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South Africa Mediators Are Said to Quit

By Joseph Lelyveld
New York Times Service

LONDON — A group of Commonwealth leaders has decided to give up its attempt at mediation between the South African government and its main black nationalist opponents, a diplomatic source close to the group disclosed here Friday.

The seven leaders, known as the Eminent Persons Group, visited Cape Town in March, meeting both President Pieter W. Botha and Nelson Mandela, the imprisoned leader of the outlawed African National Congress. They returned again in May after receiving diplomatic signals that the Botha government was prepared to talk about legalizing the outlawed movement and releasing Mr. Mandela and other prisoners.

The group was reported to have had a message from the South African government waiting for it when it reconvened in London on Wednesday at the Commonwealth's Marlborough House headquarters.

According to the source, the group replied that the South African government's actions and intransigent attitudes had doomed the group's attempt to initiate discussions between the main opposing forces in the conflict.

The seven leaders were still meeting Friday evening, reviewing



Reuters

Pieter W. Botha

drafts of a final report that is to go next week to the heads of government of the 49-nation Commonwealth.

The group was said to be divided on whether the terms of reference under which it was appointed allowed it to include a call for economic sanctions against South Africa among its conclusions.

The Eminent Persons Group, which was appointed to avert a serious rupture in the Commonwealth, was instructed to attempt an on-the-spot assessment and report back to a special Commonwealth meeting that Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher of Britain promised to attend.

The group includes General Olusegun Obasanjo, a former Nigerian head of state; Swaran Singh, a former foreign and defense minister of India; John Malecela, a former Tanzanian foreign minister; Malcolm Fraser, a former prime minister of Australia; Lord Barber, a former chancellor of the exchequer in Britain; Archbishop Edward Scott of the Anglican Church in Canada; and Dame Nita Barrow of Barbados, chairman of the World Council of Churches.

In its last message to the Commonwealth group, Mr. Botha's government was understood to have left the door open for another visit, but the tone of the message appears to have been noticeably tougher than a message sent at the end of April that persuaded the group to make a second trip to southern Africa.

A day before the Eminent Persons Group began its current round of meetings, an apparently accurate summary of a part of the message appeared in The Washington Times.

According to that report, the South African authorities asserted that the release of Mr. Mandela could spark intensified violence in black townships, making necessary an increased police and military presence in those areas.

Guarded optimism about the mediation effort had been all but dissipated even before the group left Cape Town in South Africa in May after two rounds of talk there.

The first round, which included a further visit with Mr. Mandela in prison, was followed by a visit to the headquarters in Lusaka, the Zambian capital, of the African National Congress.

On May 19, shortly after the group left Zambia and while it was still in Cape Town, South African forces attacked Lusaka and two other African capitals — Harare in Zimbabwe and Gaborone in Botswana — in what Mr. Botha characterized as a strike against "terrorists" of the African National Congress, drawing an analogy to the American bombing of Libya the previous month.

The three countries that were attacked were all Commonwealth members. Diplomats and commentators swiftly drew the conclusion that the raids had been calculated to show supporters of the government that it was not caving in to diplomatic pressures.

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