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'Ci w,ealth Except UK, Lines Up With US On SA

By Maureen Johnson

Associated Press

KUALA LUMPUR - Bruised by a

fierce internal battle, leaders of the 49-

nation Commonwealth have ended their
biennial summit lined up with the United
States in giving South Africa six months
to make drastic changes.

But British dissent has left a gaping hole
in the Commonwealth front and leaves the
association of Britain and its former colo-
nies less able than the United States to put
pressure on South Africa.

Spurred by what she described as "im-
portant and positive changes," in South
Africa, British Prime Minister Margaret
Thatcher redoubled her lone battle against
sanctions through the weeklong meeting
that ended Tuesday.

The upshot was a public sparring match
between Thatcher and the others, led by
Canada and Australia, after she issued a
surprise repudiation of the Sunimitfs
declaration on South Africa announced
Sunday.

Thatcher had signed the declaration it-
self, which incorporated her objections to
key provisions.

It calls for tighter financial measures
immediately and stipulates that a nine-
member foreign ministers committee will
meet' ln April to gauge how far South Afri-
l ca 5 new president, F..W de Klerk, has l
moved toward ending the country s racial l
separation policies.

Canada and Australia, the declarations
main authors, thought the dissenting note '
in the final text should have been enough
- or at least Thatcher should have told
them she was issuing a separate repu-
diation.

"If we all behaved like this, every Com-
monwealth document would be a sham-
bles and it wouldnt be worth very much,"
Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney
grumbled.

tFWe weren't forewarned. We were
blind-sided," he added as the main an-
tagonists let loose more recriminations at
news conferences before heading home
Tuesday.

Thatcher countered the others were be-
ing ttabsolutely ridiculous."

uThese people who make use of free
speech must expect others to do the
same," she told reporters, adding, "If it's
one against 48, I am, very sorry for the 48?"

The Commonwealth committee s meet-
ing next April is to gauge whether de Klerk
has embarked on "irreversible" change.

Canadian External Affairs Secretary
Joe Clark, the committee chairman, said
that would include draft legislation to
repeal the basic tenets of apartheid that
deny the black majority the vote and en-
shrine racial segregation of land.

Similarly, U.S. Assistant Secretary of

State Herman J . Cohen said this month that unlws de Klerk takes legislative action by June to end apartheid, President George Bush's administration will consider new measures.

It will consult with Congress, its European allies and Japan about tougher sanctions if, after the next (South African) parliamentary session, there is very little to show for it? Cohen told the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

The next session of South Africa's white-dominated Parliament begins in February. British officials flatly rejected the deadline notion in Kuala Lumpur, describing it as artificial and saying it would box in de Klerk and make it impossible for him to change.

and ends in June.

Like the United States, the Commonwealth summit did not specify any new measures. Anti-apartheid groups want coal, oil and South Africa's huge diamond mining industry targeted.

The United States already has left the Commonwealth well behind on sanctions because Britain resists them and black southern African countries, mainly Commonwealth members such as Zimbabwe and Zambia, depend on South Africa economically.

Thus the Commonwealth's most ardent advocates of sanctions - and Thatcher's harshest critics - implement hardly any embargoes.

"The Commonwealth in practice is in step with me . . . in what it says, we take a different view," Thatcher commented in a Kuala Lumpur.

Under U.S. legislation passed in 1986 after Congress overrode a veto by then President Ronald Reagan, Washington has imposed the strictest embargo of any major South African trading partner. They include bans on imports of fruit, vegetables, grain, mineral fuels, uranium and radioactive materials.

South Africa's two biggest trading partners are Japan and Italy, followed by the United States, West Germany and Britain.

A list of 11 non-binding embargoes agreed in 1986 by all Commonwealth nations except Britain included a ban on air links, agricultural products, tourist promotion and imports of uranium, coal, iron and steel.

Britain imposed only a few token measures as a gesture to the Commonwealth, which South Africa quit in 1961.

Thatcher opposes sanctions in principle, saying they hurt blacks most and strengthen white resistance to change.

Some critics, particularly African nations, charge she is worried about British investments, does not want to lose the trade, and is sympathetic to the Pretoria administration.