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FM PRETORIA 220915Z JUL 85
TO FLASH FCO
TELEGRAM NUMBER 137 OF 22 JULY
INFO FLASH UKREP BRUSSELS (FOR SECRETARY OF STATE'S PARTY)
INFO ROUTPNE JOHANNESBURG
SAVING CAPE TOWN (CONSULATE), DURBAN.

SOUTH AFRICA: INTERNAL

SUMMARY

1. THE PRESIDENT'S ANNOUNCEMENT OF A STATE OF EMERGENCY MUST BE SEEN AS A VERY SERIOUS TURN OF EVENTS. IT IS CONSISTENT WITH THE GOVERNMENT'S REPEATEDLY EXPRESSED DETERMINATION FIRST AND FOREMOST TO MAINTAIN LAW AND ORDER. IN THE CURRENT ATMOSPHERE OF BLACK UNREST IT IS A GAMBLE, BUT ONE WHICH THE GOVERNMENT HAVE FELT OBLIGED TO TAKE. THE SITUATION HAD DETERIORATED TO A POINT WHERE THE GOVERNMENT'S ONLY COURSE WAS TO TAKE DRASTIC ACTION TO RESTORE PUBLIC CONFIDENCE.

DETAIL

2. THE DECLARATION OF A STATE OF EMERGENCY IN 36 MAGISTERIAL DISTRICTS IN AND AROUND JOHANNESBURG AND PORT ELIZABETH HAS COME AS NO SURPRISE IN VIEW OF THE STEADILY DETERIORATING SITUATION OF THE LAST FEW MONTHS AND THE ESCALATING VIOLENCE OF RECENT WEEKS. SPURIOUS UNREST IS STILL MAINLY LIMITED TO BLACK URBAN AREAS IN THE EASTERN CAPE AND THE EAST RAND AND THE STATE OF EMERGENCY APPLIES ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY TO THESE AREAS. THE GOVERNMENT ACTION HAS NONETHELESS BEEN PROMPTED BY INDICATIONS THAT THE UNREST WAS GROWING AND THERE HAS BEEN PARTICULAR CONCERN THAT THERE WAS CONSIDERABLE VIOLENCE LAST WEEK IN SOWETO. THE GOVERNMENT MAY ALSO HAVE BEEN CONCERNED THAT A BOYVOTT OF WHITE BUSINESS IN THE EASTERN CAPE WAS SHOWING SIGNS OF SPREADING.

3. THE DECLARATION OF A STATE OF EMERGENCY REFLECTS THE GOVERNMENT'S CONVICTION THAT THEY COULD NOT AFFORD TO ALLOW THE TOWNSHIPS TO SLIDE INTO UNGOVERNABILITY AND THAT LAW AND ORDER MUST BE MAINTAINED AT ALL COSTS. IT IS ALSO AN IMPORTANT GOVERNMENT OBJECTIVE TO RESTORE CONFIDENCE AMONGST THE WHITE COMMUNITY IN A SITUATION WHERE IT WAS BEGINNING TO APPEAR THAT THE GOVERNMENT WERE UNCERTAIN ABOUT HOW TO REACT.

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4. ANOTHER MAIN OBJECTIVE OF THE GOVERNMENT IS A NEED TO CONTROL UNDESIRABLE PUBLICITY ABOUT THE UNREST, ESPECIALLY UNSUBSTANTIATED ALLEGATIONS AGAINST THE POLICE AND LURID SENSATIONALISM. SOME LOCAL CENSORSHIP OF REPORTING SEEMS INEVITABLE. THE GOVERNMENT HAVE NOT BEEN ALONE IN THINKING THAT EXCESSIVE MEDIA PUBLICITY HAS BEEN A SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTORY CAUSE OF THE VIOLENCE.

5. THE COMMISSIONER OF POLICE, GENERAL COETZEE, HAS CLAIMED THAT THE MAIN REASON FOR THE EMERGENCY IS THAT HIS FORCE NEED FURTHER POWERS AND HE IS MAINTAINING THAT POLICE STRENGTH IS ADEQUATE TO MAINTAIN THE SITUATION PROVIDED IT HAS THE NECESSARY AUTHORITY. I AM NOT ALTOGETHER CONVINCED BY HIS STATEMENT. WE KNOW THAT THE POLICE ARE UNDER STRENGTH AND THERE IS EVIDENCE THAT SAVAGE REPRISALS AGAINST BLACK INFORMERS HAVE LED TO A SERIOUS DISRUPTION IN THE FLOW OF INTELLIGENCE TO THE POLICE. IT NOW SEEMS MORE THAN LIKELY THAT THE SADF WILL BE USED TO MAINTAIN ORDER IN THE TOWNSHIPS.

6. A MAIN OBJECTIVE OF POLICE/SADF ACTION WILL NOW BE TO CLAMP DOWN ON STUDENTS AND SCHOOL CHILDREN WHO HAVE UNDOUBTEDLY BEEN IN THE FOREFRONT OF THE AGITATION IN THE TOWNSHIPS. THIS HAS INCLUDED ATTACKS ON SCHOOLS, INTIMIDATION OF OTHER STUDENTS TO STAY AWAY FROM SCHOOLS, ATTACKS ON THE HOMES OF POLICE AND COMMUNITY COUNCILLORS AND THE STONING OF POLICE. THE GOVERNMENT ALSO BLAME UDF ORGANISATIONS FOR THE TROUBLE AND MAY WELL TRY TO IMPOSE FURTHER RESTRICTIONS ON THEIR ACTIVITIES.

7. THERE IS NO WAY IN WHICH WE CAN JUDGE TO WHAT EXTENT THE ANC MAY HAVE BEEN RESPONSIBLE FOR MASTER-MINDING RECENT UNREST. WE ARE INCLINED TO THE VIEW THAT TOWNSHIP VIOLENCE HAS BEEN LARGELY OF SPONTANEOUS ORIGIN, REFLECTING A WHOLE RANGE OF POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND EDUCATIONAL GRIEVANCES. IT MAY ALSO BE SIGNIFICANT THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAS NOT SOUGHT TO BLAME EXTERNAL INFLUENCES AS THE MAIN CAUSE OF THE DISTURBANCES.

8. PRESS REACTIONS ARE UNANIMOUS THAT THE GOVERNMENT NEEDED TO TAKE A GRIP ON A DETERIORATING SITUATION, BUT THAT THE DECLARATION OF A STATE OF EMERGENCY CANNOT BY ITSELF HOPE TO RESOLVE THE SITUATION. 'IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT THE GOVERNMENT'S PACE OF REFORM BE QUICKENED' (CITIZEN 22 JULY). 'IT MUST NOT LAST A DAY LONGER THAN NECESSARY' (BEELD 22 JULY).

9. THE GOVERNMENT'S POSITION APPEARS TO BE THAT THEY REMAIN COMMITTED TO LONG TERM REFORM AND A PROCESS OF DIALOGUE WITH BLACKS BUT THAT THIS WAS BECOMING INCREASINGLY DIFFICULT AGAINST A BACKGROUND IN WHICH ANY MOVE BY BLACKS TO CO-OPERATE OR NEGOTIATE WAS LIKELY TO BE FOLLOWED BY ATTACKS ON THEIR HOUSES AND MORE VIOLENCE.

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10. IN PRACTICE I WOULD NOT EXPECT ANY REAL PROGRESS WHILE THE STATE OF EMERGENCY REMAINS IN FORCE. MUCH MUST DEPEND ON WHAT HAPPENS IN THE TOWNSHIPS IN COMING WEEKS. BUT SOONER OR LATER THE GOVERNMENT WILL HAVE TO COME BACK TO THE DILEMMA WHICH THEY ALREADY FACED, NAMELY HOW TO PROMOTE DIALOGUE WITH LEADING BLACKS WHEN SO MANY OF THEM ARE EITHER UNDER ARREST OR FRIGHTENED AWAY BY FELLOW BLACKS. THE GOVERNMENT WILL BE AS DETERMINED AS EVER NOT TO APPEAR TO BE NEGOTIATING UNDER PRESSURE. BUT THEY MAY BE ABLE TO JUSTIFY A RENEWED EFFORT TO ESTABLISH THE CONDITIONS FOR DIALOGUE IF THEY CAN POINT TO THE LATEST EMERGENCY MEASURES HAVING BEEN AT LEAST MODERATELY SUCCESSFUL. THE PROSPECTS NEVERTHELESS REMAIN FAR FROM ENCOURAGING.

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