

Senate, Monday 2 December 1996

COMMITTEES: Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee: Joint: Report

Senator CHAPMAN (South Australia) (4.46 p.m.) —I present the report of the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade entitled *Australia's relations with southern Africa*, together with minutes of proceedings and transcript of evidence. I seek leave to move a motion in relation to the report.

Leave granted.

Senator CHAPMAN —I move:

That the Senate take note of the report.

I seek leave to incorporate my tabling speech in Hansard.

Leave granted.

The document read as follows—

I have great pleasure in tabling the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade's report on *Australia's relations with Southern Africa*.

The inquiry commenced in April 1995 under the very able chairmanship of Mr Colin Hollis, MP and had progressed to report stage when the election was called in January 1996.

Following the re-establishment of the Committee we reviewed the evidence gathered and agreed to conclude the inquiry. The Minister for Foreign Affairs formally re-referred the inquiry in August 1996, updated evidence was sought, and the report is now before the Senate.

The inquiry focused on Australia's relations with those countries that make up the Southern African Development Community, or SADC. There are 12 member states: Angola, Zambia, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Botswana, Mozambique, Lesotho, Swaziland, Tanzania, South Africa and Mauritius.

One of the difficulties facing the Committee during the inquiry was that submissions largely focused on South Africa, and to a lesser extent Zimbabwe and Mozambique. This may be due to the limited knowledge in Australia of many of the smaller African countries, but it is also a reflection of the dominant role of South Africa in the region. We took particular care, however, to stress in our hearings that we were not conducting an inquiry into just South Africa, but that we wanted more broadly to examine Australia's contacts with the region as a whole. As honourable senators would appreciate, looking at 12 countries was a fairly challenging task as there is enormous diversity among the SADC members.

As we note in the report, unfortunately many Australians still perceive Africa in terms of stereotypes. When the media reports on Africa, it tends to show the ethnic conflicts, such as we have seen recently in Rwanda and Zaire, or humanitarian emergencies arising from civil war or drought.

Contrary to this perception, there are many success stories still to be told, and Southern Africa has more than its share. The region has been described as a 'beacon of hope' in Africa, and certainly there is much that we should applaud, particularly in the last five years.

Southern Africa is one of the most democratic regions in Africa, with successful multi-party elections having been held recently in Malawi, Mozambique and Namibia and complemented by South Africa's transition to a multi-racial democracy. While the successes to date have been encouraging, there is no reason to be complacent—much remains to be done, and the peace in both Mozambique and Angola remains fragile.

Madam President, for us all it is South Africa and the remarkable transformation that is occurring in that country that holds the key to the region's future.

Few commentators a decade ago would have believed that the South Africa of today was possible. Much of the successful transition to a multi-part democracy can be attributed to

President Nelson Mandela. While he did not do it alone, President Mandela was crucial to the whole process, and remains a potent moral symbol for the new South Africa, and indeed for the whole African continent.

Some have expressed concern about South Africa after President Mandela, and it is true that South Africa will be at its most vulnerable in the lead up to the 1999 elections, in which President Mandela has indicated he will not stand. However, there is a depth of talent among the various political parties in South Africa that augers well for the future. The Committee was fortunate to meet both Deputy President Thabo Mbeki, and then Vice President F W de Klerk during their separate visits to Australia in the first half of 1995. Although from very different political backgrounds both men showed a commitment to peaceful reform in South Africa and the role Mr de Klerk played in achieving change should not be underestimated. Negotiations on the draft South African Constitution have demonstrated a willingness by most participants to work within the system to achieve the best possible outcome. It is of concern that the Inkatha Freedom Party under Chief Buthelezi, while part of the Government of National Unity, did not participate in the constitutional reform process and is still seeking a high degree of autonomy for the KwaZulu/Natal province.

South Africa faces a number of significant economic problems, and its economic success is vital not only for its own population, but because of the central role the South African economy plays in Africa. To quote from Austrade's submission, South Africa:

produces 42% of Africa's industrial output

generates 60% of Africa's power

produces 75% of Africa's iron and steel

mines 40% of Africa's minerals

carries 65% of Africa's total freight

produces 40% of Africa's food

drives 40% of Africa's cars and

uses 40% of Africa's telephones.

South Africa is rich in natural resources, has a good infrastructure, and a well established corporate sector. However, it has a narrow export base, large sections of the population are unskilled and uneducated, unemployment is about 45% and a significant number of highly skilled South Africans have emigrated during the past 20 years. It is clear, therefore, that the challenge lies ahead for the leaders of South Africa.

After many years of comparative isolation, it is encouraging to note the positive role that South Africa is prepared to play in its immediate region. It is remarkable to see the former Front Line states, once the target of destabilisation by apartheid South Africa, now working closely with their old enemy to bring about greater economic integration and prosperity.

Cooperation is well advanced in areas such as power generation, transport and communications, and environmental management. SADC is redefining itself, and South Africa is playing an important role in that process. The organisation is beginning to take on a regional security dimension, and the Committee has made a number of recommendations on assistance to SADC to encourage its development and strengthen its institutions.

There is much that I could speak on today—the business opportunities for Australian companies in southern Africa; the educational links that are being established between Australian universities and those in the SADC countries, the involvement of a number of the SADC states in the Indian Ocean Rim processes, both governmental and 'second-track'; Australia's development assistance program in Southern Africa and the real need that exists and will continue to exist for many years to come. However, time is too short to do more than refer honourable senators to the report.

Madam President, I conclude by thanking all of the individuals, NGOs, academics and business groups who assisted the Committee in its work. The Committee was particularly

pleased to receive a number of submissions from Southern African countries and we hope the report reflects something of their concerns and viewpoint. I would also like to thank the honourable member for Groom who, as Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee, saw this report through to its conclusion in this Parliament, and to all the members who participated in the inquiry.

I commend the report to the Senate.

Senator MARGETTS (Western Australia) (4.47 p.m.) —by leave—The inquiry which resulted in this report of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade was started under the previous government. A separate subcommittee was set up as part of the Joint Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee. It was considered to be important enough to set up a subcommittee on Africa because southern Africa, and Africa in general, is one of those areas in relation to which there is a fairly large gap in the knowledge of many parliamentarians.

My remarks relate mainly to the issue of the original terms of reference. It was a concern which was shared by a number of the community groups who also wrote to the committee.

The terms of reference were:

To investigate and report on Australia's political, security and trade interests in Southern Africa in the Post Apartheid era, in such areas as:

the role of Africa in Australia's global interests—of course, these days, read 'trade interests'—Australia's bilateral interests in key African countries—read 'trade interests'—how Australia might be in a position to contribute to the improving regional security environment; trade and investment opportunities for Australia, including niche markets.

There are sub-topics, but, largely, the irony in relation to Australia and Africa is that Australia's aid relationship, which has been of concern to a lot of community groups, is inversely proportional to the per capita income of many countries. It seems that aid is often used as a means of attracting trade or being involved with trade.

That is very sad, because we really have not had an opportunity to look at whether Australia's aid program is meeting the need of addressing poverty in Africa or southern Africa. By dealing simply with the SADC countries, we have probably avoided dealing with many of the countries which are suffering some of the biggest shifts and upheavals. The problems are economic and social, and they end up being ones that involve loss of life and also some very serious environmental problems.

The committee dealt with some of these problems, but unfortunately, because of cutbacks, we no longer have an Africa subcommittee; it ended up being sent to the foreign affairs subcommittee of the Joint Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee. I think it is quite sad that we put less emphasis on that area due to cutbacks.

I also think it is important that at some time in the future we look at some of the issues relating to Australia's relationship with Africa. We should look at some of the political issues so that in the future Australia does not feel that it needs to support, or otherwise, an international military effort into parts of Africa, in order to try to sort out a huge social and military dilemma, when we have so very little understanding of the area.

I think it is time for the Australian parliament to look further into those areas. It is time for us also to look at the connections between economic policies and some of the other issues that eventuate from that, be they social upheaval or even environmental upheaval. I am pleased that, at my request, on page 143 of the report there is a small section on environmental issues.

It was pointed out to the committee on a number of occasions that there seemed to be a connection between structural adjustment programs as a result of internationalism and the impact of World Bank and IMF programs. At page 143 of the report, the Australian Council for Overseas Aid is quoted as saying:

What has happened with the structural adjustment programs, by and large, is that they have tended to pressure countries to export more of their agricultural produce . . . It has also pushed agriculture into very marginal areas . . . and that has stressed the land . . . [It] has not been done in a way that is in any way environmentally sustainable.

The report also quotes from Marter and Gordon's 'Emerging issues confronting the renewable natural resources sector in sub-Saharan Africa' in Food Policy :

As a consequence of urbanisation, the proportion of population not producing its own food is rising fast and has profound implications for the region's food security. Urbanisation also raises major issues with regard to pollution. Air pollution associated with vehicle emissions and industry, solid waste, most of which is not collected or treated, contaminated water supplies, will all have serious implications for public health. The failure of many structural adjustment policies to date is attributable to the failure to address such issues effectively.

It is important that we start seeing those connections, whether in nearby regions or in Africa, and start building them into our support structures and looking beyond our base desire to make money out of a particular area of the world. We need to start looking at what kinds of decisions of a political or military nature Australia might be required to make in the future and try to understand what the issues are.

It is very rare in Africa that a drought is simply a drought. There is often some political and military story behind it which exacerbates the situation, leading to extra pressure on the land. There has been a history of people moving to areas or being forced to use areas that should not be used because of climatic conditions, and the creation of deserts where deserts did not exist before. It is important for us to understand such things.

We are still way short of that level of understanding. We, as a parliament, need to be able to make decisions in relation to these issues. I certainly hope that in the future we take the opportunity of going past the desire simply to make money from trade and look at what are the real issues affecting Africa which might spill over into decisions required to be made in this parliament. I seek leave to continue my remarks later.

Leave granted; debate adjourned.