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FM NAIROBI

TO PRIORITY FCO

TELNO 279

OF 231400Z JUNE 86

INFO PRIORITY PRETORIA, HARARE, LUSAKA, DAR ES SALAAM, LAGOS

EMINENT PERSONS GROUP

1. I CALLED TODAY ON GENERAL OBASANJO WHO IS PASSING THROUGH NAIROBI TOGETHER WITH CHIEF ANYAOKU. THEY HAVE BEEN IN TANZANIA WHERE OBASANJO BRIEFED BOTH MWINYI AND NYERERE ON THE GROUP'S MISSION. THEY ARE GOING ON FROM HERE TODAY TO LUSAKA AND THEN HARARE TO BRIEF KAUNDA AND MUGABE, AND THEY WILL TRANSIT NAIROBI AGAIN EN ROUTE TO LAGOS ON 26 JUNE TO SEE BABANGIDA BEFORE THE LATTER GOES UP TO ABUJA.
2. OBASANJO GAVE SOME PERSONAL IMPRESSIONS OF THE MISSION SEMICOLON NOT NEW BUT PERHAPS WORTH REPORTING. HE SAID THAT THEY HAD BEEN GREATLY ENCOURAGED BY THE UNDERSTANDING REACHED WITH VON HIRSCHBERG. THIS HAD SET THE STAGE WELL FOR THEIR FIRST VISIT TO SOUTH AFRICA WHERE THERE HAD BEEN A GENUINE MEETING OF MINDS PARTICULARLY WITH PIK BOTHA WHO HAD GONE TO THE EXTENT OF ADVISING THEM HOW TO DEAL WITH HIS OWN GOVERNMENT. HOWEVER, IT WAS P W BOTHA AND OTHER HARDLINERS LIKE HEUNIS, DE KLERK AND MAGNUS MALAN WHO HAD DESTROYED THE SLIM CHANCE OF SUCCESS.
3. OBASANJO SAID THAT THE EPG WAS INDEBTED TO THE PRIME MINISTER WHO HAD DONE ALL SHE POSSIBLY COULD TO PROMOTE THE SUCCESS OF THE MISSION. THE MIX OF PERSONALITIES WITHIN THE GROUP HAD PROVED OUTSTANDINGLY SUCCESSFUL. LORD BARBER HAD POSSESSED THE RIGHT BACKGROUND AND QUALITIES TO PLAY A VITAL ROLE.
4. BOTH OBASANJO AND ANYAOKU ASKED ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF YOUR GOING TO SOUTH AFRICA IN THE NEAR FUTURE. I COULD ONLY TELL THEM WHAT I HAD HEARD ON THE BBC WORLD SERVICE ABOUT THIS. THEY COMMENDED ANY SUCH INITIATIVE BUT FELT THAT IT WOULD BE VERY DIFFICULT.
5. OBASANJO FELT THAT THE EPG'S WORK SHOULD NOT COME TO AN END WHILE THERE WAS STILL A CHANCE TO AVERT CATASTROPHE IN SOUTHERN AFRICA. HE HAD HIGH HOPES FOR THE LONDON MEETING IN AUGUST AND SAID THAT THE COMMONWEALTH MUST RETAIN LEADERSHIP OVER THE SOUTH AFRICAN PROBLEM, AS THEY HAD A FAR GREATER UNDERSTANDING OF IT THAN ANY OTHER GROUP OF COUNTRIES.

JOHNSON

SOUTHERN AFRICA

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