



PRIME MINISTER

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ADDRESS AT OPENING SESSION OF CHOGM

This is an historic occasion. It is the first time that a regular Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting has been held in Africa. You, Mr. President, have been firm in your resolve that, whatever the difficulties, this conference should be held in Zambia - a member country which occupies a front line position in South African affairs, which has suffered greatly because of the problems of the region, and which has much to contribute to the resolution of those problems.

Mr. President, I believe you to be right in your conviction that the logic of the Commonwealth's history and character required that this conference be held in Southern Africa. The Commonwealth as it is represented here is the product of a movement which has swept the world over the last thirty years, converting colonies into independent countries and establishing political equality between peoples, irrespective of race and colour. Mr. President, in terms of that major transformation in global affairs, there is still unfinished business to be attended to in Southern Africa and time is running out. As the process began in the Commonwealth, as the Commonwealth has both contributed to and reflected its course, it is appropriate - and indeed essential - that we should establish the relevance of this institution by concerning ourselves with its completion.

The issues involved in Southern Africa, and in particular in Zimbabwe, are enormously complex ones. They present different member States with different problems, both domestic and international. But I believe that as we deliberate in this conference we should keep three things firmly in mind.

First, it is vital that we recognise and build on the substantial areas of agreement which exist among us on this issue, that we not be dominated by negative aspects. No one at the meeting believes that a settlement is compatible with a constitutional situation in Salisbury, which is tainted in any way with racialism. We are all in favour of majority rule - true majority rule which takes account of all the parties concerned and which is reflected not only in elections but in the underlying structure of power and authority.

No one wants a solution through slaughter and bloodshed, both because it will produce untold suffering to innocent people and because it will breed new hatreds. Everyone wants to see outside interference in the region diminish, not grow. No one wants to see the Commonwealth damaged. It is imperative

that as we enter the thickets of technicalities and controversies, we do not allow them to obscure these basic points. Formidable as the differences on some issues are, I believe that, as far as those of us present at this meeting are concerned, they are differences about means and timing, not about ends. We must not allow means to dominate ends.

Mr. President, I would like to elaborate briefly on one of these elements of agreement. The essential cause of the grave situation in Southern Africa is racialism, the belief that one race is superior to another and therefore enjoys a natural right to dominate, exploit and discriminate against others. This is a belief that all here categorically reject. All oppression is repugnant, but there is an obscenity about oppression based on no more than the colour of a person's skin. You Mr. President, were the guiding hand behind the declaration of Commonwealth principles made by the Heads of Government Meeting in Singapore in 1971, when members recognised racial prejudice as a dangerous sickness and racial discrimination as an unmitigated evil. It is not only appropriate but imperative that at this time, in this place, we should solemnly reaffirm our adherence to that declaration.

The second thing we should keep in mind is that, whatever else it has done and whatever one might think about particular aspects of it, the recent election has created conditions for movement. But in itself, the election settles nothing - let there be no doubt about that. It has however, brought about a different situation. It has created new facts and disturbed a stalemate. There have been significant constitutional changes, and it is clear that before agreement by a number of African States is achieved, there will have to be further changes. As to what happens next, that is not in the lap of the gods. It is, to a very large extent, in our laps. Much depends on whether we can seize, and seize with determination and vision the opportunity provided by the comparative fluidity which now exists, in order to advance towards a settlement. Time is running out and we may not have such an opportunity again.

Thirdly, Mr. President, I think it is clear that if a non-violent solution to the problem of Zimbabwe is to be found it will involve flexibility on all sides - flexibility not about the objective of a non-racialist society, but concerning the process of arriving at that objective and the individual interests of the principals. Compromise and moderation should be seen not merely in terms of establishing a bridge between different positions. They should be seen as positive values in their own right - the essential values both of democratic politics and of peaceful relationships between States which are simultaneously sovereign and interdependent. There is an urgent need to rally and invigorate the forces of moderation and reasonableness in international affairs. We should advocate and proclaim moderation not apologetically and out of expediency, but confidently - even passionately - as a matter of fundamental principle. If we do so, the bridges are likely to emerge of their own accord.

Mr. President and fellow delegates, it is our solemn duty at this meeting to contribute positively to the search for comprehensive, equitable and peaceful solutions to the problems of this region. At the end of the day it is vital that we will have reached agreement among ourselves which will enable constructive negotiation and consultation to proceed.

Mr. President, inevitably the problems of Southern Africa will occupy the central place in this conference. But there is much else that is urgent on our agenda.

If a major theme of the last quarter century has been the ending of colonialism, the remainder of this century is likely to be increasingly preoccupied with economic problems. We have already demonstrated the scope for Commonwealth action on economic matters by the initiative we took on the Common Fund at the last Heads of Government Meeting. I believe that the Commonwealth can legitimately claim considerable credit for the fact that the Common Fund proposal represents one of the few areas in which real progress has been made since then.

We must view with grave concern assessments that there is little likelihood of an improvement in the slow growth in international economic activity and international trade that has been experienced since 1973.

What these assessments imply is that there has been a serious deterioration in the prospects for reducing poverty and raising living standards in developing countries.

I believe that a pre-requisite to remedying this outlook must be to deal with the dual scourges of inflation and protection.

These are interconnected problems whose solution lies primarily in the hands of powerful developed states. There is also an urgent need to ensure that inadequate supplies of oil do not act as a constraint on economic growth or endanger the inter-dependent economic system which has the potential to provide great mutual benefits.

The issues are complex and I shall not dwell on them further now except to say that I believe the time has come for a new and bold approach to get the world economy moving at a faster rate and to ensure that all participants have equal opportunities to share in the benefits.

A strong and determined effort will be needed, involving attention and consideration by world leaders. If we appeal to the concept of interdependence, we must mean what we say and all play a part according to our ability.

Another issue which in one way or another touches most of us is that of refugees. Mr. President, I know that your country - and many of our other African members - have had to cope with this and with the attendant tragic problem of divided families, temporary arrangements which tend to become permanent, international indifference and consequent pressure on all too scarce resources. The problem is now assuming crisis proportions in our own part of the world - as a result not only of the inevitable disruption resulting from conflict but of a deliberately pursued policy

which, again, has a racist component. We must address ourselves to it. Humanity requires us to come to the aid of the victims of such action. But humanity and realism also demand that the international community attack the problem at its source, that we mobilise pressure to end the policies of persecution and expulsion which result in mass exodus.

I have touched on a number of the central issues confronting this conference. But in concluding I urge that in dealing with major global and regional problems, we take care not to neglect some of the less dramatic ones. In particular, let us bear in mind the special and often pressing problems faced by small States, remembering that there is a significant and growing number of such States among our members.

Mr. President, I believe, as I think you do, that this meeting will be a crucial one for the Commonwealth. Rarely, if ever, have we gathered to address problems of such magnitude and urgency. Rarely have we had the eyes of the international community so firmly on us. And rarely, have we had as great an opportunity to demonstrate the value of this institution by making a positive contribution to world order.

If we rise to the occasion, if, under your leadership, we set aside sectional and short-term considerations and show the statesmanship, wisdom and resolution which the circumstances demand, we have it within our means to contribute to peace in Africa and to establish beyond doubt that the Commonwealth is going to be a key institution in the last decades of this century. If we speak to each other and with each other, instead of at each other or past each other, in a week's time we will emerge a stronger and more relevant body.

Mr. President, let that be our determination.