

**December 14, 1985**

**Letter from UK Prime Minister Thatcher to South  
African President P.W. Botha**

**Citation:**

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[margaretthatcher.org/archive](https://margaretthatcher.org/archive). Included in "Southern Africa in the Cold War, Post-1974,"  
edited by Sue Onslow and Anna-Mark Van Wyk.  
<https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/118371>

**Summary:**

Letter from Margaret Thatcher to State President P.W. Botha, noting that the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group (designated by the Commonwealth meeting earlier that year to observe and instruct the South African government) seems agreeable and would like to travel to South Africa in January. She urges Botha to be cooperative.

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BRITISH EMBASSY  
HILL STREET, PRETORIA

14 December 1985

Private Secretary to the  
State President of the Republic of  
South Africa

Dear Private Secretary,

I have been asked to pass to you the enclosed message  
from the Prime Minister to the State President, which I have  
received today.

Yours sincerely  
Patrick Moberly

P H Moberly  
HM Ambassador



## CONFIDENTIAL

MESSAGE FROM THE PRIME MINISTER TO THE STATE PRESIDENT,  
MR P W BOTHA

I write to let you know that I had an opportunity for a long discussion with the members of the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group during their recent visit to London. I was greatly encouraged by their general approach and believe that you will be also. They clearly get on well together. I understand that the two co-Chairmen are writing to you to ask whether the group can pay an early visit to South Africa. They assured me that they had taken care to couch it in terms acceptable to your Government.

In the course of our meeting the members of the Group said that they well understood that it was no part of their task to purport to tell the South African Government or people how to organise their own affairs. Rather they recognised that their mandate was simply to see if they could facilitate a dialogue between the various communities. They would be conducting their mission as discreetly as possible. They will not seek publicity but have yet to work out how to respond to inevitable press interest in what they recognised is a very sensitive situation. They said in terms that it was no part of their intention to embarrass the South African Government but rather to be constructive. General Obasanjo acknowledged the need to preserve the strength and buoyancy of the South African economy which he described as important not only for South Africa itself but for the Southern African region as a whole. The Group agreed with me that the six month period mentioned in the Commonwealth Accord was not a deadline but a "review clause". They also recognised that it was unrealistic to expect changes to happen overnight.

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effort to preserve this. The Group made clear to me that they were very anxious to start on their task as soon as possible. They particularly asked me to urge you to let them visit South Africa in January. They recognise that their first duty is to meet your Government and carry out whatever programme you might recommend, though they would subsequently also like to see representatives of all communities. In view of the Group's responsible approach, I hope very much that you will feel able to respond positively to their letter and in particular agree to see them before the end of January as they ask.

I have asked the co-Chairmen to keep me informed of progress in case I can help with any difficulties that may arise. I would hope that you would similarly feel able to take me into your confidence in such circumstances.

With my best wishes,

(MARGARET THATCHER)

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British Embassy  
Hill Street, Pretoria

14 December 1985

Private Secretary to the State President of the Republic of South Africa

Dear Private Secretary, [written]

I have been asked to pass to you the enclosed message from the Prime Minister to the State President, which I have received today.

Yours sincerely [written]

[signature]  
P.H. Moberly  
HM Ambassador

CONFIDENTIAL

Message from the Prime Minister to the State President, Mr. P.W. Botha

I write to let you know that I had an opportunity for a long discussion with the members of the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group during their recent visit to London. I was greatly encouraged by their general approach and believe that you will be also. They clearly get on well together. I understand that the two co-Chairmen are writing to you to ask whether the group can pay an early visit to South Africa. They assured me that they had taken care to couch it in terms acceptable to your Government.

In the course of our meeting the members of the Group said that they well understood that it was no part of their task to purport to tell the South African Government or people how to organize their own affairs. Rather they recognized that their mandate was simply to see if they could facilitate a dialogue between the various communities. They would be conducting their mission as discreetly as possible. They will not seek publicity but have yet to work out how to respond to inevitable press interest in what they recognized is a very sensitive situation. They said in terms that it was no part of their intention to embarrass the South African Government but rather to be constructive. General Obasanjo acknowledged the need to preserve the strength and buoyancy of the South African economy which he described as important not only for South Africa itself but for the Southern African region as a whole. The Group agreed with me that the six month period mentioned in the Commonwealth Accord was not a deadline but a "review clause". They also recognized that it was unrealistic to expect changes to happen overnight.

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With my best wishes,

(MARGARET THATCHER)