

MEETING OF COMMONWEALTH PRIME MINISTERS, 1951

(London, 4-13 January)

DECLARATION BY COMMONWEALTH PRIME MINISTERS

The Prime Ministers of the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, India, Pakistan, Ceylon, and Southern Rhodesia, and the South African Minister for the Interior, representing the Prime Minister of South Africa, desire, before concluding the present London Meeting, to state in simple terms some of the great principles which have inspired the discussions and strengthened mutual understanding.

Our historic Commonwealth, which comprises one-fourth of the world's population and extends over all the continents and oceans of the world, is singularly well constituted to enable it to study and in some measure to comprehend the vexed questions which beset the world. These do not fit neatly into old patterns. In Europe there are grave and urgent problems which must be solved, and in Asia the rise of new nations and new national unities must be recognised, if peace is to be secured on a basis of justice and prosperity.

The Commonwealth has the unique quality of embracing nations and peoples from every continent. Our own meetings have, therefore, given us special knowledge, and have left us with a special sense of responsibility.

We are, both jointly and severally, pledged to peace. This is not merely a pledge given to other nations; it is solemnly given to our own.

We believe that there are certain courses which must be pursued if real peace is to come.

First, the wounds of the last war must be healed; settlements with Germany and Japan should be made with speed.

Second, we must do what we can to understand those who appear to differ from us. The great antidote to war is hope; its greatest promoter is despair. When we say that war is not inevitable, we do not just mean that we shall prepare and be strong, and that our strength may deter aggression. We also mean that, in a world worn out and distorted by war, there must be an overwhelming majority of the people of all lands who want peace. We must not despair of reaching them. In all our discussions we have made it clear to each other, as we now do to the world, that as Commonwealth Prime Ministers we would welcome any feasible arrangement for a frank exchange of views with Stalin or with Mao Tse Tung. We should, in the name of common humanity, make a supreme effort to see clearly into each other's hearts and minds.

We do not seek to interfere in the affairs of the Soviet Union or China or any other country; we are simply determined to retain the mastery of our own affairs, without fear of aggression.

It is with these considerations in mind that in the last few days we have directed our efforts to the securing of a cessation of hostilities in Korea, so that around the conference table the Great Powers concerned may compose their differences on a basis which will strengthen the United Nations and fulfil the purposes of the Charter.

We all have deep within us a faith in the existence of a purpose of justice in this world, and we believe it to be our duty to forward it by everything we do. Indeed, this sustaining, faith derives added strength from the fact that at our meetings it has been simply and sincerely expressed by men of different races, traditions and creeds.

We think it proper to declare once more that the Commonwealth countries, though they have a special and precious association which they value profoundly, do not regard themselves as some sort of exclusive body. They welcome co-operation with other nations. It has been their privilege to be able to work closely with the United States of America, whose efforts in the direction of assisting many war-stricken nations are warmly regarded, and whose practical support of the United Nations has contributed much to the strength of that organisation. We will at all times seek, by process of discussion, to promote the utmost harmony among ourselves and to arrive at common international policies with the United States, and with all other friendly and co-operative nations.

Our support of the United Nations needs no re-affirmation. The Commonwealth and the United Nations are not inconsistent bodies. On the contrary, the existence of the Commonwealth, linked together by ties of friendship, common purpose and common endeavour, is a source of power behind the Charter.

We of the Commonwealth recognise that the peace and prosperity of the free world cannot be assured while millions live in poverty. We are therefore resolved, while keeping our own economies strong, to promote economic and social development in the under-developed countries, by providing such financial and economic assistance as we can command and by making full use of our resources of scientific and technical experience. The Colombo Plan is practical evidence of this intention. The Commonwealth countries concerned will continue to contribute, to the full extent of their ability, towards the execution of this and similar schemes for developing economic resources and raising social standards.

In brief, the problem of peace is that of removing the causes of war; of easing tension and promoting understanding; of assisting those less-developed nations which need our aid; of being at all times willing to discuss our differences without foolishly assuming that all attempts to secure peace are a form of 'appeasement'. We will cultivate the friendships we now have, and hope that with wise approaches differences may become less and ultimately disappear.

But, while we say these things with a full heart, we are bound to add that, so long as the fear of aggression exists, we will have to strengthen our defences with all speed and diligence. This may well result in placing heavy burdens upon our peoples. It is our firm belief that that the rule of law should govern human conduct; and we are prepared to accept whatever sacrifices may be necessary to uphold, with all other nations, those principles of international law and order which are essential conditions for world peace and progress.

FINAL COMMUNIQUE

The final session of the Meeting of Commonwealth Prime Ministers was held at No.10 Downing Street this afternoon.

The Prime Ministers of the Commonwealth had agreed that at this critical time it was desirable to supplement and reinforce by personal discussions the regular exchange of information and views which is maintained at all times through the High Commissioners in Commonwealth capitals. Against the background of the common understanding thus secured, decisions can be reached more readily by Commonwealth Governments on specific questions of policy. The discussions which the Prime Ministers have held during the past ten days over a wide range of topics have once again revealed a harmony of view that gives a sense of confidence and strength in this time of international tension.

The main purpose of the present Meeting was to review the international situation, and to consider what further positive action Commonwealth Governments could take to secure and preserve world peace.

There was agreement on the urgency and importance of promoting a satisfactory settlement in the Far East. The current discussions on this question in the First Committee of the General Assembly of the United Nations were kept under daily review during the course of the Meeting; and the Commonwealth Prime Ministers were able to exchange views regarding the means by which their representatives in New York could best advance those discussions towards a successful conclusion. It is their earnest hope that the fresh approach which has now been made in the First Committee may lead to a settlement of outstanding issues in the Far East.

The Prime Ministers discussed the terms of a peace settlement for Japan and the safeguards which it might include. They affirmed their belief that the early conclusion of a Japanese Peace Treaty was an urgent need.

The Prime Ministers considered the situation in the Middle East. They agreed that the stability and welfare of this area, and its maintenance as a vital artery of communications, are of deep concern to all Commonwealth countries.

The Meeting also reviewed the situation in Europe. The Prime Ministers of the United Kingdom and Canada, whose Governments are signatories of the North Atlantic Treaty, explained their obligations under the terms of that Treaty and the measures which are being taken to meet them. The Prime Ministers took note of the progress made in re-establishing the economy of Western Europe on a sound basis. By strengthening the ability of the European democracies to maintain their national integrity, this has made a valuable contribution to the security of the free world.

The Prime Ministers examined the economic problems arising from current shortages of raw materials. They agreed that, apart from any comprehensive international organisation for handling raw materials problems, there was need for closer and more regular consultation between the Commonwealth countries on all questions of supply and production. They agreed to recommend to their respective Governments that the existing Commonwealth

machinery for consultation on economic questions should be strengthened for this purpose.

In a separate declaration the Prime Ministers have affirmed the common purpose of the Commonwealth countries to preserve world peace.

Several of the Prime Ministers will be remaining in London for a few days longer and will take this opportunity of discussing matters lying outside the scope of the Meeting now concluded.

12 January 1951

Heads of Delegation

Australia	The Rt Hon R G Menzies, Prime Minister
Britain	The Rt Hon Clement Attlee, Prime Minister
Canada	The Rt Hon L S St Laurent, Prime Minister
Ceylon	The Hon D S Senanayake, Prime Minister
India	Shri Jawaharlal Nehru, Prime Minister
New Zealand	The Rt Hon S G Holland, Prime Minister
Pakistan	The Hon Liaquat Ali Khan, Prime Minister
Southern Rhodesia	The Rt Hon Godfrey Huggins, Prime Minister
Union of South Africa	Dr The Hon T E Donges, Minister of the Interior