

**January 9, 1986**

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

**Citation:**

"Letter from UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher to South African President P.W. Botha", January 9, 1986, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Available via [margaretthatcher.org/archive](https://margaretthatcher.org/archive). Included in "Southern Africa in the Cold War, Post-1974," edited by Sue Onslow and Anna-Mart Van Wyk.  
<https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/118372>

**Summary:**

Letter from Margaret Thatcher to South African State President P.W. Botha expressing her appreciation for how cooperative he has been with the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group, and urging him to continue. Notes that a successful speech and a positive meeting with the Group will significantly alter international opinion toward South Africa and greatly reduce the likelihood of eventual economic sanctions.

**Credits:**

This document was made possible with support from Leon Levy Foundation

**Original Language:**

English

**Contents:**

Original Scan  
Transcript - English



BRITISH EMBASSY  
PARLIAMENT STREET, CAPE TOWN

9 January 1986

Private Secretary to  
the State President of the Republic  
of South Africa  
Tuynhuys  
Cape Town

*Dear Private Secretary,*

I enclose the text of a further message dated  
8 January, just received at the Embassy, which is  
addressed to the State President from the Rt Hon  
Mrs Margaret Thatcher MP.

*Yours sincerely*

*Patrick Moberly*

P H Moberly  
HM Ambassador



CONFIDENTIAL

MESSAGE FROM THE PRIME MINISTER TO PRESIDENT P W BOTHA

Dear Mr President

Thank you for your letter of 24 December as well as for your earlier letter of 14 December which crossed with mine of the same date.

I greatly appreciate the positive and constructive way in which you have responded to the approach from the co-Chairmen of the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group. The Commonwealth Secretariat are pursuing the question of dates for the visit with the Group and will no doubt be in touch with your Government shortly.

I am also much encouraged by your comments both to me and to the co-Chairmen about your determination to proceed with reform and begin negotiations. You may recall that in my letter of 31 October I urged the importance of presenting your proposals as a major new initiative. Events since then have only strengthened my view on this. I am sure that you do not need advice from me about how to handle the expectations which are building up for your opening speech. Yet a forthright bringing together of your policies, including a firm timetable for new legislation which would remove important aspects of discrimination, could have a great impact. If it was then followed by a successful visit by the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group, the international climate towards South Africa might be considerably altered. Support for peaceful change would be vindicated and that for coercion and violence weakened.

I have urged others not to prescribe exact solutions to South Africa's problem and shall not presume to do so myself. You will know what measures you need to adopt to transform the situation. My letter of 31 October made various suggestions about what would have the greatest international effect. But it must be for you to judge. Let me simply underline the crucial importance of what you do for the policies of others in the coming year.

/I very

**CONFIDENTIAL**

I very much regret that the end of last year and the beginning of this should have been marked by an upsurge of violence against civilians within South Africa. There can be no sympathy or justification for acts of indiscriminate violence and we have condemned them firmly. At the same time, I suspect that your enemies may be seeking through the planting of landmines and other such incidents to provoke you into military reprisals against your neighbours. These would inevitably cause a new wave of international protest and increase the pressures for sanctions. I hope very much that you will seek diplomatic solutions to the problems as you have done recently with Zimbabwe, despite the strong feelings which such wanton attacks naturally arouse.

May I extend my best wishes to you for the New Year and to say how valuable I have found it to be able to correspond frankly and confidentially with you. Let us continue to do so.

Yours sincerely

**MARGARET THATCHER**

Confidential

British Embassy

Parliament Street, Cape Town

9 January 1986

Private Secretary to the State President of the Republic of South Africa  
Tunyhuys  
Cape Town

Dear Private Secretary, [written]

I enclose the text of a further message dated 8 January, just received at the Embassy, which is addressed to the State President from the Rt. Hon. Mrs. Margaret Thatcher MP.

Yours Sincerely [written]  
Patrick Moberly [signature]  
P.H. Moberly  
HM Ambassador

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MARGARET THATCHER