

October 23, 1974

**Statement by the Prime Minister, the Honourable
B.J. Vorster, in the Senate on 23 October 1974**

Citation:

"Statement by the Prime Minister, the Honourable B.J. Vorster, in the Senate on 23 October 1974", October 23, 1974, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Africa: SA Policy in Africa and Relations with African States, 16, 1/99/19, South African Department of Foreign Affairs Archives. Obtained by Jamie Miller.
<https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/134630>

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Original Scan

ment to all S.A. Missions abroad and
Foreign Missions in S.A. File
11/7/75
Be

STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HONOURABLE B.J. VORSTER,
IN THE SENATE ON 23 OCTOBER 1974

Mr. President, Africa and Southern Africa as well, and obviously therefore South Africa itself, is in the news today. It is true that many questions are being asked, that there is a great deal of speculation in progress, that sometimes many misgivings are expressed, and for that reason I have seen fit to enter this debate, and I think that it would be a good thing for me to say a few words about this matter in this hon. House. In fact, I believe that the status of this House most certainly warrants it and makes it imperative that a person in my position should appear here at least once every year.

For that reason I am on this occasion availing myself of this debate in this House, to say a few words on the subject to which I referred. Let me say at once that what is of course involved here in the first place is South Africa, our fatherland. If I were to be asked what my view is of the future of South Africa, of the future of Southern Africa and, for that matter, of Africa as well, then I want to say that it is my heartfelt conviction that I have a great deal of confidence in and that I am optimistic about its future.

But I believe it is a good thing, on an occasion such as this, to project South Africa against Africa for a moment, and, because time will not allow one to do this at too great a length, to give attention for a while to its future problems and its future possibilities. I think it is a good thing to glance for a moment at Africa itself and subsequently to give attention, for a moment, to Southern Africa. When we take a look at Africa, all of us know that it is a developing continent, that on that continent are to be found countries in various stages of development, that there is probably a tremendous potential in the way of unexploited ore and raw materials, but that it is to a very large extent still unprospected. Apart from its probable potential, it is also a fact that this of course also brings problems in its wake, that it has a very high growth rate as far as its population is concerned. If one should want to draw up priorities for

.../

...ing, taking this into consideration, then I think hon. senators will all agree with me that the highest priority one could set for Africa today would be development. That is what it needs most - development which could result in work opportunities for its growing population. If the reports on certain countries of the world derived from authoritative world sources are read, however, then I think you would also agree with me that one of those priorities is food for its people, for food is becoming a problem in this world in which we are living. If you were to ask me, or anyone else for that matter, what Africa's greatest need is, then it goes without saying, because it has to develop and cannot at this stage generate the capital for that development itself, that capital for development, capital for exploitation is necessary. In the second place I believe that everyone would also agree with me that what is necessary is knowledge to guide that development and knowledge so that Africa can train its own people to occupy their rightful place in that course of development. In the third place - I have no doubt at all about this, nor do I believe that hon. senators doubt it - it is necessary that there should be stability, for without stability the other aspects to which I referred can most certainly not prosper. We know the present-day world, and we can foresee that in view of the present high prices prevailing throughout the world, the increasing unemployment which is discernible in developing countries and the monetary problems with which the world is struggling at the moment, it could happen that Africa's position on the world priority list in respect of development aid could very easily be affected. And even if it were not affected by these things, it goes without saying that the high prices to which I referred, which affect any developing country, are affecting Africa to a greater extent than other already developed continents. For that reason I believe that we have reached the stage where Africa should give serious consideration to itself and its future, where Africa should in all earnest ask itself where it is going and where it wants to go, particularly if we take cognizance of what is happening at present in the Indian Ocean and of the disturbances which are being caused by that. And if I am reading the signs of the times correctly

3.

I do not doubt that hon. Senators will agree with me on this score - then we are entering on a period in which countries and continents are to an increasing extent going to look after their own interests in the first place. I therefore believe that Africa owes it to itself to look after its own interests as well. And if this is the case with Africa it is most certainly the case in respect of Southern Africa as well. South Africa, as a country in Southern Africa, is of course in the first place - I do not think there is much argument about this - the most developed country, or at least one of the most developed countries. In the second place I want to reiterate here on behalf of South Africa, that we in South Africa harbour no aggressive intentions against any country in Africa or any other territory in the world. On the contrary, our standpoint has always been - we have maintained it to the best of our ability - that we do not intervene in the domestic or other affairs of any other country, and that we do not gaze with covetous eyes at the possessions of any other country in Africa. In fact, Mr. president, you will recall that we are on record as having said that we are prepared to conclude a non-aggression pact with any country that should request this and which may perhaps harbour any misgivings on that score. Therefore I think it is necessary for me to reiterate my statement here today that South Africa harbours no aggressive intentions against anyone, but it goes without saying - this I must also add - that if South Africa should be attacked, it naturally has the elementary right which any other country has, and it will exercise that right, to defend itself with all the power at its command, and South Africa's power in that regard is not inconsiderable. I therefore wish to spell it out clearly that although no incidents will be provoked on the part of South Africa, no problems will be caused, it cannot be taken amiss of South Africa, or, for that matter, of any other country in the world for its finishing what other people started if it originated with them. In addition, I do not think the fact can be over-emphasized at this juncture that the Whites of South Africa - this also applies to the Coloureds and to the

.../

Indians - are as much of Africa as any other person or any other state of Africa. As far as we are concerned, we do not begrudge our own Black peoples development in the political, economic and all other spheres, and it is clear that this policy is being implemented in ever-increasing earnest. I make no apology for returning in particular to the position of the Whites. The Whites have been established here for centuries. They have the right to demand for themselves the preservation of their identity while, on the other hand, granting this to all other peoples, the preservation of their identity along a course of differentiation which they are not only adopting today, but which they have been adopting for a very long time. Lastly, I may say a word about South Africa, I want to say that South Africa is prepared, to the extent to which this is asked of it, and to which it is its duty, to play its part in and contribute its share towards bringing and giving order, development and technical and monetary aid as far as this is within its means, to countries in Africa and particularly to those countries which are closer neighbours. Africa has been good to us, and we are prepared, as far as our means allow us, to return to Africa* a measure of what we have so generously received over the years. On considering Southern Africa on this occasion, it is clear to all of us that for a decade or more Southern Africa has unfortunately been characterized by violence and strife. Violence and strife do not necessarily bring development and progress in their wake. On the contrary. In most cases they have precisely the opposite effect. The best example, I think, which we can find in this regard is Mozambique. Therefore I believe that Southern Africa has come to the cross-roads. I think that Southern Africa has to make a choice. I think that that choice lies between peace on the one hand or an escalation of strife on the other. The consequences of an escalation are easily foreseeable. The toll of major confrontation will be high. I would go so far as to say that it will be too high for Southern Africa to pay. If one adds to that the threatening economic problems which could assume major proportions, then Africa and Southern

Wilson Center Digital Archive

Africa should guard against its heading for chaos. However, this is not necessary and I think hon. senators will also agree with me that it is not necessary, for there is an alternative, there is a way. That way is the way of peace, the way of normalizing of relations, the way of sound understanding and normal association. I believe that Southern Africa can take that way. I have reason to believe that it is prepared to prefer to take that way, and I believe that it will do so in the end. In fact, I want to repeat what I said at the beginning, that as far as I am concerned, I have never been more optimistic that the climate and the will to do so is there, in spite of what is being done and said, in spite of everything that has happened. It goes without saying - as a realist one has to admit this - that there are stumbling-blocks. It is true that there are contentious issues. It is true that there are problematical situations and one cannot escape these. One should refer briefly in passing to a few of those problematical situations. There is the question of Mozambique. The position is that my colleagues, i.e. the hon. Ministers of Defence and of Foreign Affairs, and I have stated our standpoint in regard to this matter very clearly. I refer inter alia to an interview I had with the publication News Week, which I do not wish to quote here now. We stated our position very clearly and for that reason I do not wish to elaborate on it, but I just want to refer to this matter in a recapitulatory manner. We take cognizance of what has happened in recent times, and we have read the reports, and I believe there is not one single hon. senator who will not agree with me when I say that order should be effected in that part of Southern Africa. It is in their interests; it is in the interests of all of Southern Africa that order should be effected there. If any value is attached to development - and I believe that value is in fact attached to it - sources of revenue must be protected and order must be restored fully in that territory as soon as possible. I believe that it is in the best economic interests of that territory, and therefore in those of Southern Africa as well, that the ports of Nacala, Beira and Lourenço Marques be kept open for South Africa, Rhodesia, Malawi and Zambia,

Wilson Center Digital Archive

... that normal traffic should continue, not only in the ports but also on the railways. I believe that it is in the highest interests of Mozambique that the Mozambique labour agreement be upheld. I believe that it is in the highest interest of Mozambique that the power of Cabora-Bassa take its course to South Africa. These three things to which I have referred are major sources of revenue to that territory, and I should like to accept that they will also be viewed in that light by those holding the reins of government there.

Another problem with regard to Southern Africa is, inevitably, South-West Africa. It has been a controversial question for years, and this is still the case today. I have not only devoted a great deal of time and attention to this matter, but this is a matter which, in the course of years, we have discussed at great length with the Secretary-General of the U.N., his representative and others, and I am convinced that there is only one solution to this problem, i.e. that the peoples of South-West Africa be allowed to decide their own future without being hampered or disturbed. I believe that if outsiders should be involved, whoever they may be, this could only lead to greater confusion instead of greater clarity being brought about in regard to this matter. I still believe today, as I put it to both Dr. Waldheim and Dr. Escher, that one of the top priorities as far as South-West Africa is concerned, is that the peoples of that territory should be afforded the opportunity, as indeed they are being afforded now, to gain experience so that they may eventually exercise their right of self-determination. You have taken cognizance, Sir, not only of the new initiative that has originated with the governing party of the Whites in South-West Africa, but also of the initiative of the Owambo people with regard to their proposed election. You have taken cognizance of the standpoint that the right to lawful political activities should be granted to all people, provided that it is not attended by threats of violence or by violence. You have taken cognizance, Sir, of the standpoint that everybody who wants to assist in solving this problem in a peaceful manner has been invited by the government of Owambo to lend

Wilson Center Digital Archive

hand in reaching that peaceful solution to the problem. However, it goes without saying that any breaking of the law, any disturbance of order, cannot be permitted under any circumstances. I believe, therefore, that the peoples of South-West Africa and those who want to co-operate in a peaceful manner should be afforded the opportunity of solving the problems of that territory. On this occasion I want to put, in conclusion, this one question to those who insist that South Africa withdraw from that territory: What chaos would not result if South Africa should accede to that request? The chaos which resulted in other parts of the world will be child's play in comparison with the absolute chaos which would manifest itself if South Africa were to withdraw from that territory.

Then there is the question of Rhodesia. Hon. senators will realize that I have no brief whatsoever to argue this case on behalf of Rhodesia or anybody else. It must also be fully understood that I do not want to interfere in any way in the internal affairs of Rhodesia. Nothing that I might say this afternoon must be so construed. I believe that, with goodwill, this matter can be settled, and I believe that an honourable solution can be found. What is more, I believe it is in the interests of all parties to find such a solution. I know and hon. senators know that attempts have recently been made by Mr. Smith and his Government, but unfortunately these attempts, judging from reports, have failed. But I do know that as far as the Rhodesian Government is concerned, this matter is of the highest order on their priority list. However, I must also say that I know it is being said in some quarters, on the one side, that South Africa is holding the Rhodesian Government back. In fact, this accusation has been made, and will be made more and more, and I want to say that that is not so, as anybody in Rhodesia, or elsewhere, who knows anything about this position, will be able to tell. On the other hand there are ZANU and ZAPU leaders outside Rhodesia who are suspected - I am not putting it higher than that for the purposes of my argument - of exerting influence on Black Rhodesians not to come to terms.

8.

I believe that now is the time for all who have influence to bring it to bear upon all parties concerned to find a durable, just and honourable solution, so that internal and external relations can be normalized. Africa, and for that matter Southern Africa, must not become a trouble-torn continent or sub-continent. It must, if it can be avoided - I sincerely believe that it can be avoided - not become an area of conflict.

Mr President, there are no doubts in my mind, nor in that of any authority on South Africa, about South Africa's ability to grow and to develop further. South Africa's fundamentally sound position, its future possibilities and its potential are, as my hon. colleague here on my right will rightly be able to tell you, held in high repute by the outside world. Therefore I believe that as far as South Africa is concerned, we shall have that growth and that fine future. Nor do I have any doubt - once again in spite of what is being said and in spite of attempts that are being made by ill-disposed persons to wreck this - that the Whites, the Brown people, the Black people and the Indians can find a solution to every problem as far as South Africa is concerned. Just as independent states and peoples can live here in their own right, in this territory which is known today as the Republic of South Africa, just as these various independent Black peoples will take their place next to us in due course, so, I believe, the politically independent peoples of Southern Africa can live next to one another in peace. Therefore I also believe that it is not inappropriate that Southern Africa can create its own U.N.O. which will stand for peace, progress and development. Towards that end, Mr. President, I believe that South Africa is keen to co-operate, and to that objective I commit myself and my Government as far as the future is concerned. I thank you.