

House of Representatives, Monday 2 December 1996

COMMITTEES: Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee: Report

Mr TAYLOR (Groom) (12.49 p.m.) —On behalf of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, I present the committee's report entitled *Australia's relations with Southern Africa*, together with the minutes of proceedings and evidence received by the committee.

Ordered that the report be printed.

Mr TAYLOR —I have pleasure today in tabling the report of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade entitled *Australia's relations with Southern Africa*. The inquiry commenced in April 1995 under the chairmanship of the honourable member for Throsby (Mr Hollis) and had progressed to preliminary draft report stage when the election was called in January 1996. Following the re-establishment of the committee, the Minister for Foreign Affairs (Mr Downer) formally re-referred the inquiry in August 1996 and the foreign affairs subcommittee, which I chair, then sought updated evidence.

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 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 to examine Australia's contacts with the region more broadly. Clearly, 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. However, there are many success stories that are still to be told and southern Africa has more than its share, being described as a 'beacon of hope' in Africa, 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. Of course, there has also been South Africa's transition to a multi-racial democracy. While the successes to date have been encouraging, we must not be complacent. Much remains to be done, and the peace in both Mozambique and Angola remains very fragile indeed.

Mr Acting Speaker, in the short time I have today, it would be remiss of me not to say a few words about South Africa and the remarkable transformation that is occurring in that country. Few commentators a decade ago would have believed that the South Africa of today was possible. Much of the successful transition to a multi-party democracy can be attributed to President Nelson Mandela. While he did not do it alone, he was crucial to the whole process and remains a potent moral symbol for the new South Africa and throughout the African continent.

While there are some concerns in the lead-up to the 1999 elections in which President Mandela has indicated that he will not stand, there is a depth of talent among the various political parties in South Africa that augurs well for the future. 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, however, that the

Inkatha Freedom Party under Chief Buthelezi, although still 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's economic success is vital not only for its own population but for all of Africa. It produces 42 per cent of Africa's industrial output and generates 60 per cent of Africa's power. It produces 75 per cent of Africa's iron and steel. It mines 40 per cent of Africa's minerals. It carries 65 per cent of Africa's total freight. It produces 40 per cent of Africa's food. Mr Acting Speaker, the figures speak for themselves.

However, it has a narrow export base. Large sections of the population are unskilled and uneducated. Unemployment is about 45 per cent, and a significant number of highly skilled South Africans have emigrated during the past 20 years. It is clear that many challenges lie ahead. 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 process; and the real needs that exist and will continue to exist for many years to come. However, time limitations simply allow me to refer honourable members to the report. Mr Acting Speaker, I thank everyone who assisted the committee in its work. I thank committee members who participated in the inquiry, and I commend the report to the House. I move:

That the House take note of the report.

I seek leave to continue my remarks later.

Leave granted.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER —In accordance with standing order 102B, the debate is adjourned. The resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting. The honourable member will have leave to continue speaking when the debate is resumed.