

November 12, 1985

**Letter from South African President P.W. Botha to
UK Prime Minister Thatcher**

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Summary:

Letter from South African State President to Margaret Thatcher, thanking her for her support at the meeting of Commonwealth heads, but stating South Africa's objection to the intervention by foreign delegations. He argues that this would give South Africa an ultimatum and disrupt the ongoing internal negotiations.

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Union Buildings
Pretoria

SECRET AND PERSONAL

12 November 1985

Dear Prime Minister

Thank you for your personal message of 31 October which I have studied most carefully. The candid way in which you expressed your views on developments at Nassau is appreciated.

You may be assured that I have much understanding for your position vis-à-vis the Commonwealth. We are, moreover, gratified by the strong, principled, stand that you and Sir Geoffrey Howe have taken against economic sanctions and also by your refusal to meet with the ANC for so long as that organisation remains committed to violence.

I must, however, tell you - informally and confidentially since we have not been officially approached to date - that my Government will find it impossible to co-operate with the Commonwealth initiative. The insurmountable problem that Nassau presents has to do with both principle and practical concerns of great importance.

The principle I refer to relates to the nature, scope and presentation of the Commonwealth initiative. The initiative is announced by foreign governments, who formally decide upon a course of action which directly bears upon the most crucial issues falling squarely within the national concerns of a sovereign nation. South Africa is not consulted. We are confronted with a fait accompli, reinforced by the threat of further sanctions, embraced within an ultimatum.

Our practical concerns are equally serious. Our primary objective is to advance reform by means of negotiation between our diverse communities. Intrusion into this process by those who are the originators of threats of punitive measures cannot facilitate this process. Indeed, it would do the exact opposite by polarizing opinions and sharpening divisions.

Democratic reform is our objective. We must necessarily assume that a group that is representative of the Commonwealth is likely to include governments whose commitments to democratic government and fundamental rights are, to say the least, suspect. Names and countries now being mentioned do, indeed, include states which are fairly described as total strangers to democracy. Such persons would not be acceptable to important sections of the South African public. The sort of reaction I anticipate might even limit my Government's options as regards advancing reform. I trust that you will understand that many Commonwealth countries exactly represent the fears of many South Africans who are opposed to my Government's policy.

Were it not for your admirable efforts, I would have had no hesitation in rejecting the Nassau initiative outright. Cognisant as we are of your position, we have endeavoured to explore all possible ways in which we could accommodate your concerns. In our view, there are two possible options.

Firstly, I reiterate that we would be prepared to consider sympathetically the possibility of emissaries of individual governments visiting South Africa, to which I referred in my letter of 22 October. The purpose would be to acquaint


themselves with the realities of the South African situation and to hold discussions with representatives of my Government, various communities, the private sector and other interested parties on the same basis as that which pertained to the EEC Foreign Ministers in August 1985.

Alternatively, we have informally learned of a study being undertaken by the Foundation for International Conciliation. We understand that your Government is informed about this project which is already well-advanced. The Foundation members involved in this project are recognised experts in constitutional, legal and political matters.

I do not know what conclusions the Foundation's study will reach. Whatever they may be, my initial impression is that the work of the Foundation could be viewed by us in a very different way from which we regard the Commonwealth initiative. In essence the former are not closely associated with foreign governments. Their actions do not represent politically inspired intrusions or threats of punitive measures. This does not, of course, mean that we feel bound by such conclusions as they may reach. It is rather a question of being able to take account of advice which is offered on a constructive basis devoid of extraneous considerations.

If you feel that the Foundation's project, together with a visit by the persons involved to South Africa, is a viable alternative, I will not stand in the way of it being pursued. My Ambassador will be in a position to provide further information to your Government as to the basis on which discussions with the South African Government, other leaders and communities might be arranged.

Yours sincerely



P.W. BOTHA
STATE PRESIDENT OF THE
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

The Rt. Hon. Margaret Thatcher, MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London

Union Buildings
Pretoria

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[signature]

P.W. Botha

State President of the Republic of South Africa

The Rt. Hon. Margaret Thatcher, MP

Prime Minister

10 Downing Street

London