -**

AM: 1971 was critical for us because the British government wanted to supply arms to South Africa and we got thousands of petitions signed against it. We got every bishop in Britain to sign as well.

**SO: I have a note here that you got 18 million signatures.**

AM: Yes, it could be, in terms of the representation then; for example, all the trade unionists signed it, so in terms of their membership, this ran to millions. I took two big suitcases full with me to Singapore, and when I went to the airport we had to get a taxi. We didn't have much money in those days, and two big suitcases just with the petitions. So, we stuck the petitions on the suitcase cover, so everybody could see the text! Then I had a smaller bag with my clothes and I went in this taxi. Now, I can't remember how much money I had, or if it was going to be just enough. But when I got to the airport, the taxi driver said, "No, you don't have to pay me". Then I went to the Pan Am airline desk as clearly I had excess luggage. The check in person looked, and she said, "There's nothing to pay". So they were human beings acting way outside (the formal rules)!

**SO: Yes.**

AM: But the Singapore authorities apparently wanted to arrest me.

**SO: Did they?**

AM: Yes, just before I arrived, there were such reports. -

**SO: Even though you had an appointment with the Singapore Foreign Minister?**

AM: No, that was granted afterwards. They wouldn't give me an appointment initially. No, they refused; they didn't want to have anything to do with me.

**SO: So, you arrived at the airport in Singapore and they didn't want to admit you?**

AM: No. There were reports in the Singapore press and elsewhere that if I come and do something like engage in protest they will lock me up. So actually Nigerians officials apparently said, "If you detain him, we won't be here for the conference". I don't know what effect they had. I found this out later. When I got to the airport, their security followed me closely as well. And after my arrival I kept asking for an appointment, and later I asked the Secretary General of the Commonwealth if I could give him the petitions instead. In the end, he said, "Yes, Abdul, we'll try. If not, I will receive them from you". Then inside the Commonwealth meeting, what happened was that Premier Lee Kuan Yew was emphasising, in harmony with the British, that there was a major Russian communist threat in the southern oceans. So, the question of selling helicopters to South Africa turned on the Simonstown Agreement. So Prime Minister Heath said, "These Africans don't understand". Before that meeting, we had African leaders going to London to lobby Downing Street and to see the Prime Minister. When we got to Singapore, the issue arose and Ted Heath said, "Look, you cannot use helicopters against the liberation movements. It's only for (use against) the Russian vessels, and (for the) patrolling South African ships. So these helicopters are for use on the South African naval ships". Well, I knew that they would argue like that, so I collected some clippings from the South African newspapers in advance which showed the regime's anti-guerrilla exercises using ships. I didn't use them earlier. I just kept them. When this argument came up in Singapore, I went to Nyerere. I told him this, so he got together Obote and Kaunda, and the four of us discussed what to do. Nyerere was always leading initiatives so he suggested that the Foreign Minister of Uganda should actually have a press conference and expose this. I gave him all of my material and Uganda then said, "Here are pictures that show South Africans using ships for anti-guerrilla warfare" - so this threw a spanner in the works completely. Then one

night the Singapore authorities arranged that in all of our pigeonholes, we got pictures of Russian ships going past Singapore. This was to show now the communist threat. "You see this?" I think Singapore papers also talked about the fact that their region had to give their lives in the last war. Then President Kaunda said, "Yes, there are people even buried here in this region who are our nationals. We also gave our lives. We lost Zambian citizens, so don't come with that argument". So African leaders got annoyed that this campaign was being used also to defend the South African military.

It was only six helicopters that Britain wanted to provide Pretoria with, for which they were prepared to break up the Commonwealth. Then President Obote wanted to go home because he had a warning about a possible coup. He tried to get East African Airways, which the three countries Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda owned, to send a plane but no plane came to pick him up. He was wondering why and then there was a coup. And then some journalists in Singapore informed that the British Foreign Secretary, Sir Alec Home, reportedly even said, "That loud mouth Kaunda might find himself in the same situation." So then many wondered; "Good God, is a coup being promoted?" Later the British TV programme *World in Action*, did a one-hour programme. The heading was, *How a General Stole a Nation*. They interviewed Israeli security officials who had been in Uganda, and invited by Obote to help to train their military. They asked one of these guys, "Did you help with the coup?" "Yes, we were in the country to help the military". Then Amin was very clever. He turned the whole situation against the British by using the Indians and the issue of British passports. He threw the British Ugandan Asians out and then the Israelis out, so anyone who touched Amin would then be accused of being an agent of the British, or of Israel. So that's how Amin survived for such a long time in that period.

Irrespective of who was responsible for the *coup*, for six helicopters these countries took a stand. They had a President removed, and many of our friends were killed in Makerere University and elsewhere. So, it was a very heavy price that African leaders and others have paid over the whole period of fighting apartheid. Anyway, at the 1971 conference when it became evident that the Commonwealth was concerned about the role of Singapore, then the Foreign Minister asked to see me. He said, "I believe you are here with petitions. You can bring your petitions and we will have a press

conference, and we will get all the newspapers” so he conducted the whole event in his office. The tables were put out, I had to go early, their officials took all our petitions and displayed them on the tables.

**SO: So, suddenly this was the theatre of the presentation?**

AM: It became a complete conversion because I think they needed legitimacy from the Africans and others.

**SO: So what of India? I know that you stopped off in India on your way to Singapore.**

AM: The exciting thing about India is that I stopped because Mrs Gandhi wanted to see me. You see, what we used to do in London was to visit all the Commonwealth nations: we prepared with them months before, we gave them documents, we took up specific issues with them, they sent these to their capitals, they gave questions back; so we interacted in that way. India was very strong in supporting the Anti-Apartheid Movement, but at that time Mrs Gandhi was not coming to Singapore for some reason. So I went to India. Just before I left India I think the British Foreign Secretary arrived, and there were big demonstrations against Britain, in the streets. I saw people with real anger. Then comes Trudeau from Canada and huge crowds were celebrating him; so what we were rejoicing at, at that time, is that the public were not reacting in any racial way. They could identify this, and the very important thing for us at that time was that Canada was against apartheid and a bridge builder; as were Australia and New Zealand later on, so Canada’s role was really quite critical in the Commonwealth.

**SO: Do you think it had anything to do with the fact that the Secretary General of the Commonwealth was a Canadian?**

AM: It may have had something to do with it, but if you look back at Canada’s role it had a Nordic type of policy in relation to Africa.

**SO: A moral agenda towards Africa?**

AM: Yes, The Secretary General was the first Secretary General who was also well-disposed and, as I say, he told me that, "If they [the Singaporeans] don't meet you, I will meet you and receive the petitions". So, we knew that someone would receive our petitions but we had to try first with the Chair of the Commonwealth. We didn't expect it and they didn't behave towards us as if we could expect it; but later they did receive us. Then of course I used to attend the meetings of the British journalists because we published *Anti-Apartheid News* so they couldn't keep me out! *[Laughs]* In some of those meetings in later Commonwealth Summits I would hear all they said in the briefings and then we would know what their line was on many issues. But, Singapore became a turning point in that the position taken on the arms issue remained one that the Commonwealth was united on later. The media played a big role.

**SO: Excuse me sir, when you say 'we', whom do you mean beside yourself? Was this the Anti-Apartheid Movement representatives?**

AM: Well, there weren't many at the Summits where I was usually the only one! *[Laughter]* But for the organisation we had to meet the High Commissioners in London. We knew them, we planned before each Summit. Some of them, depending on if they trusted us, would say, "Look, this is what's happening". I have to prepare the text. When we saw them at the Commonwealth heads meeting, the High Commissioners would be there. Some of them were asked to write the speeches for their Heads so in that process we assisted. We worked with all countries but did not become members of particular delegations. At the Summits I registered for *Anti-Apartheid News*, which was a monthly newspaper, and then I worked with all Commonwealth countries. So, at that time if I had been linked with, let's say, just one Commonwealth country, I would not have been able to work well with some others. So, we worked with everybody but it was the wisdom of our structure early on about being impartial with everything and working independently though that did mean we had some disadvantages.

**SO: Sir, were most of your energies then at Singapore, at Ottawa in 1973 and then in '75 at Kingston, devoted towards South Africa?**

AM: No, Southern Africa.

**SO: So Rhodesia was also very much part of your agenda?**

AM: And Angola and Mozambique. We used to take up all the issues and in fact I used to meet representatives from the former Portuguese colonies regularly. For different reasons, they asked me to help them in Europe as well. They had no representatives in Europe, the ANC and SWAPO had. When they came to Europe they would often ask me to join them and then after they left, I would follow up whatever had to be done in different European countries: We were a genuine solidarity movement.

You see, I was initially the Membership Secretary and our Honorary Secretary also a South African, Rosalyn Ainslie was expecting a baby so she couldn't continue in that role. We had just managed to get Barbara Castle to be highly active in AAM. She came to speak at our main rally after Sharpeville in 1960 where we changed our name to the Anti-Apartheid Movement from the Boycott Movement and thereafter there was a strong demand for her to serve as the President of the Anti-Apartheid Movement. She apparently said she would serve but that I should be the Secretary *[laughs]*. We knew each other very well and I had worked closely with her over several campaigns.

So, one day when Oliver Tambo was in London he told me, "No, you must do this and you must not make the Anti-Apartheid Movement an extension of the ANC. You must win your support from the British people and you must respond to them". I was young and quite upset at apparently being disengaged from the Liberation struggle. So it had to be and we all learnt much from the leadership provided by Oliver Tambo. Later more and more we saw his great wisdom. The Anti-Apartheid Movement had on its national committee the ANC, PAC, ZANU and ZAPU; we worked with all. Throughout the Lancaster House negotiations we organised meetings in the House of Commons for briefings by ZANU leadership and ZAPU leadership and so on, so we worked with all of them. And this was quite wise when you look at it since Britain was the centre of the anti-apartheid global movement. There weren't many strong anti-apartheid movements in many countries. We were the strongest at the time.



It meant that what we did also caught the news, so we became quite central. Once I went to the UN to give evidence and later I wrote a letter to the UN to suggest that a special committee against apartheid be set up. Some thought it was impertinent to suggest to the UN what it should do. So now when we are marking 50 years of the OAU, it's also 50 years of the anti-apartheid committee. It was not called 'anti-apartheid' because the rest of the countries wouldn't allow it. It's the only committee in the UN that was boycotted by the West. So, it had mainly Communist countries and African/Asian countries so we worked very closely with them in the UN Special Committee on the Policies of Apartheid of the Government of the Republic of South Africa (later called the Special Committee on Apartheid); and of course after that, the Rivonia Trial started in 1963 with Mandela among the accused. There was a Treason Trial in 1956 which some of us campaigned against since 1958 and I worked with Canon Collins who had raised the money to defend those Treason Trial accused who were eventually freed. He actually helped to save their lives, so we also worked with the OAU. I was invited to the meetings as a guest of the OAU and the first Chairman of the Special Committee on Apartheid was then made Secretary General of the OAU. So there's a whole link, you see, in the global movement. We were also in touch with the Afro-Americans in the US to try and get support. We were sitting in London writing letters to anyone and everyone. Then I went to Leeds University for a year to do law. I went to see the Vice Chancellor, and Professor Ayer, and asked if they would nominate Chief Luthuli for the Nobel Peace Prize - and then when Jim Callaghan invited me to a meeting in Coventry I asked for his support. And so it went on with letters we wrote across the world and finally we got the Nobel Prize for Luthuli, But we were just hitting everywhere with such appeals.

**SO: I'm very struck, Sir, by the extent to which international solidarity against apartheid was founded on networks of well educated, well placed people, using London as a hub.**

AM: No, it is simply the opportunity we had, and the fact that London was the centre of world news. It wasn't like now, with CNN and others. It was the BBC, and much of what we did got reported. Then we started with the sports boycotts, we started with cultural boycotts etc. We started with small little initiatives that nobody knew about, but then one day Peter O'Toole would call

and say, "I'm supporting you". I would say, "Please get the following playwrights together" and he'd get all of them together in his house and we'd go and talk to them. When Yehudi Menuhin initially went to South Africa and Father Huddleston said he mustn't perform to segregated audiences. "So I tried to perform to a mixed audience and that did not work." He asked: what should I do? I said, "You must boycott" so he did. And Marlon Brando would visit London and Ken Tynan, the Cultural Editor of the Observer called me and he said, "Abdul, you must see Marlon Brando". I said, "Okay". So I see him and he says, "Now, he doesn't think we're doing enough on sanctions. He wants to stop all films in South Africa". I had to spend a day and a half talking to him about these matters! *[Laughs]*

**SO: Sir, you're mapping out here the network of prominent playwrights, writers, politicians, particularly on the left. Within the Liberal Party, I know David Steel was a very -**

AM: David Steel was a student when he was active as were the Kinnocks.

**SO: Student and trade union networks.**

AM: It was all voluntary back then.

**SO: - and you emphasise very much key Commonwealth leaders. What of the Commonwealth Secretariat after 1965? Was it providing particular support?**

AM: The Secretariat was not sympathetic on all issues at first.

**SO: Really?**

AM: Because by raising issues we caused problems but in reality, later it became more sympathetic but it always was also watching itself. The Secretary General who had a really imaginative, outstanding, and innovative stance, and stands out, is Sonny Ramphal. He stood out on sheer principle and when we were in the Caribbean and elsewhere when we had this problem with Thatcher, he developed the EPG, because the Commonwealth works by consensus. But Britain was opposed to many anti-apartheid positions and

then we saw the communiques stating ‘the Commonwealth, with the exception of Britain, decided...

**SO: Yes.**

AM: And Prime Minister Thatcher was happily thinking Britain was undermining the Commonwealth but it in fact rebounded on her.

**SO: Just to go back to the beginning of Sonny Ramphal’s time in office: did you meet him at the Kingston CHOGM?**

AM: Yes and in London before the Summit. We never went to CHOGM without seeing the Secretary General beforehand. And I knew Sonny when he was Foreign Minister and UN Ambassador, so I knew some of them before because they were in different roles in the UN. I used to go to the UN almost every year because of the apartheid issues and the UN used to invite us to meetings of the Anti-Apartheid Committee where we met them.

**SO: So, would you have official as well as private discussions with Sonny Ramphal as part of his activism?**

AM: Well no. He would know I was anti-apartheid and there would be no separation between official or private because we always discussed solidarity work on Southern Africa.

**SO: When did you alert him to the South African government’s determination to develop an atomic bomb?**

AM: Well, that is another story because I was following this subject in detail. I was also at University College doing a Master’s programme and when it finished, the Richardson Institute offered me a fellowship and as I did research, I found that “No, I don’t want to publish this. I want to stop it”. So, they were upset with me and they’d never had a student who doesn’t do his thesis.

**SO: [Laughs] I have to say, I don’t think I’ve ever had a PhD student who said, “I want to stop”!**

AM: *[Laughs]* So I didn't do it but then I read the small print in every report and there I found that South Africa was preparing for a nuclear weapon. There was one statement by a minister who said, "We must not look at only the peaceful uses of nuclear energy". Then I wrote a booklet in 1969 that highlighted this threat, it was translated in a few languages, entitled South Africa's Defence Strategy.

**SO: There's a copy of that booklet in the Anti-Apartheid Movement papers at the Bodleian. I saw it on Tuesday.**

AM: Yes. I have to consult the full text because it provided the full context and there were footnotes and it showed that they wanted to develop a nuclear device so it was the first to spell this out - and then it was mentioned when I went to address the UN from time to time. There is a book published by Mr ES Reddy of all my speeches in the UN so that provides some further insight.

So, we promoted this concern and Ruth First who was also in exile and others also worked with me on it, but eventually it was all left to me. So, because I did all the research on it, when we went to the World Conference for Action against Apartheid in Lagos in 1977, and the second UN/OAU conference - the first one was in Oslo in 1973. I was on the Steering Committee of both, so in Lagos we heard that the satellites of the West had detected a South African possible nuclear test site. There was an international outcry and the French President said to South Africa "Don't explode". So, I made a statement, "How can they explode what they don't have?" because I had been to every Western country regarding their nuclear collaboration and they had all told me, "South Africa doesn't have nuclear weapon capability and our cooperation is only for peaceful purposes". Now, all of a sudden they were saying, "Don't explode". So, I said, "But they can't explode if they don't have this weapon according to you. Why are you appealing to them?" So it blew up and at Lagos where we were meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> August this news exploded. The Chairman of the UN Committee, Olaf Palme of Sweden, David Steel from Britain and many other personalities and leaders of the liberation movements were there as was the Norwegian Prime Minister - an old friend since I used to visit Norway annually from the early 1960's. I also went to Norway prior to the Lagos conference to persuade the Prime Minister to come to that conference because no Heads of Western countries were coming. When he

agreed to come, the Labour Party took a risk because it was ten days or so before their general election. Anyway, the Prime Minister came and made a very good speech. Norway had just become a member of the Security Council so what the Norwegians said is that "if Abdul Minty can come to Norway and since we are on the Security Council, we can take up the issue of the arms embargo". They were prepared to fund the office. So, the UN Special Committee made an appeal to the British Anti-Apartheid Movement in a formal way to say they would like me to head the new World Campaign against Military and Nuclear Collaboration with South Africa. We had some talks with the Norwegians and it took a little while. By 1978/9 we opened this office and I expected to resign from AAM but they said, "No you cant, you have to do both."

**SO: Joan Lester wouldn't let you! [Laughs]**

AM: Yeah, none of them would, so I had to go backwards and forwards between London and other countries. So I did both and I remained the Honorary Secretary of the AAM.

**SO: Thank you, Sir. Now I understand.**

AM: We thought the World Campaign would be a temporary arrangement. Now, on Rhodesian sanctions, they had machinery in the Security Council. So we had expected that, when the arms embargo against South Africa was finally adopted by the Security Council it would also be implemented like that. On the morning when the Council was to discuss the first proposal for an arms embargo in September 1977 we went to see Foreign Secretary David Owen with a delegation and he said, "We will never support mandatory sanctions against South Africa". That Resolution was blocked by the Triple Western Veto. Immediately we worked very hard with the US and Andy Young and other delegations. The US reversed the position and we got the positive vote of all for these sanctions in November 1977. The international community was also preoccupied with the terrible brutality of the apartheid regime which had killed Steve Biko in detention and banned the Black Consciousness organisations. These developments also influenced matters at the time. So when we got that decision, we thought now the UN will set up machinery for the implementation because they did have some machinery for Rhodesian

sanctions but for South African sanctions they didn't set up any effective mechanism. They had a sub-committee of the Security Council that could meet regularly. But as I said in 1977 at the Lagos meeting it was decided by the UN that we needed a special office, that was in addition to stop the nuclear threat as well. Remember, 'nuclear' is not in the UN resolution.

**SO: No.**

AM: So, now there was also a real nuclear threat. Then they said "If Abdul Minty does it, we will support him" and Norway added, "We will act in the Security Council so whatever research he gets done and gives it to us, we will discuss it", so that was a kind of link as well. In reality, it didn't happen that easily because they are also members of NATO. But anyway, I went to Norway, did that work and then when the committee on the arms embargo met, I often went to New York to give evidence. They never refused me a meeting. The Chair in the first period was Ambassador Bishara, the Kuwaiti Ambassador; he did the best report of all and used some of the evidence I had given. In effect I was the only one giving evidence about violations, because no country wanted to give evidence about another country that sold arms to South Africa, a horrendous experience where no country would report about arms embargo violations by South Africa.

**SO: Sir, did you liaise in any way with the Commonwealth Secretariat, because I know that you were -**

AM: Yes.

**SO: - conducting a campaign against British export licences and possible imports of uranium from South Africa.**

AM: Yes. We used to go to the Commonwealth Secretariat every two or three weeks from time to time to see their officials, to see the head of the international department and give them material and information. It would depend on how receptive they were. Informally they helped us. Formally it was a little difficult because some important countries, like Britain, were not in favour, so they couldn't go too far at times unless they had the authority from CHOGM. And this is why I went to every conference because we took up

issues there; we wrote letters to the Heads of State in advance and made suggestions about what decisions to take, things like that.

**SO: So this explains why in the Commonwealth Secretariat files there is the detailed report on a seminar from the UN Committee against Apartheid. It refers specifically to military and nuclear collaboration with South Africa.**

AM: Yes. The historic thing is that in 1964 we were the first people to hold a World Conference on Sanctions in Friends House in London. The UN Committee came and the conference legitimised sanctions because we produced all the intellectual arguments. It was not just a political campaign. You see, this is also what the whole Anti-Apartheid Movement was quite good at. We gave intellectual content to many of the political demands. We didn't just accuse. But we also got a lot of false and forged letters both when I was in Oslo and in London - we'd get a forged letter which would appear to be on an American or British company letterhead, and it would purport to be writing to South Africa about arms deals. They wanted us to act on it, and it would not be true. So, there were many attempts to sabotage us. If we had one fact wrong we would have been finished.

**SO: Well, your credibility would have been seriously damaged, if not destroyed.**

AM: Because they just did not want to believe us but the fact was that we were right every time, they had to respect us. So I had to look at every case very carefully: is this what the military needs? Why would they want it? What is it that they would need it for? They don't have that much money so does this purchase make sense? We had to do - I can't say 'research' because we didn't have all the tools -but intuitive thinking of putting ourselves in the apartheid government's position; is this a priority? The same thing with the bomb: why would they want it? To intimidate Africa? Not to use it against them, but to frighten them and frighten the world. So, the West would also at times say, "Look, those people are mad. They even have a nuclear weapon. Don't touch them" and indeed they did do that later, but we were ten years or more ahead and anticipated it.

**SO: So, you believed that it was constructed to be a deterrent?**

AM: Well, not deterrent in the normal sense because other deterrents are deterrents against another nuclear weapon, and they were not deterring anybody with a nuclear weapon. It was to show their destructive capacity, so it was more to frighten and intimidate. So, they just wanted to show that “if you mess around with us, we can knock you out and have a small holocaust or several small ones.” They had a mentality that worked that way.

**SO: Hmm. Sir, I know that you were one of the prime movers behind the campaign, ‘Stop the Apartheid Bomb’ in the beginning of 1980, and it had moved by 1983 to ‘Stop the Apartheid War’. Was that problematic for you, because I know you were emphasising very much the whole question of the nuclear capacity of the South African apartheid regime?**

AM: No, we were always thinking of war in the region. Before that, in 1967, South Africa had moved into Rhodesia when the armed struggle developed, so they already brought that. Then came the Cuban intervention in Angola; and then I also went to the Security Council in 1975, and I disclosed to it internal NATO secret forms. I distributed them and I said, “Here is evidence NATO is providing the NATO Codification System for Spares and Equipment to South Africa. It’s not even a member of NATO, so what is going on?” Some western members were furious, but they didn’t know at first that I had authentic documents. It caused a major crisis.

**SO: Because you were arguing that the South Africans needed this codification system to construct their Advokaat naval communications system?**

AM: Yes, and other things. This was used for the spares for the Advokaat.

**SO: Yes. And the NATO Secretary General denied any links between NATO and South Africa.**

AM: That’s a separate matter as to whether he met the South Africans or not. So we exposed it and said he shouldn’t meet them in future; and so he said, he had met them, but in future he would not. Now, the Norwegian Foreign



Minister was our friend. Before the World Campaign was established, in 1976, the NATO meeting took place in Norway. I went there to lobby the Labour Party and others who helped me a lot. Then we were saying, "You must have no links with South Africa." So the NATO President as the Norwegian Foreign Minister, Knut Frydenlund was - told the NATO Secretary General that physically, "You must not meet the South Africans". I didn't see the letter - but that assurance was given. In response to my letter however - the way Secretary General Luns gave the assurance was that the international staff of NATO will not meet them. So I wrote back, "No, not the international staff only. NO staff". Because they do have national staff.

So, later we found that Luns had a meeting in his house with Pik Botha. So I went to the Norwegian Foreign Ministry and I said, "This has happened". One of their senior diplomats said, "No, Abdul. You've not been wrong before, but now you're wrong. I don't think Luns can mislead my Minister. I said, "No, I'm right. You check. He has entertained Pik Botha." So then he finally admitted that he did meet him but "we only spoke in Afrikaans". He stated that Botha "wanted my advice about reforming apartheid and I told him to get rid of petty apartheid". So that was the outcome of that. But after that was the decision they cannot meet even for this type of informal meeting. So, all of this just showed the depth of Western commitment to South Africa - that even though South Africa was not a member of NATO, they broke the rules to go beyond, with full confidence, to assist South Africa.

**SO: Sir, was it at all contentious within the ANC that you were Honorary Secretary of the Anti-Apartheid Movement and you were also a leading figure in the World Campaign? Did you retain your affiliation in any way with the ANC?**

AM: I didn't have any direct formal affiliation. I mean, I met them, I discussed issues with them, I accepted Oliver Tambo as my leader, if you wish, in South Africa but I didn't publicly espouse ANC policy only..

**SO: I just wondered if there had been any ANC internal debate about whether emphasis should be put on South Africa's acquisition of atomic capability, or whether it was felt this would not resonate within broader**

**South African society and generate domestic opposition towards the apartheid government?**

AM: No, no, this policy that we detailed was usefully behind it. I continued to do some research and what I found I then said, "Listen, these are the facts" and they supported it, so there was no disagreement.

**SO: The reason I ask that is Jean du Preez reflected [at an academic conference at Intundla in December 2012) that there had been some dissent within the ANC about whether this was an appropriate policy to generate internal opposition to the apartheid government.**

AM: I'm sorry to say, but it's rubbish!

**SO: Thank you for clarifying that.**

AM: No, because Jean knows nothing about internal ANC discussions. He was nowhere near those situations. What was happening at that time is that Jean and a whole lot of people who are still in our Foreign Service were ... well, I can't say it was Jean, but the others were all preparing to counteract me and the World Campaign. They distributed all kinds of stuff. So, they were worried: how was I getting this information?

**SO: Sir, I did wonder when I saw the amount of detail in the AAM archives.**

AM: When Samora Machel got killed, I wrote the first article that said how South Africa would have done it. I wrote it in a Mozambique national news agency AIM report which was then published in South Africa.

**SO: That was in 1986.**

AM: I said the device could be kept in a backpack and it would misroute the plane. So, the South African Air Force General said, "Oh, this Abdul Minty! He thinks he knows a lot about aviation!" So then I wrote another piece to say how bad the South Africans were, they didn't even know where the plane took off, basic things you would see through radar. It was like, "They're stupid." Then they wrote a piece that said, "No, no, no! We monitored this plane from when

it left Malawi". So, then I said, "Of course you monitored it because you used the Plessey AR3D radar system. It has 16 consuls, you could watch the plane every minute but why did you only have the search and rescue operation the next morning when they crashed at night?" So they were put in a real spot because they were having a duel with me. Now what happened is they had agreed the Nkomati peace deal with Mozambique; and one of the deals was that they would publish the AIM articles in South Africa. So I wrote articles for AIM and it got published in South Africa, and they started a dialogue with me. So now I see the South African government has reopened the investigation of that crash and I don't know whether they have more information or not, but on a lot of these matters we were almost the first with information. I also went to the Security Council at that time and I said, "South African troops are in Angola". They denied it and then later it was found it was true. South African troops were in Angola.

**SO: How had you picked that up, sir?**

AM: Oh that, you don't worry! *[Laughs]* We had to calculate at every moment, every minute of our being, day or night, what was happening, and what their moves would be. We were very weak relatively and they had so many resources so we just had to outdo them. We had to. We had to work hard.

**SO: So information really was power?**

AM: Not only information.

**SO: Communication?**

AM: It was intuition. Because information is massive and you don't always know when it is coming.

**SO: So it was analysis, as well?**

AM: It is keeping focus of your priorities and what you think is going to happen and, if you wish, like a dog with a bone, you don't let go. You bite onto that piece, no matter how much everybody says "No", and then you surprise yourself with your findings. So it was that kind of thing too. What gave it to

us I don't know but I think we had the single-minded perspective. For me, it was to try and make sure that we had the least amount of violence: we used to say and Nyerere then coined it very well. "It is the degree of unarmed pressure we can put on South Africa that will determine the amount of armed pressure we have to use."

**SO: Sir, if I could ask you, please, to comment on other African leaders within the Commonwealth such as President Seretse Khama, and General Olusegun Obasanjo, both of whom were patrons of the World Campaign. Did they provide simply affirmation of what you were already doing, or were they active?**

AM: No, they were active. They were all active. In Canada in 1973 I had a long talk with Seretse about various matters. It's just that they were all sympathetic. Also remember Seretse also had a very unpleasant experience with the British about his wife.

**SO: Yes.**

AM: I think that they all respected us because of what we did in Britain. We were not coming with any agenda or any favours, or saying how good or bad we are. We had a record and we were working in very difficult conditions in Britain with the rise of racism and Powellism. I remember that at times I used to get onto TV and now and then I'd be on the tube in Holborn or somewhere, and a strange Pakistani, or West Indian, would come up to me and say, "Oh thank you. I saw you on television. It's so good to know that there are people against racism." So, our campaigns also gave security to immigrants in Britain as the Anti-Apartheid Movement strengthened. Then some people wanted us to go into the field of race relations. I opposed it, because if we did we would not have a single subject Movement. We would divide our forces. But we would support others, so we would make statements of support but we did not have the expertise to work on it. But as far as a lot of our branches were concerned they were involved in different ways: For example, when I went to Birmingham in 1960, I found in the West Indian community there was great fear and we discussed issues with them. So although we were anti-apartheid and worked on Southern Africa, we talked to them about other

issues and the wisdom of certain issues. These were just additional things that happened that we didn't plan for at that time.

**SO: You're pointing to a dynamic of a moral agenda of racial justice in seeking the downfall of the apartheid regime, which went with working to combat racism within the UK?**

AM: Because the most remarkable experiences were the rugby demonstrations and the ones on cricket, because we worked on it. I remember I had a big fight once at one of our meetings when I said, "Apartheid sport, was totally wrong. Others said: We mustn't work on sport and focus on our political campaigns. This was settled early. I was representing the South African Non-Racial Olympic Committee from London after I left South Africa so I also went to the Olympic Conference in Baden Baden in 1963. So, I go there and I say, "South Africa must be excluded" and we gave papers to the participants. President Brundage, the Head of the IOC, refused to see me, so early one morning I knocked at his door. He sees me and I say, "Here is a letter for you" and I delivered a letter from Dennis Brutus who was a non-racial sports leader in South Africa and we had smuggled out the letter. Then we collected the Africans together. Algeria had just become independent. I spoke to Algeria and we went to the African Group and Algeria said, "If by the time we are ready to apply for the Olympics, South Africa is there, we won't even apply". We got the whole African Group together and decided to call for the suspension of South Africa. So they were suspended from the 1964 Games in Tokyo and then we made sure they were expelled later. The Western countries tried to reverse that decision several times but they didn't succeed. We did the same thing with a whole lot of other sports.

**SO: Speaking of other people who were particularly active, according to the AAM files: I would welcome your comment on Tunku Abdul Rahman, the Malaysian Prime Minister.**

AM: Whereas Mahathir is a modern radical, Tunku was a traditionalist. So I went to see him at the Dorchester I think. So Tunku says to me, "Are you a Muslim?" I said, "Yes" and he tells me, "I'm also a Muslim" and he then asks: "Tell me, one question: if I go to South Africa, they tell me I can't stay in any hotel. Is that true?" So I told him. We had a little booklet, *The Laws of South*

*Africa*, just a small one that gave all the facts and I gave him that. I said, "No you can't." He said, "But this is ungodly. How can they be in the Commonwealth?" Now, while we were concentrating on Nkrumah and for Nehru, and the big names, about the tactics to get South Africa out - this was the London Commonwealth meeting in 1961. Then Tunku comes out in the media saying, "This ungodly country cannot be in this Commonwealth" and he was considered to be very conservative - so when people like him turned, the others didn't have to do anything further. He had done all the work. So momentum was created and it was like a dam that had burst open. It just came, the pressure of many people because apartheid was so wrong. At that time we followed around the South African Prime Minister in London; we put a coffin on a car and wherever he went we followed him. It was a Sharpeville coffin to symbolise that massacre.

**SO: Sir, I'd like to ask you about the Nassau conference in 1985, your view of the Eminent Persons Group and also the 1986 London Special Review Meeting at Marlborough House. I am aware that in London you were organising vigils and boycotts, a day of action, prayers, declarations that were signed and presented, all of which comprised highly visible activism.**

**Please could you add more detail on this?**

AM: You see, we had to focus on the Commonwealth. We didn't have any other structure where things were happening like that and it is where, with Afro-Asian countries and one or two white countries, we had to do such things and demonstrate our support. It's not that we planned it like that but it was also - and it's now turned out to be very important for the future of the country and the continent - to show that there were white people in the world also opposed to apartheid. And all the demonstrations we had in London: this solidarity action made people in South Africa realise that whilst most whites inside the country were brutalising them there were whites abroad who were against apartheid and believed in a non-racial society.

**SO: Going back to your point about the importance of the particular Secretary General, Sonny Ramphal ...**

AM: He was absolutely courageous.

**SO: I am aware he called for sanctions against South Africa in February 1985, saying the world must use all the sanctions at its command against South Africa.**

AM: Yes. You see, he was totally committed and provided unique leadership at that time, followed by others who had to work in different circumstances.

**SO: A different style?**

AM: Yes, others had different ways of working but all had to be effective and they consulted regularly with AAM.

**SO: Yes. I also know in 1985 that the Commonwealth Secretariat was inviting Mike Terry to take part in media workshops that they were developing to counter South African propaganda.**

AM: Oh, that happened a great deal. We took part in many such events, and when the Commonwealth Committee [CCFMSA] was formed with the Canadian Foreign Minister as the Chair, I had to give evidence on the arms embargo.

**SO: Yes. That was in 1987.**

AM: Because I said to them at a meeting, they were hearing testimony in Lusaka, I think, and I said, "If there is an effective arms embargo, the apartheid regime will collapse" so they looked at me surprised and the Canadian Foreign Minister asked, "Can you show that?" I said, "Yes" so I gave them a document to show events that were occurring. So we wanted them to act on the arms embargo and financial sanctions because they had a decision to implement. So then the Canadian Foreign Minister says to me, "Will you come to Canada? I want to engage you with my team. How many can you bring? I can invite about 7 and altogether there will be about 15 people". So I told "I'm alone with a secretary in Oslo". So he asked, "How can you produce all this material?" I said, "I have to with some help". So, I went to Canada and had two days of talks. I took the opportunity to show gaps in the Canadian laws and Canada then corrected them; but this was our normal work,

remember, for the UN seminars that we arranged we made a study of each country's laws controlling arms trade, so that meant virtually all Western countries. So we had to say, "Belgium's law says this, Italy's says this." It was a lot of work and if we were wrong, we would have been discredited; but all these years they didn't find a single thing wrong with our information not one. We made no mistake.

**SO: So, you were providing vital information then for the Commonwealth sanctions committee?**

AM: And they interacted in the Committee on this evidence and then I told them in Canada, "The apartheid system is based on force and control, and the military and the police are integral to that structure. They do not have a lot of money to spend on defence. If you apply financial sanctions, it reduces even further their capacity. There is a big problem of morale among the whites; many are running away from the military, the white males, as conscripts. They were trying to enlist women but it failed. They are not Israel. Israel can enlist women to fight. South African white women can't go and fight." So, we put that to them - if you are effective in stopping the actual weapons reaching them, they will have no instruments to fight with; and although it's an industrialised society, they cannot make the weapons that they need and the planes are 30 years old. I said, "You won't drive a motor car 30 years old with confidence so how are you going to fly a plane that old?" Then the Israelis came in and helped South Africa to update those planes and to modernise them. They were built on the same French Mirage design but later called a Cheetah as if it was a new plane.

We had to cover all corners so I wrote to all of the major arms manufacturers to say, "You are not to sell to South Africa". So I would get a lot of letters back saying, "We have no intention to do so". I had to keep them. If I then found that one of them did, I would go to the UN and say, "This one did not comply. But I had to buy all the Jane's weapon system books and magazines and read them every week to monitor links with South Africa. I also read the South African propaganda magazine which I got under a false name every week.



But I don't think if they know even now that I'm the same person! I don't think they do! But I'm just saying is that we would go through it and read this every week. In it they would talk about new weapon systems and how they work; then I would follow that. Is South Africa going to need this? Is this naval communication system going to be useful for them? Is that essential? Then we would also write to the companies.

**SO: So were you tracking by 1988-89 the collaboration between Israel, Taiwan and Chile?**

AM: Yes, we published several reports about military collaboration with Israel and Taiwan. And regarding Chile: we caught them very nicely in 1990 when I was at the Namibian independence celebrations in Windhoek. The South African Minister of Defence went to Chile. He said he went there to talk about underground mines. Then I got a journalist to follow him in Chile and he sent me some information. Now, remember I'm in Namibia where South Africa is in occupation, so South African agents are watching me too in the hotel, so I'm a bit insecure. Then I go - and in those days we were using telexes - and send a telex to the UN. So this Defence Minister has gone there, he is going to show off this weapon system on wheels and it is being launched there as if it's a Chilean product. They had an arms exhibition in Chile at the time as well.

**SO: This is the G5 you're talking about?**

AM: Yes. So then I managed to get further information from these journalists, I said, "Please go and get me a picture of the tyre. Just take a big picture of the tyre and send that. So he managed. He got a picture and I said, "Describe it" over the telephone. But, you know, another difficulty is we didn't have much money, we couldn't make many international telephone calls now but anyway we found the information. Then they claimed in a statement, "This is a Chilean product". So I had to write to the UN and say, "It's a very strange Chilean product that has the tyre pressure in Afrikaans. Or is it made in Belgium by Flemish manufacturers?" Then I would write a whole piece about their collaboration.

**SO: And then you pointed that there was a link to Iraq too.**

**AM:** Iraq more seriously even threatened me. When I went to the UN with information about Iraq the US was defending Iraq. When I said, "The Iraqis are buying a variety of items from South Africa the Security Council Committee didn't seem to want to know. The Iraqi delegation wanted to see me. Of course the Security Council Committee meetings are confidential. The Iraqi representative tells me, "These things you are saying are untrue. You are also writing to my President." I had sent telexes to the President of Iraq." So I said, "You shouldn't be doing this – trading in arms with South Africa". He said, "No, we're not doing it. It's all Israeli propaganda you are promoting". So I said, "No-one's going to believe you in the Security Council because I have raised the question of Israel too. So you can tell everybody that I am promoting Israeli propaganda. You will not get very far, so don't try that one". Then he says, "Untrue". I said, "Yeah okay, what about this particular factory where you are making the cluster bombs and the fuses from South Africa? The things are there". So he sits up straight and says: "You seem to know a lot about our security", waving his finger at me. I said, "Yes, it's my job to find out about South African involvement and you shouldn't be dealing in arms with them". So he says, "You'd better be careful because we know what to do with people like you" and then they walked out.

**SO: Whoa!**

**AM:** But those things happened and they tried to intimidate us and they sent their diplomat to my office in Norway because I had written to their President. They said they wanted to meet me. I was at an international conference in Sweden out in the countryside and the Iraqi Ambassador in Sweden came to the conference venue. I thought he had some message for me. He says, "You are writing to my President." So I said, "Yes. Are you giving me an answer?" He says, "No, I don't know what you wrote to him about. I just had to come and meet you". So, I think these were intimidation efforts. They never gave me any substantial response. Then the South African regime gave credit guarantees for their arms trade with Iraq and I don't know that this was ever recovered.

**SO: I know.**

AM: South Africa was also asked to make a deal with Iran in the nuclear field with the Shah. There were many deals like that. From Norway via the World Campaign we also exposed all the Danish vessels that were taking arms to South Africa. The ships would go to the Canary Islands, then they would change the signals, and the ship would disappear and next they would arrive in South Africa. The South Africans took caravans, and special trailers to the ship which was put in a special harbour area; they also took prostitutes there, and lots of money. They escorted all the sailors who wouldn't be allowed anywhere else; they were given extra money and restricted since they were trafficking in arms. Italy was also a source for a lot of those arms.

**SO: Sir, please if I move away from discussing your monitoring of breaches of international arms sanctions against South Africa ...**

AM: Sorry, we've gone far from the Commonwealth!

*[Laughter]*

**SO: You've helped to put the Commonwealth in context, namely it was key individuals in the Commonwealth who were significant supporters of the anti-apartheid struggle; but the Commonwealth itself ...**

AM: No, the Commonwealth Secretariat on South Africa, for example, later, on sport: they played a very advanced role on information, because there were policies on it, you see. So I think we looked upon the Secretariat as an ally. That didn't mean that they could just adopt any anti-apartheid policies. So they were an ally. As I say, it was part of our normal work to see them in London.

**SO: How did others within the ANC, who were obviously outside South Africa, view the value of the Commonwealth?**

AM: They knew of our efforts and that I covered the Commonwealth Summits so it was okay.

**SO: Oh I see. So this was your designated responsibility.**

AM: Not only in relation to the ANC, but SWAPO too. SWAPO's representative, Peter Katjavivi, came to the Australian CHOGM (in Melbourne) and Thabo Mbeki came to the CHOGM in Kuala Lumpur. So often we encouraged them to attend but at least I was able to attend all the Summits. I would of course always inform them about all the issues, and we never had any differences.

**SO: I picked up a rumble in the AAM archives after the Vancouver meeting in 1987 - there was a long minute in November 1987, and I wondered whether this was representative of other points of concern among other members of the ANC who were not happy about the Commonwealth's media activities. Donald Woods had been appointed as a consultant to the Secretariat on anti-apartheid media, and there was a note saying that the ANC were concerned about this; also that the ANC wanted direct liaison with the Commonwealth Secretariat over the implementation of Vancouver. I quote: "They had to act fast so that the Commonwealth Secretariat didn't "fix things". I'm not saying that there was direct criticism of what you were doing, but I'm asking whether there were ANC points of concern about the Commonwealth Secretariat that needed to be addressed.**

AM: Not from me. If they had concerns of the Commonwealth - I'm not aware of any concerns. Well, not from the leadership. I don't know: maybe some others, because we used to share with all the liberation movements what we were doing. Also, remember in London we used to have anti-apartheid meetings: we had annual meetings, we had reports back from the Commonwealth, etc. When I came back from CHOGMs, sometimes we would have a semi-public meeting, everybody would come and we would be quite transparent. We informed all: "We did this, we did that. This we didn't achieve." People would tell us their views, because if we didn't have that kind of structure we would really not have succeed. The public could not have confidence in us if they didn't know what they were associated with what we were doing in their name. And then we always had a report in *Anti-Apartheid News* after the Commonwealth head's meeting. I would also be interviewed on the radio at times, so people had an idea of what we were doing.

**SO: Did you also provide briefing notes or points of contact for the Eminent Persons Group which went down to South Africa in between February and May 1986?**

AM: Yes, we did in advance and we would give it to the Commonwealth. A lot of it was also done quietly because we did not want them to be prejudiced.

**SO: When the ANC had private contacts with members of the South African NIA and then the later meetings at Mells Park: were you also involved in any way with these discussions?**

AM: No. We kept very much to the public things, to the policy issues, not with deeper negotiations between them because we said, "We are not intermediaries". We were very careful about that.

**SO: Thank you: because that would be a question from a historian, whether you were in fact a facilitator in any way?**

AM: No, we were very – well, a facilitator maybe we could say this one. But we were very clear. "We are not the mediators, and they mustn't talk to us instead of to the Liberation Movements."

**SO: So you were not a substitute nor an official spokesperson.**

AM: Yeah, it was solidarity. You see, our policies were that the liberation movements represent the people of the country. We are a support movement for them. So, we would ask everyone who wants to support us to also talk to their representatives. That would not only be the movements: it would also be if you wish generally as people now call 'civil society' or public opinion. So they must talk with Allan Boesak and *the UDF*; and the Commonwealth even flew Allan Boesak in and out of meetings related to apartheid.

**SO: Yes, I had a note that he was at a number of AAM meetings.**

AM: I was with him at some of the meetings as well.

**SO: Yes. Sir, did you have any discreet meetings with any members of the lower ranks of the British government?**

AM: Yeah, we did. First of all, before a Commonwealth meeting we'd go and see the Foreign Secretary. The Foreign Secretary may say, "See a Minister of State". We would go as a delegation. Some of them would be interested in detail in terms of what we had to say; they may not agree with us, but overall for all of them, in different amounts, we added value to the information they had. If you stretch right from African countries, Asian countries, Caribbean countries, that's what we did. So we also added value. Britain had a certain view; and we'd say, "No, but this is happening". They don't have to acknowledge it, but they recognised that there was another dimension. But Mrs Thatcher refused to meet us. Other Prime Ministers met us and Foreign Secretaries. But she was forced to meet us when she invited PW Botha to London; then she couldn't resist, and had to meet us. There was no way the public demonstrations could be stopped in London.

The unions also gave us a pledge: they wouldn't allow PW Botha to sleep anywhere in Britain. He wouldn't travel on any train, he would just be frozen in the country. So when he was brought to Switzerland and taken by plane to Heathrow and then by helicopter to Chequers Mrs Thatcher arranged the furniture so she wouldn't have to shake hands with him because the British were furious. The Germans carried out the same arrangement when he went to Germany, but he could sleep in Germany, but he couldn't sleep in Britain.

**SO: Did you know that the Foreign Secretary Geoffrey Howe, who was at Chequers at that meeting (with Malcolm Rifkind), knew that his son was part of the demonstration in Trafalgar Square?**

AM: Yes! Yes! Geoffrey Howe is a unique person, very, very unique. Yes, I have a lot of respect for him. RAB Butler, also, you see. He was Home Secretary in those early years and also had integrity. We had lots of refugees coming to London. I had to call them and the Home Office – I had a 24 hour emergency number. I had to call them; I often didn't get much sleep at that time because people were coming. Well, you see, we were following developments also in the 1980s, when many children were being killed in South Africa.

**SO:** Yes.

**AM:** We had 24,000 children in prison and we held a conference in Harare with Trevor Huddleston. At that moment people would call and say, "The following ten people are charged", and I would have to wake up at times and write the names very fast, to get hold of Canon Collins as well as the secret lawyers in South Africa, give them the names, make sure they appear in court when the trials took place because if they didn't, you could have people dying and many were being killed and tortured. So that period was really a very, very intense period and you had to be alert every minute when you'd get a call. And if someone at Heathrow risked being sent back on the plane we would have to make this one call and speak to the Chief Immigration Officer and said, "Please hold it. I'm getting hold of the Home Secretary's office". They would hold it until I got hold of the office and by that time the Home Secretary's office knew they had to deal with it because British politicians would be supporting us. People such as Jeremy Thorpe when he was Liberal leader helped us a great deal as did Humphrey Berkeley, a Conservative MP and a couple of others. We also had to fund the work on political prisoners and were calling for the release of South African political prisoners in 1963 because of the Rivonia Trial. You see, we set up special committees for such campaigns so that we didn't lose people who didn't agree with sanctions. So, they supported the campaign to release these people. So, we were, I think, - and now it's hindsight - we were very clever in setting up *ad hoc* structures, so those who didn't agree with us on one issue could still support other campaigns. And that is how we had to make each issue a campaign of its own, so for the Cultural Boycott we had Artists against Apartheid, then Local Government against Apartheid, Engineers against Apartheid, Architects against Apartheid, and so on -

**SO:** *[Laughs]*

**AM:** - but we had every category covered. So we set up all these structures and that meant that people who wanted to contribute in one area had work to do. So it mobilised a whole lot of the elite and others right across the board. This was unprecedented. CND even at its height didn't reach this level, so I think this was the last mass protest movement of its kind in Britain. And the other thing we proved wrong: many said that domestic opinion could never

influence foreign policy. Everybody says this in all the academic literature. But we did.

**SO: I don't agree. I think domestic politics does influence foreign policy.**

AM: Well, politics does, but domestic movements like these? They cannot because foreign policy is considered too important; it's also dealing with powers, alliances, NATO. That's how this idea goes but I mean we did, we broke that concept.

**SO: You're talking about civil society movements/grassroots activism?**

AM: Yes. Not that domestic policy doesn't. No, the domestic environment does; but this is now NGO activism, being able to change policy, not just influence it but to change policy? I think we did change policy. When Harold Wilson got elected I went to see him with Barbara [Castle] and within a week he agreed to come and address our rally in Trafalgar Square in 1963. It is 50 years ago, and it's vivid in my mind because we had to draft part of his text. He said he 'commits the Labour Party to an arms embargo against South Africa'. It was the first time so everybody was over the moon. When he got into power he didn't carry that out fully because they provided weapons for so-called external defence.

**SO: The shipment of Buccaneers in late 1964, yes.**

AM: Yes. So we went on with those campaigns. Then when Callaghan was Foreign Secretary, I saw him once and I said, "Look, your Buccaneers have crashed in South Africa. It is not so clever, and what is it you are defending?" Within two weeks Simonstown was over because what Callaghan was now saying 'it's not in Britain's Interest', so he reversed actually all the wisdom of the government bureaucracy.

**SO: Sir, I'm very conscious that I've taken up a lot of your time. I do have some brief questions about your particular view of whether the Commonwealth, the Commonwealth Secretariat or indeed the British government, was in any way useful as facilitators during the time of transition from 1990 to 1994?**



AM: Well, they all played their respective roles, but it would be in terms of their own policies and positions, but I think we as South Africans were strong enough to maintain our integrity. The argument that South Africa was going to have a race war: that was found to be wrong later. When I came back from Namibian Independence, in London, we had a big rally in Trafalgar Square. I didn't speak often at the rallies but then I spoke because I had just come from Windhoek; so I said, "Now South Africa cannot survive". A very good friend called me and she said: "You're wrong. It can't be. This cannot collapse". I said, "No, they have nowhere to go. They cannot sustain that power structure anymore. It's not possible". And I always had an approach of this military dimension that the apartheid regime rests on if we knock that from under their legs, they will collapse - not an overnight collapse or anything but that was the analysis I had set out in some of the booklets as well and actually that's what happened. People were surprised at the remarkable speed with which they transitioned, so I think the Western countries saw the light and told the South Africans, "You cannot afford a revolution, because other people have had a revolution" and that would have resulted in destruction of the country. So I think that intervention by them was to avoid a hot revolution. Then I think our Harare Declaration (1989) gave us the principles for the transition and the Commonwealth helped with that Harare Declaration. Anyway, it started as an African position so it was first an OAU position. You see, one can't underestimate the OAU because that's where we united a whole continent and when they did that; that influenced the Commonwealth and the UN. So Oliver Tambo had to get on many flights with this Harare Declaration and travelled the world to get support and later he got his stroke and he later then passed away; but that was one of the great sacrifices at that time.

**SO: Did you contribute to the drafting of the 1989 Harare Declaration?**

AM: Not directly, we had to follow the OAU and the UN. It was an OAU initiative also to prevent any specific white minority provision and for one person one vote.

**SO: Sir, in your view then, how much did the Commonwealth help to contribute to the final ending of apartheid rule?**

AM: I think the Commonwealth's role has often been underestimated by many, but the Commonwealth didn't work in isolation. So, the Commonwealth's value was that it covered several continents, it covered different cultures and all that and above all it included countries of the West and Australia and Canada, at different times took good positions. And Canada was probably the most progressive, if you wish, on the African side, to be joined later by Australia.

**SO: Under Malcolm Fraser.**

AM: Yeah, and he played a big part in the Zimbabwe settlement when Nyerere met Thatcher in Lusaka Mrs Thatcher was so nervous and she came late in the night. So, at the Summit she then met Nyerere and eventually there was a deal between them because the way it emerged was, "Thatcher, can you deliver Ian Smith? You can't". "Of course I can". "No, you can't". "Yes, of course I can. Can you deliver Mugabe?" "Yes, I think I can". So, that's how many say the Zimbabwe issue was resolved. So, later journalists asked Nyerere what happened and he was laughing and reportedly said, "No, she discovered that I didn't have horns and a tail!"

*[Laughter]*

**SO: It's interesting sir, you're emphasising very much Nyerere and not Kaunda.**

AM: No, Kaunda was an astounding person but Nigeria was also very important, but you see Nyerere was the fox who at the end of each CHOGM would prepare for what the next conference should do. And remember he was the Chairman of the Front Line States. Oh, he was a real fox. Before the meeting, he would say, "No, next we're going to do this. We must work out a reasonable way of helping them not to close the issue". The depth of the man was just enormous. The most underestimated African leader, enormously, Nyerere. You have to remember that when they became independent they had no defence force; they only had police units. They decided to support the liberation struggle; and they were bombed and attacked, they had to develop a military. They developed it and when they acted against Idi Amin, several western countries even condemned him. And though they said "Africans don't fight African dictators", he did. Some donors even said, "If you use a tin of

sardines from what we provide you, we will stop all aid.” That upset many intensely.

**SO: Yes, in '79.**

AM: So, history has a strange way of thanking people and appreciating what they did with their own resources. You see, in that region it's experience is unparalleled in the world, where that a liberation struggle in another country is supported by neighbours at great cost when a new country like Mozambique becomes independent it immediately supports the liberation struggle, it stops oil to Zimbabwe, it gets attacked. It doesn't stop, it continues to support the liberation struggle. So, where have you seen in the world that small countries that come out of independence act in solidarity when that threatens their very national survival? It doesn't happen anywhere else. There's no other region where it's happened. So as much as they knock Africa - it's an unparalleled history and there's no other region with that kind of solidarity.

**SO: And Cuba's internationalist contribution too.**

AM: Cuba's is a blood contribution.

**SO: Yes it was, blood and treasure.**

AM: I keep saying it. Even here in the UN people forget that Cuba's help was extraordinary. And of course the Nigerian President who recognised Angola and then he was assassinated: so there are all kinds of factors in our history and as the Cold War tried to engulf us then Nigeria always stood out for African freedom.. The West didn't want to confront Nigeria. Nigeria was a country that also paid attention to these issues, not just Tanzania. So, Nigeria worked with us very closely as well.

**SO: What of General Obasanjo?**

AM: I was fortunate to have been on his steering committee for the UN/OAU conferences in Nigeria in 1977. It was a very important conference and I worked with him mainly through his Foreign Minister. So, we worked with Nigeria from Day one. Nigeria couldn't at times understand how British

people were supporting Africa. Remember in their society, they did not have many white people or people of other races participating in African solidarity. They supported me a great deal. When I was running the office in Norway, at one time the new Conservative Norwegian government cut my funding. Nyerere told me, "Don't ask them for a penny again. I will give you money". But I could not take money from Tanzania. It's a very poor country. So, I fired my secretary and I bought myself a first computer *[laughs]*. A big -

**SO: It would have been the size of an armchair!**

AM: It was like a train engine, a very noisy thing!

**SO: *[Laughs]***

AM: Ten megabytes I think and I put much of the information in there and worked with what I now had, so I used to work all hours. New York would finish work at midnight our time, and then they'd say, "Tomorrow we want a resolution on this", or some other issue so I would draft it, and send it to New York. The next morning they would have it because of the time difference, so General Garba of Nigeria had always believed that I could process information rapidly because of the computer without understanding that it had to have all the information loaded onto it.

*[Laughter]*

So, but Tanzania continued with its support, and Nigeria later came to Oslo and gave us some money, "Continue your work". Of course, Olof Palme and Sweden continued with their support.

**SO: Sir, you began that by saying that you feel that the Commonwealth's contribution to transition is -**

AM: Is underestimated.

**SO: - underestimated, but it still shouldn't be overestimated.**

AM: Well, it depends what you expect its role to be. But CHOGM was a fantastic venue for exchanges between Heads and the other great thing about the Commonwealth is that the leaders seemed to love going to the retreat where

they take no officials; they talk to each other. I've been with President Mandela on such a retreat so I later knew that's where they talk one on one and collectively. They don't have any officials.

**SO: So you went to Auckland?**

AM: Yes. That was our first CHOGM. But for the others, we would be outside: President Nyerere would be inside. We'd send him a piece of paper with messages from time to time, he would come running out, we'd give him an update, he'd go in again and that is how our briefings with leaders carried on. Then sometimes they would come and say, "But where are you going? This thing is being discussed now, you know. It is important, Prime Minister X is going to raise this and so on". And the African Head would say, "No, we have to go and see the Queen", and we would think, "Good God, to see the Queen when this discussion is on?" so they would leave the Meeting because of their audiences with the Queen.

**SO: Sir, how much do you think the Queen has provided part of the invisible glue?**

AM: Yes, she has been very, very *good* on racism. She was very good on race relations issues but I think she's also grateful that Nehru and other leaders said she's Head of Commonwealth [NB: a reference to the 1949 London Declaration, confirmed in 1952]. So in addition to Head of Britain she's played that wider role impeccably, quietly. She's reportedly had disagreements with Mrs Thatcher on South Africa, didn't want race to become a factor on South Africa. I believe also for President Mandela and South Africa she has had a high regard.

**SO: Was there ever any doubt within the ANC about the desirability of re-joining the Commonwealth when President Mandela came to office in '94?**

AM: Never, no, and I was at the ceremony in London when we re-joined the Commonwealth. In '94 we had a thanksgiving service in the Abbey and then had a reception at the Commonwealth's Marlborough House with the Queen. I was there with the Deputy President Thabo Mbeki at that time. And then we

played our first proper cricket match with the British so Thabo insisted on taking me to Lords because we had run many of the sports campaigns against apartheid.. So, the people from the South African cricketing world: well, they were still the old racists, and they tried to get me thrown out of that even though the Deputy President -

**SO: Excuse me?**

AM: No, no, you see but they still hated me because of what I did before when I also debated with them in England. We stopped them [playing international cricket] so they were very nasty. At one point when we went from the Long Room and were going onto the field to shake hands with all the players they even tried to stop me. There was actually a real hatred because they demonised us since we were active in the Anti-Apartheid movement - we were portrayed as not working for the interests of the country.

**SO: Working in the interests of South Africa.**

AM: They had a vision, this is the cost of you imprisoning yourselves into things, so we had to see if we could -

**SO: Break out of that?**

AM: - get them out, yeah.

**SO: If I could just ask you finally about Auckland? That was where President Mandela made a phenomenally moral impact in saying that Nigeria should be suspended from the Commonwealth because Ken Saro-Wiwa and other eight Nigerians who were executed on the eve of the summit.**

AM: No, he said it; but he anticipated that people who talked about democracy and so on would support it, but they were not really ready for such a thing.

**SO: Were they not?**

AM: No. The British didn't want to confront Nigeria.

**SO: Oh? So if it hadn't been for President Mandela's -**

AM: They didn't want to confront Nigeria. In fact later we got Mozambique accepted as a member (of the Commonwealth); but it was done very cleverly.

**SO: In what way?**

AM: Well, English is not their main language.

**SO: No, that I know.**

AM: That was quite important in the Commonwealth *[laughs]*. No, that was it and then there was a huge rally for Mandela, the country was taken over and many of the things he said nobody could stand against him. It was just impossible, this personality. Yeah, no, no we had no hesitation to re-join the Commonwealth.

**SO: Sir, thank you very, very much indeed for your frank reminiscences.**

[END OF RECORDING]