

COMMONWEALTH SECRETARIAT

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Your ref:

Our ref:

C.151/4/5

15 January, 1980

*for
Print*

Commonwealth Committee on Southern Africa

As agreed by the Committee at its last meeting on 8 January 1980, the Secretary-General wrote to the Foreign Secretary (with a copy to the Lord Privy Seal) to convey the deep feelings and concerns outlined by members in regard to developments in Southern Rhodesia.

In Lord Carrington's absence abroad, the Secretary-General has now received the attached reply from the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Mr. Richard Luce, MP, which is brought to the attention of members of the Committee.

The Secretary-General continues to be in touch with the British Government and will keep High Commissioners informed of further developments.

M Malhoutra

M. Malhoutra
Committee Secretary

Copies To:

As per circular (2)

Copy of letter dated 14 January 1980
from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary
of State, Richard Luce MP

In the absence of Peter Carrington and Ian Gilmour abroad, I have been asked to reply to your letters of 8 and 9 January about the presence of South African forces at Beitbridge. The Government take careful note of the concern felt by members of the Commonwealth Committee on Southern Africa on this, and Ian Gilmour and I should be happy to discuss it further with you.

We are all agreed that it is of the utmost importance that there should be no external interference in Rhodesia if the conditions for free and fair elections are to be created. This was the objective of Peter Carrington's assurance which you quote, that there would be no external involvement in Rhodesia under the British Governor. The assurance remains valid.

The Governor has looked very carefully at the position on the ground in the light of the situation he inherited and of the response to the Ceasefire Agreement. As you know, the bridge, which is shared property between Rhodesia and South Africa, is vital to the economies of Rhodesia, South Africa and to other countries. Damage to it would have very serious consequences in the region. The South African contingent which we have agreed should guard it is small and is present uniquely for the protection of the bridge. There is no question of this contingent being used elsewhere in Rhodesia or of it being able to intervene in the internal affairs of the country. There is moreover a team from the Monitoring Force nearby and I am satisfied that this gives us sufficient assurance that the role of the South African forces there will be limited to the protection of the bridge. We do not therefore accept that the presence of a small South African contingent to guard Beitbridge amounts to external involvement in Rhodesia in a way which would prejudice conditions for elections. The Governor will however keep the need for this special measure of protection under review.

I should also like to draw your attention to the serious threat to the Lancaster House Agreements which is presented by continuing breaches of the ceasefire on the part of some Patriotic Front (and particularly Zanla) forces. These have included continued cross-border movement, refusal to move to assembly points, acts of violence and intimidation of the local population. These acts are in violation of the Agreements signed at Lancaster House. The Governor has applied the Agreement flexibly to allow the fullest possible assembly of Patriotic Front forces and has made use of the Ceasefire Commission and Patriotic Front commanders to deal with breaches of the ceasefire.

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The activities I have described are not consistent with the undertakings, to which all parties at the Conference subscribed, to renounce the use of force for political ends and to campaign peacefully and without intimidation, and make it difficult for free political activity to take place. I hope that you and the Commonwealth Governments concerned will use your influence to secure the earliest possible end to these continuing violations of the Lancaster House Agreements.

Signed: Richard Luce

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