

MEETING OF COMMONWEALTH PRIME MINISTERS

The attached is the official text of the Communique issued at the conclusion of the Meeting of Commonwealth Prime Ministers in London on March 17th, 1961.

It replaces the text issued in Canberra on March 18th, 1961, immediately following the receipt of cables from London.

Alterations have been made on page 2 of the Communique and in paragraphs 3(f) and 7 of ANNEX 1, and these have been underlined.

From the Government Public Relations Office,
Canberra.

April 6th, 1961

MEETING OF COMMONWEALTH PRIME MINISTERS

FINAL COMMUNIQUE - MARCH 17th, 1961

The Meeting of Commonwealth Prime Ministers was concluded to-day. Pakistan, Ghana and Cyprus were represented by their Presidents. The other Commonwealth countries were represented by their Prime Ministers.

It had been agreed that on this occasion the Prime Ministers would concentrate their main attention on a limited number of specific problems which are currently of common concern to them all - namely, disarmament, the structure of the United Nations and certain constitutional problems affecting the Commonwealth itself. At the outset of the Meeting, however, the Prime Ministers held a general review of the international situation as a whole, in order to set these particular problems in the perspective of current world events. They also considered, in the course of their Meeting, recent developments in the Congo and in South East Asia.

The Prime Ministers re-affirmed the support of their Governments for the efforts of the United Nations to restore order in the Congo and to secure the independence and integrity of the Republic. They deplored outside intervention in the Congo and recognised that many of the problems which had arisen were due to such intervention. They considered that the United Nations forces in the Congo should be strengthened and that the Security Council resolution of 21st February should be fully implemented.

The Prime Ministers noted with concern the situation which had developed in Laos. They expressed the hope that the parties would be able to reconcile their differences, that intervention from outside would cease, and that Laos would be enabled to enjoy an independent, neutral and peaceful existence.

The Prime Ministers held a full discussion on the problem of disarmament. They recognised that this was the most important question facing the world to-day and considered that a favourable opportunity was now at hand for a fresh initiative towards a settlement of it. They agreed that the aim should be to achieve general and complete disarmament, subject to effective inspection and control, on the general lines indicated in the statement in Annex 1 of this communique. They recalled the resolution on general and complete disarmament which was adopted unanimously at the 14th session of the General Assembly. They agreed that every effort should be made to implement this resolution by agreement between the major powers, and that further negotiations for this purpose were necessary. Certain proposals designed to promote such negotiations have been put by various countries before the United Nations.

The Prime Ministers expressed their hope that the negotiations on the cessation of nuclear weapons tests, which were due to re-open at Geneva on 21st March, would lead to the early conclusion of an agreement on this subject. Such an agreement, apart from its importance in itself, would provide a powerful impetus towards agreement on disarmament generally.

The Prime Ministers considered the various proposals which have recently been put forward for changes in the structure of the United Nations - including, in particular, the structure of its Councils, the position of the Secretary-General and the organisation of the Secretariat. They recognised that such changes could only be made with general consent. They agreed that, whatever adjustments might be made, it remained vitally important to uphold the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter and to preserve the international and independent character of the Secretariat. They further agreed that members of the Commonwealth shared with all nations a fundamental common interest in maintaining the integrity of the United Nations as a force for orderly political, economic and social progress throughout the world.

The Prime Ministers also discussed certain constitutional questions relating to Commonwealth membership. The conclusions reached were announced in communiques issued on 13th, 15th, and 16th March relating, respectively, to Cyprus, South Africa, and Sierra Leone. The text of these communiques is reproduced in Annex 11.

STATEMENT ON DISARMAMENT

Aim

1. The aim must be to achieve total world-wide disarmament, subject to effective inspection and control.
2. In view of the slaughter and destruction experienced in so-called "conventional" wars and of the difficulty of preventing a conventional war, once started, from developing into a nuclear war, our aim must be nothing less than the complete abolition of the means of waging war of any kind.

Principles

3. An agreement for this purpose should be negotiated as soon as possible, on the basis of the following principles -
 - (a) All national armed forces and armaments must be reduced to the levels agreed to be necessary for internal security.
 - (b) Once started, the process of disarmament should be continued without interruption until it is completed, subject to verification at each stage that all parties are duly carrying out their undertaking.
 - (c) The elimination of nuclear and conventional armaments must be so phased that at no stage will any country or group of countries obtain a significant military advantage.
 - (d) In respect of each phase there should be established, by agreement, effective machinery of inspection, which should come into operation simultaneously with the phase of disarmament to which it relates.
 - (e) Disarmament should be carried out as rapidly as possible in progressive stages, within specified periods of time.
 - (f) At the appropriate stage, a substantial and adequately armed military force should be established, to prevent aggression and enforce observance of the disarmament agreement; and an international authority should be created, in association with the United Nations, to control this force and to ensure that it is not used for any purpose inconsistent with the Charter.

4. On the basis of the above principles, it should be possible, given goodwill on both sides, to reconcile the present differences of approach between the different plans put forward.

Negotiations

5. The principal military powers should resume direct negotiations without delay in close contact with the United Nations, which is responsible for disarmament under the Charter. Since peace is the concern of the whole world, other nations should also be associated with the disarmament negotiations, either directly or through some special machinery to be set up by the United Nations, or by both means.

6. Side by side with the political negotiations, experts should start working out the details of the inspection systems required for the measures of disarmament applicable to each stage, in accordance with the practice adopted at the Geneva Nuclear Tests Conference.

7. Every effort should be made to secure rapid agreement to the permanent banning of nuclear weapons tests by all nations and to arrangements for verifying the observance of the agreement. Such an agreement is urgent, since otherwise further countries may soon become nuclear powers, which would increase the danger of war and further complicate the problem of disarmament. Moreover, an agreement on nuclear tests, apart from its direct advantages, would provide a powerful psychological impetus to agreement over the wider field of disarmament.

8. Disarmament without inspection would be as unacceptable as inspection without disarmament. Disarmament and inspection are integral parts of the same question and must be negotiated together; and both must be made as complete and effective as is humanly possible. It must, however, be recognised that no safeguards can provide one hundred per cent protection against error or treachery. Nevertheless, the risks involved in the process of disarmament must be balanced against the risks involved in the continuance of the arms race.

9. It is arguable whether the arms race is the cause or the result of distrust between nations. But it is clear that the problems of disarmament and international confidence are closely linked. Therefore, while striving for the abolition of armaments, all nations must actively endeavour to reduce tension by helping to remove other causes of friction and suspicion.

CYPRUS

Communique issued on 13th March, 1961

At their meeting this morning the Commonwealth Prime Ministers accepted a request from the Republic of Cyprus for admission to Commonwealth membership. They invited the President of the Republic to join the Meeting.

SOUTH AFRICA

Communique issued on 15th March, 1961

At their meetings this week the Commonwealth Prime Ministers have discussed questions affecting South Africa.

On 13th March the Prime Minister of South Africa informed the Meeting that, following the plebiscite in October, 1960, the appropriate constitutional steps were now being taken to introduce a republican form of constitution in the Union, and that it was the desire of the Union Government that South Africa should remain within the Commonwealth as a republic.

In connection with this application the meeting also discussed, with the consent of the Prime Minister of South Africa, the racial policy followed by the Union Government. The Prime Minister of South Africa informed the other Prime Ministers this evening that in the light of the views expressed on behalf of other member Governments and the indications of their future intentions regarding the racial policy of the Union Government, he had decided to withdraw his application for South Africa's continuing membership of the Commonwealth as a republic.

SIERRA LEONE

Communique issued on 16th March, 1961

The Prime Ministers noted that Sierra Leone would attain independence on 27th April, 1961.

They looked forward to welcoming Sierra Leone as a member of the Commonwealth on the completion of the necessary constitutional processes.