



CHAPTER 7: South Africa seen from Abroad

7.1 SOUTH AFRICAN MISSIONS ABROAD

During its consultations with other governments, the Task Group met with 19 South African missions and with commentators and officials in 19 countries on how South Africa was perceived and on the ways in which it was being promoted.³²

We were impressed with the determination of South African representatives to market South Africa. In general, abundant goodwill still exists for South Africa around the globe. However, a large majority of those we met sounded alarm bells - over a rising perception of the problems besetting the country and the end of the "honeymoon" period for South Africa.

The lack of a strategy and co-ordination in projecting South African policies and priorities was expressed forcefully by heads of mission, and most strongly by the HoM in the five G7 countries visited. Their points are worth noting in full.

- The term "the new South Africa" is not a sufficient marketing strategy. South Africa will not sell itself.
- Criticism of South Africa is mounting (for example crime and perceived lack of delivery), and there is no clear guidance, or overall strategy, to address these issues.
- Information flow to missions is inadequate. Missions need to know the context of decisions, not just the bare facts, in order to be able to motivate them. It is also essential that material be timely - missions often receive ministerial speeches days after the media.
- In the bigger missions dedicated informative attachés should be appointed.
- There is a need for focus - the missions try to do too much because there is no guidance on priorities. Resource constraints have added further to this problem. At a time when interest is growing in South Africa and the demand for information on mission staff has escalated, the DFA budget has been reduced.
- No facilities for missions to do local research on attitudes towards and perceptions of South Africa.
- Several sympathetic independent commentators noted that South Africa presents a confusing set of messages which harm its efforts to promote its interests. For example, cases were cited where ministers visited without warning, and there was no involvement of the South African mission - which undermines overall credibility. We were particularly concerned that it appears that provincial governments and some ministers do not involve the local missions when travelling, since this results in the sum of efforts being less than its parts.

³² See Annexure 4, a compilation of reports on international investigations and Annexure 17, survey of South African missions conducted by the Department of Foreign Affairs. See also Recommendations, Improving South Africa's Image in the World.

7.2 FOREIGN COMMUNICATION EFFORTS OF HOST GOVERNMENTS

During the visits, the Task Group also investigated the foreign communication efforts of host governments. By comparison, the standard of South Africa's services is below that provided by most countries, especially those which are its main economic partners or competitors. Unless this problem is addressed, it will be difficult for South Africa to mount and sustain the drive needed to maximise the economic and political benefits from the existing international goodwill.

7.3 THE GROWTH OF ELECTRONIC INFORMATION SYSTEMS

The growth of electronic information systems has transformed the scale of information exchange available to consumers and institutions seeking data. This is especially important in the trade and commerce field, but also in news and information. Virtually every government we visited in Europe, the Americas and Asia, is ahead of South Africa in this area. Comparable developing countries have Internet sites, and major efforts are made to make commercial and statistical information available this way. South Africa needs to develop a national website into which all departments can provide data. There is also an urgent need to provide each mission with access to the Internet, and to improve the level of technology available to them.

7.4 CLOSE CO-OPERATION BETWEEN THE TRADE AND POLITICAL ARMS OF GOVERNMENT

Close co-operation between the trade and political arms of government is a feature elsewhere, but seems to be lacking in South Africa. For example, in Egypt and Hungary, the Foreign Ministries operate and integrate cultural, trade and political information services utilising the Internet and diplomatic/cultural missions. In Britain, the concept of "public diplomacy" is used to advance British interests through an integrated programme led by the foreign ministry, but involving other departments and institutions: visits and exchanges, the BBC world service, the news and information arm of the government, as well as trade promotion and information services. The advantage of these approaches is that they explicitly target key groups such as commerce and industry, support communities or exiles, as part of foreign policy activity. These approaches define many of the reforms and developments in foreign policy delivery in the countries we visited. In general, we found that co-operation with the other important arms of government involved internationally, such as Trade and Industry and SATOUR, was insufficient.

7.5 CONCLUSION

We found much to be encouraged by in our visits, particularly in terms of the morale and professionalism of South Africa's representatives. The emergence of a highly competitive international economy, and the range of demands placed on South Africa because of its history, place unique demands on the country's foreign policy machinery. These will require the leadership of the Department of Foreign Affairs but also the co-operation of other branches of government if South Africa is to exploit fully the opportunities which exist.