

Note from the British Foreign Office to the United Kingdom High Commissioners in the Commonwealth on the arrangements for an Afro-Asian Conference (4 February 1955)

Caption: On 4 February 1955, a note sent by the British Foreign Office to the United Kingdom High Commissioners in the Commonwealth outlines the United Kingdom’s concerns surrounding the conference, to be attended by the representatives of 23 Asian countries and six African countries. The Foreign Office suggests that there is a risk that the Afro-Asian Conference will be influenced by communist hostility to the West and by neutralism.

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URL:
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From Foreign Office to certain of Her Majesty's Representatives

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CONFIDENTIAL

AFRO-ASIAN CONFERENCE

When the Prime Ministers of Burma, Ceylon, India, Indonesia and Pakistan met at Colombo in April 1954, the Indonesian Prime Minister proposed that an Afro-Asian Conference should be held in Djakarta in February 1955, to discuss colonialism, economic co-operation and means of lessening world tension.

2. The Prime Ministers met again at Bogor, Indonesia, on December 28 and 29, 1954, to discuss arrangements for this Conference. They agreed that it should be held in the last week of April 1955 and that its purposes would be:—

- (a) To promote good will and co-operation among the nations of Asia and Africa, to explore and advance their mutual as well as common interests and to establish and promote friendliness and neighbourly relations;
- (b) to consider the social, economic and cultural problems and relations of the countries represented;
- (c) to consider problems of special interest to Asian and African peoples, e.g., problems affecting national sovereignty and of racialism and colonialism;
- (d) to review the position of Asia and Africa and their peoples in the world of to-day, and the contribution they can make to the promotion of world peace and co-operation.

3. They decided to invite Afghanistan, Cambodia, the Central African Federation, China, Egypt, Ethiopia, the Gold Coast, Iraq, Japan, Jordan, Laos, the Lebanon, Liberia, Libya, Nepal, Persia, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Siam, the Sudan, Syria, Turkey, Vietnam (North), Vietnam (South) and the Yemen.

4. Her Majesty's Government have thought from the first that the only topic on which the Conference is likely to agree will be anti-colonialism and that, if it indulges in anti-colonial propaganda, it will do nothing to promote the cause of world peace but may well present opportunities to the Communists to stir up racial feeling against the West. Now that the intention to hold this Conference and the list of invitations have been publicly announced it would be a mistake to attempt to dissuade foreign countries from attending. Instead we shall concentrate on encouraging such friendly Governments as may accept invitations to take a reasonable and constructive line in the Conference itself.

5. One of the principal dangers of the Conference is that it may allow itself to be influenced by Communist hostility to the West and by neutralism. If there is no one to oppose such views, the resultant impression may be that Africans and Asians, if not actually sympathetic towards Communism, are at least neutralist and regard opposition to colonialism as more important than the Communist danger. We shall therefore endeavour to brief suitable friendly delegates to counter such views.

6. Intervention by the Conference in African affairs would be unwelcome, and we hope that the Governments of British Territories in Africa will not be represented. The position of the Sudan is exceptional. We share responsibility for its external affairs with Egypt, and the Egyptian Prime Minister has said that he will attend. We shall not therefore object if the Sudanese Prime Minister accepts an invitation to the Conference.

7. Paragraphs 4 to 6 above are for background information only.

[Copied to United Kingdom High Commissioners in all Commonwealth countries and to Her Majesty's Ambassador, Dublin.]

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