

SUBJECT



PRIME MINISTER

CANBERRA

PRIME MINISTER'S
PERSONAL MESSAGE
SERIAL No. T12/79T

19/5/79

My dear Prime Minister,

Looking ahead, in particular to CHOGM in August, it is clear that Rhodesia is going to be a very difficult matter for all of us to deal with. I appreciate that you will be deeply involved in the question. Lord Carrington's meeting with our High Commissioner and officials in London on 14 May was most helpful and I am taking this opportunity to confirm to you personally the Australian views which were expressed at that meeting. I hope we can keep closely in touch in the coming months.

I am especially concerned that the Rhodesian issue could prove divisive at CHOGM. It has the potential to split the Commonwealth at a time when all the other signs have been pointing in the direction of enhanced Commonwealth harmony. Moreover, in its wider implications, the western approach to the Rhodesian question will have a crucial impact on the prospects for long term stability in southern Africa and on the future of western interests in Africa as a whole. In this respect, of course, Namibia is also very relevant and it will be most disappointing if the western initiative there cannot continue to go forward.

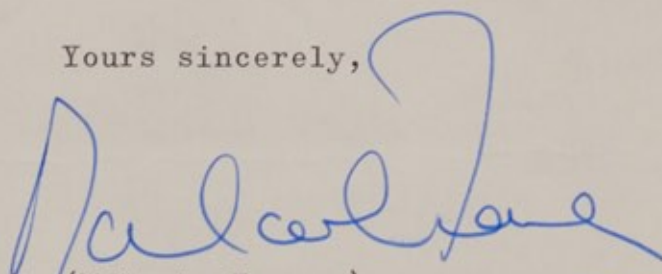
I am hopeful that at Lusaka formulations can be worked out to allow difficulties to be overcome, but there is bound to be a good deal of speculation, not least in the press, about the Rhodesian question hanging over the conference. In the meantime, the Australian Government will be approaching the question with a good deal of circumspection. We have said publicly on a number of occasions that the internal agreement in Rhodesia and the elections represent a significant step in the right direction compared with the situation before March 1978 and - and this is the point on which we have been placing some emphasis - that if the new administration were to show signs of being prepared to invite the Patriotic Front to join negotiations, this would be a welcome step. It is important I think for all of us to put stress on the need for some form of new political process which would enable the major Rhodesian elements, both internal and external, to be brought into contact and to work out arrangements for a settlement - the elections in themselves have not produced a basis for a satisfactory settlement. The new administration must prove itself and the Patriotic Front has to be drawn into negotiations.

You have a particular and special role to play on Rhodesia and I appreciate that you will be looking very closely at the sanctions question. There will also be important debates and decisions in Washington, and I note that Senate consideration has already begun. I warmly welcome the speed with which your Government is entering into high-level consultations with the United States administration. I need scarcely say that we will be watching developments most closely and I do hope that you will be able to keep us closely informed of your approach to the various aspects of the question. My Foreign Minister, Mr Peacock, will be taking the opportunity to talk to Lord Carrington during the OECD meeting in Paris on 13/14 June.

What is decided on Rhodesia will have repercussions for all of us. I believe it is still possible for a satisfactory settlement to be worked out. But may I say again that a principal concern in my mind is that formulations should be found to allow us to keep CHOGM on the rails at Lusaka. We must do all that we can to avert a situation which could bring old and new elements of the Commonwealth into an avoidable explosive confrontation over southern African issues.

I felt that the question of Rhodesia was of such importance that I should bring the Australian Government's attitude to your notice as soon as possible. There are several other matters, such as Australia's trade relations with the EEC and the imposition of licensing controls on imports of coking coal, which I would like to take up with you. However, I can appreciate the very heavy demands which are being made on your time at this early stage of your term. Accordingly, I shall be in touch with you on these matters later.

Yours sincerely,



(Malcolm Fraser)

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