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Letter dated 5 December 1990 from the Minister for Foreign Affairs of South Africa addressed to the President of the General Assembly

The Government of South Africa is concerned that the parameters set by the report of the Special Committee against Apartheid and the tenor of many contributions thus far to the general debate reflect the outdated prejudices of past decades - almost as if nothing has happened since Mr. F. W. de Klerk assumed the Presidency in September last year. The General Assembly has no jurisdiction in terms of the Charter of the United Nations to discuss this subject. I say in all earnestness that this debate is inappropriate, uncalled for and counterproductive. Things have changed in South Africa. Is the Assembly incapable of adjusting to change as we in South Africa have done over recent months?

Let me review the course of developments since September last year.

At his inauguration a little more than a year ago, President de Klerk said that his goal was a new South Africa; a totally changed South Africa; a South Africa that had rid itself of the antagonisms of the past; a South Africa free of domination or repression in whatever form.

How far have we progressed in this direction?

- More than 100 discriminatory laws and regulations have been repealed. Only three apartheid laws still remain: two of these, the Group Areas Act and the Land Acts, will be repealed when Parliament resumes next year. The third, the Population Registration Act, will fall away when a new constitution is adopted. My Government's commitment to removing the last pillars of apartheid is therefore final and irreversible. As far as we are concerned apartheid is something of the past;

- My party, the National Party, which is the ruling party, has opened its ranks to all South Africans irrespective of colour. This further underlines our rejection of racial discrimination in all its forms and the irreversibility of our commitment to the removal of all aspects of racial discrimination from government policy;

- We have committed ourselves to a process of negotiations with all political leaders and parties with a recognized constituency with a view to formulating a new constitution for South Africa that will have the support of a majority of the total population of the country;

- Mr. Mandela and his associates have been released;

- The African National Congress (ANC), the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (PAC) and other organizations have been legalized so that they may participate freely in the political process;

- The state of emergency has been lifted throughout the country;

- We have publicly undertaken to review existing security legislation in order to ensure that there is no restraint on normal, free political activity. This will be attended to when Parliament meets next year.

Obstacles to the commencement of negotiations on a new constitution were removed with the adoption of the Pretoria Minute by the ANC and my Government on 6 August 1990.

A salient feature of the Accord was the announcement by the ANC that the organization was suspending all armed action and related activities. Agreement was also reached on a definition of political offences in the South African situation and on a planned action for the release of prisoners and the granting of indemnity to certain persons and categories of persons.

The Accord notes that in the light of the agreement reached, "the way is now open to proceed towards negotiations on a new constitution". Exploratory talks to this end are taking place.

This agreement is most significant and, in the words of the Pretoria Minute, "can become a milestone on the road to true peace and prosperity for our country".

President de Klerk has made it abundantly clear what the Government of South Africa would strive for:

- A multi-party democracy with regular elections;

- Acceptance of the right of all South Africans to participate in government at all levels through power-sharing without domination;

- Protection of minorities against the abuse of majority power by means of checks and balances written into the constitution as in the United States and elsewhere. In the new South Africa, the colour of a person's skin or his race will not form the power base of any political party. Shared interests, values and standards will transcend racial lines so that "minority" and "majority" should no longer be mistaken for "white" and "black". Indeed my Party's objective will be to become a majority party;
- A vote of equal value for all, in other words, a system of one man, one vote;
- An independent judiciary;
- Freedom of religion;
- Freedom of assembly and expression;
- Freedom of the press;
- A market-oriented economic system;
- The right to own and dispose of private property;
- Recognition of the needs of those suffering as a result of backlogs. I refer to the needs of the lesser privileged of our country and our region and the necessity to redress those backlogs and to be innovative in our approach;
- An entrenched and justiciable Bill of Rights in the best tradition of a modern democracy.

These are the outlines of the new South Africa for which we are working. Against this background, many of the proposals for the draft resolutions before the Assembly make no sense at all.

There is widespread acceptance by Governments that the changes in South Africa are irreversible. President Bush and other government leaders, including African leaders, with whom President de Klerk and I have had discussions in recent months have acknowledged this reality, some publicly and openly. Several African Heads of State whom we have visited and African Governments that have sent various delegations to South Africa in recent months have agreed that the way is now open to normalize relations with South Africa and that the time has arrived for us in Africa to work together to evolve joint economic development plans based on close regional co-operation. I ask those African representatives who profess to be aware of what is going on in South Africa and the rest of Africa: "How do you serve the interests of your people by expending time and energy on a debate that should not be taking place?" They should not be instigating further discord, which has already caused so much havoc on the African continent. They should rather be encouraging negotiations and other peaceful means of resolving differences.

It is time the international community and the Assembly in particular reconcile themselves to the new realities of South Africa.

It is discouraging to note the recapitulation of outdated accusations and the refusal of some delegations to acknowledge what the ANC itself acknowledged in the Pretoria Minute of 6 August 1990, that "the way is now open to proceed towards negotiations on a new constitution". Instead they insist that a climate conducive to negotiations has yet to be created. Allegations of destabilization of neighbouring countries are a relic of the past. The fact is that the Government of South Africa has publicly undertaken to desist from all military assistance to Unita and Renamo and we believe that the Governments of Angola and Mozambique accept our good faith in this respect.

It is particularly disconcerting that the report of the Special Committee against Apartheid should be encouraging the continued imposition of measures aimed at pressurizing the Government of South Africa into moving in a direction to which it is already committed. We are aware that this echoes the ANC. However, the ANC will one day be required to account to its people for the misery this political strategy has created for them.

An estimated 350,000 black workers enter the labour market in South Africa each year. Our economy requires a real growth rate of 5 per cent per annum to be able to accommodate them. We registered a growth of marginally more than 2 per cent in 1989. The prospects in this calendar year are no better.

We need to build a new school every day of the year to accommodate the increase in black children reaching school-going age. This is beyond our means unless our economic growth rate can be rapidly increased.

Those advocating a continuation of punitive measures, including the ANC, must realize that the campaign is hurting the disadvantaged in our society. Maintaining sanctions simply causes a delay in restoring our ability to provide jobs and essential services in such fields as education, health and housing and to bridge the gap between the haves and the have-nots. The Government requires no inducement to continue the process of constitutional change, as events of the past 12 months have demonstrated. Our commitment is final.

Our development goals are aimed at redressing backlogs and inequalities, but overseas investors are being frustrated in their attempts to play a role in this respect by restraints placed on them by the sanctions policies of their Governments.

The implications of economic restraints extend beyond our borders. Regional economic revival is dependent on the state of South Africa's economy. This is recognized in the Dublin Declaration of the European Council of 26 June 1990:

"The European Council holds the view that the new South Africa, which will have harnessed the full richness, not only of its physical, but also of its abundant human resources, has the potential to act as a stimulus for growth in the southern African region. The European Council looks forward to being able to welcome, in the near future, a new, democratic and economically prosperous South Africa as it takes its proper place as an African nation in the international community."

Other forces are also shaping the region's destiny. Profound changes have taken place in the relationships between nations, especially the super-Powers, and within nations and communities. But for the crisis in the Middle East, a new spirit of reconciliation and co-operation has dawned. An unplanned renaissance has caught all of us unawares. The Berlin Wall has collapsed. The division of Europe is disappearing. There is a determined move towards "Europe 1992". The restructuring of Europe is imminent.

We in Africa, in South and southern Africa, are asking ourselves: where do we fit in with this monumental change?

The 11 States of southern Africa have a combined population of 100 to 110 million. The region is endowed with valuable natural resources and has the potential to become one of the most prosperous regions of the world.

But, in order to succeed in this objective, the nations in southern Africa, who have been divided by colonialism, wars, conflicts and racial strife, will have to join hands, work together and plan together in order to achieve their common dream of a better future.

Given the far-reaching developments in Central and Eastern Europe, Africa is running the risk of being marginalized and being forgotten.

According to the latest World Bank report, the foreign debt of sub-Saharan Africa amounted to \$143.2 billion in 1989 - \$4 billion higher than in 1988.

The latest report of the International Finance Corporation in London shows that Africa south of the Sahara received development aid to the value of \$83 billion in the period 1980 to 1988. Despite this, the standard of living in sub-Saharan Africa decreased by 1.2 per cent per annum.

In 1970, sub-Saharan Africa's share of world trade amounted to 2.3 per cent. By 1985 it had decreased to 1.3 per cent, and currently it constitutes less than 1 per cent.

Africa south of the Sahara, with its 450 million people, has a GDP equal to that of Belgium, a country with a population of 10 million. The GDP of South Africa is not included in this calculation.

The latest World Bank report concluded that "the economic outlook for Africa is potentially devastating", but also states "it is reasonable to assume that solutions will be found to the problems that have divided the people of the southern African region and that southern African economic co-operation will eventually transform the prospects of the whole of southern Africa".

It is clear from the foregoing that African States, including those of southern Africa, will, particularly in the wake of developments in Central and Eastern Europe, be required to design their own programme for survival and development.

Events in Eastern Europe and the prospect of a restructured European Community have resulted in a dramatic reassessment of priorities by European nations and the super-Powers. It is a fact that these developments, particularly in Europe, which has traditionally been the part of the industrialized world with the closest ties to Africa, have caused anxiety, concern and doubt in the minds of many African leaders. They are concerned because the opening of markets and investment opportunities in Central and Eastern Europe might draw investors away from Africa and reduce interest in the economic development of the African continent. It is clear that we in Africa will have to put our house in order if we are to remain a factor in world affairs. A few weeks ago the Chairman of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda, urged African countries to speed up the formation of a continental economic community to co-ordinate an envisaged reduction in European aid and trade after 1992.

At the two day OAU conference on stability, security and co-operation in Africa last month, the Secretary-General of the Organization, Mr. Salim Ahmed Salim, said in his opening speech to the meeting that Africa was bound to lose preferential trade arrangements with European countries after the establishment of the single market in Europe. He said Africa had no choice but to pursue the goal of collective self-reliance.

Mr. Salim said Africa could no longer live under the illusion of continued economic support from Europe because Europe was turning more and more to itself and giving priority to its own problems. He called for moves to set up an African economic community and for the strengthening of African economic regional groupings, hopefully by next June, when an African economic conference is scheduled to be held at Abuja, Nigeria.

In southern Africa there already exist structures that can form the basis for planning and implementing a southern Africa development programme. In all the disciplines of importance there are structures and organizations with experience and expertise in trade, investment, transport, technology, water, electricity, labour and tourism - either in some of the countries of the region or in South Africa: the Southern African Regional Commission for the Conservation and Utilization of the Soil, the Southern African Regional Tourism Council, the Southern African Monetary Union, the Southern African Customs Union, the Development Bank of Southern Africa, the Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference. We thus have a wide diversity of structures available that can be integrated, jointly utilized, adapted and expanded and can set southern Africa upon a course of progress.

You may ask: "What can South Africa contribute?" My reply is that South African expertise can make substantial contributions in the fields, inter alia, of agriculture, mining, civil engineering and construction, business and marketing, health, education, communications and scientific research.

If the resources of all the countries of southern Africa were to be combined, we could present a large and stable market to the world and the region would be well placed to do business in world markets. South Africa wishes to be an equal partner and no more in the development of our sub-continent.

As we place old divisions and bankrupt ideologies behind us, the prospects for broadening and deepening that co-operation to mutual benefit must be bright. South Africa shares with the rest of Africa a desire to put the differences of the past behind us and to rise to the new challenges of the last decade of this century. A new South Africa is being created. A new southern Africa is within sight.

There is no need for the Assembly to continue to focus on the confrontational issues of the past; they are no longer relevant. Let us confront instead the compelling development needs of the African continent and of the southern African region in particular. That moment has now arrived.

I should be grateful if the present letter could be circulated as an official document of the General Assembly under agenda item 34.

(Signed) R. F. BOTHA

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