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South Africa

20 May 1955

Santa Cruz, Hernan (Santiago, Chile)

- 1 letter from D.H.

PERSONAL

20 May 1955

Dear Mr. Santa Cruz,

I have received your letter of 12 May 1955 concerning the place of meeting of the next session of the United Nations Commission on the Racial Situation in the Union of South Africa.

I should like first of all to assure you that no disrespect toward the Commission or toward yourself was intended by my cable of 11 May. I regret that it appeared peremptory to you because it omitted the details concerning the financing of UNCORS and the conditions governing meetings in Geneva which are necessary for an understanding of the position. I shall therefore briefly summarize the situation for you.

You will recall that at the last session of the General Assembly the method of financing UNCORS was changed. In previous years I had been granted the authority, without the necessity of any concurrence of the Advisory Committee, to enter into any commitments not exceeding a fixed sum which might be necessary for UNCORS; thus I was able alone to make all arrangements for meetings. At the ninth session, however, it was decided on the proposal of the Fifth Committee (A/2858) that I should be authorized to meet commitments required by UNCORS only with the concurrence of the Advisory Committee, and thus this year every expenditure for the Commission

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requires the approval of that Committee. It has consequently been clear since the last session that any plans for a Geneva session were contingent upon the concurrence of the Advisory Committee.

In accordance with the desire of UNCORS to meet in Geneva this summer, I requested the concurrence of the Advisory Committee in the necessary expenditures, but this concurrence was not given, and the Committee recommended that the Commission should meet at Headquarters. Under the circumstances I felt it very difficult to avoid acquiescing in this recommendation.

The decision of the Advisory Committee is no doubt based on its interpretation of the strict limitation which the General Assembly has placed on Geneva meetings of United Nations organs - a limitation which has special force in the case of the Assembly's own subsidiary organs. By resolution 694(VII) the General Assembly adopted the principle that "sessions of all Headquarters-based bodies should be held in New York and sessions of all Geneva-based bodies should be held in Geneva" with certain exceptions not relevant here, and it also directed the Secretary-General to prepare a four-year conference pattern based on the principles adopted. The pattern prepared did not cover the meetings of UNCORS, but that fact did not dispense with the necessity, in scheduling those meetings, of complying with the principles which had been laid down, except where it was clear that a departure from them would not defeat the General Assembly's objects.

The Advisory Committee has carefully followed and strongly supported both the Assembly's decision and the conference pattern. As to meetings like those of UNCORS, the Committee declared in 1953 (A/2501, page 48):

"Where sessions of small Headquarters-based bodies are assigned -- for compelling reasons -- on an ad hoc basis to Geneva, every effort should be made to hold such sessions during the winter months and, in any event, to avoid an overlap with conferences arranged under the fixed pattern."

In this connexion you may not be aware that 5 July, the date chosen for the opening of the UNCORS session, is also the date of the opening of the summer session of the Economic and Social Council held in Geneva under the conference pattern, and consequently if UNCORS met in Geneva it would overlap with the entire session of the Council. As the European Office staff will be fully occupied by the Council, it would be necessary to recruit specially a staff for UNCORS, and for this and other reasons a Geneva session would cost several thousand dollars more than one at Headquarters. It is these reasons of economy and administrative facilities which led to the position of the Advisory Committee.

As I have now learned there will be strong objection to the holding of the session at Headquarters, however, I shall raise the matter again with the Advisory Committee when it meets in New York in the beginning of June, setting forth the arguments as you presented them in your letter. I should be very glad to receive from you any further arguments or facts which you consider appropriate for submission to the Advisory Committee. The place of meeting would then depend on whether the Advisory Committee, in view of the additional information submitted, sees fit to reverse its earlier decision.

As to the concluding paragraph of your letter, I have ventured, in view of the above considerations and of the fact that the matter will be re-submitted to the Advisory Committee, not to transmit our correspondence to the other members of the Commission as you requested. I remain, of course, at your service to transmit anything which you may wish to communicate to the other members in the light of your full knowledge of the facts.

Yours sincerely,

Dag Hammarskjold,
Secretary-General