

COPY

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6th March, 1967.

Mr P.C. Pelsaer, M.P.,
The Hon. the Minister of Justice and of Prisons,
Marks Building,
Parliament Street,
CAPE TOWN.

Dear Sir,

Re: Permission to visit R.M. Sobukwe
Your Ref.: MG 2/1: M1 21

In accordance with your letter of January 4, 1967, I duly applied to the Magistrate, Cape Town, for permission to visit Mr. Robert M. Sobukwe on Robben Island. The Magistrate refused me permission, and I trust that you will not mind my addressing this letter to you to express my very great disappointment and surprise at this.

In a Press announcement on May 2, 1963, your predecessor in office, the Right Hon. B.J. Vorster, said that Mr. Sobukwe "will by no means be treated like a prisoner, but receive special treatment in respect of food movement, using leisure hours, hours of rising and retiring, clothing, etc". In the same generous vein, Mr. Vorster also said that he would "be able to receive visitors weekly".

Yet I would respectfully draw your attention to the fact that Mr. Sobukwe is greatly restricted in the number of his visitors. Had he been detained in any jail on the mainland it would be a normal occurrence for me, or any other friend, to call during official visiting hours and gain access to him. His detention on Robben Island means that a permit must first be obtained and in this way he is restricted in regard to visitors. As far as I know, the only people who have been permitted to see him during his nearly four years on the Island, apart from myself and certain distinguished visitors, are his wife, his brother-in-law and his mother. For financial reasons, they can visit him only seldom.

I am sure, Sir, that you will agree that the imposition of such hardship was not the intention when Mr. Sobukwe was first transferred to Robben Island. His situation of virtual solitary confinement is having a serious deleterious effect on him, inevitable perhaps after the passage of so many years, in that he is literally forgetting how to speak properly. He is having, I understand, increasing difficulty in concentrating and in enunciating his thoughts.

As you may know, Mr. Sobukwe is a close friend of mine, of many years standing. Our friendship predates his active involvement in politics and indeed has nothing to do with his particular political beliefs. Your predecessor in office was kind enough to allow me to visit Mr. Sobukwe on six occasions, and I cannot understand why it should no longer be possible

for me to visit him. While keeping up a regular correspondence with him and supplying him with most of his material needs, I have never knowingly abused this access to him. He is a friend and I am concerned about him; that is the only reason for my wishing to visit him.

In writing this letter to you, I would also respectfully like to address a special plea to you for consideration to be given to Mr. Sobukwe's early release from detention. He is now approaching the end of his fourth year on the Island, after previously having served a three-year jail sentence. The Republic is secure and at peace. In no conceivable way, surely, could Mr. Sobukwe represent any kind of a threat to the maintenance of good order or the security of the State. He cannot, surely, be held responsible for any harmful political developments which may have occurred during the past four years; in this period, he has been under close and constant guard, with little contact with the world.

I would respectfully appeal to you to allow Mr. Sobukwe the opportunity of returning to a normal life again.

Yours faithfully,

(Sgd.)

BENJAMIN POGRUND.

PUBLISHER:

Publisher:- **Historical Papers, The Library, University of the Witwatersrand**

Location:- **Johannesburg**

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DOCUMENT DETAILS:

Document ID:- **A2618-Ba5-19**

Document Title:- **Letter to PC Pelsler, MP (copy)**

Author:- **Benjamin Pogrand**

Document Date:- **6 March 1967**