



PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

17 MARCH 1988

This morning, I summoned the South African Ambassador in Canberra to my office to make representations on behalf of the Sharpeville Six, who are due to be hanged on Friday 18 March 1988.

I asked the Ambassador to pass my representations to the South African President, Mr P.W. Botha. This afternoon in Parliament, in answering a question, I referred to my representations. I expressed the hope that I was speaking on behalf of all Members of Parliament in making an appeal for clemency on behalf of the Sharpeville Six.

At the time, I was somewhat concerned that the Leader of the Opposition did not seek to associate the Opposition with my remarks, because I believe that they would have more impact with the South African Government if they clearly reflected a bi-partisan position of the Australian Parliament.

I was utterly horrified by the subsequent remarks made in the Parliament by the Opposition spokesman on Foreign Affairs, the Honourable Member for North Sydney, who in effect acted as a prosecutor of the Sharpeville Six, on the basis of information supplied to him by the South African Embassy.

I would remind the Opposition that no evidence has been produced in the case sufficient to establish a direct causal connection between the conduct of the accused and the death of the victim.

Moreover, a key prosecution witness in the case stated publicly yesterday that he had perjured himself in the trial at the behest of the police. This has led to a last minute appeal to the South African Supreme Court, which will be heard tomorrow.

I appreciate that there are policy differences between the Government and the Opposition on the general situation in South Africa and the need for sanctions.

But I appeal to the Leader of the Opposition to put aside partisan differences on this issue, in the interests of the overriding humanitarian concern for the fate of the Sharpeville Six.

I ask him to join the Government in appealing to the Government of South Africa to spare their lives, as President Reagan, Prime Minister Thatcher and other world leaders have done.

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