

Address by Duncan Sandys at the Kenya constitutional conference (London, 25 September 1963)

Caption: On 25 September 1963, Duncan Sandys, British Secretary of State for the Colonies, gives an address at the opening session of the conference attended by British and Kenyan representatives from 25 September to 6 October 1963 in London to finalise the constitutional arrangements for an independent Kenya.

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1. SPEECH BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE COLONIES

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE COLONIES said:

"Gentlemen! On behalf of the British Government I wish to extend to you all a very warm welcome here in London. This is the fourth important conference which has been held in the last three years to consider the future of Kenya. There was the conference here in Lancaster House in January, 1960, there was the second conference also here in Lancaster House in February, 1962, and then there was the conference we had in Nairobi in February of this year. Some of you I know have taken part in all these meetings. It has certainly not been an easy path, and it would have been, I think, a bold man who three years ago would have predicted that we would be sitting here in 1963 settling the final steps to lead Kenya to full independence.

The earlier conferences were all of them faced with difficult problems and I am inclined to think that this present conference is not likely to be an exception. However, on each previous occasion, after much argument and heart searching, agreement was eventually reached, and I trust that we too will manage to do the same.

At the Lancaster House Conference in 1962, the delegates of all parties agreed upon a framework for Kenya's future constitution. This declared, and I am quoting from it, that: 'Our objective is a united Kenya nation, capable of social and economic progress in the modern world, and a Kenya in which men and women have confidence in the sanctity of individual rights and liberties and in the proper safeguarding of the interests of minorities.'

In all our constitutional talks our aim has been to reconcile the need for efficient administration with the protection of the interests of the various tribes and communities of which Kenya is composed. Our main task has thus been to establish a proper balance between the powers of the Central Government and those of the regional authorities. Most of the problems with which we shall be faced in this conference will in one way or another be concerned with this question of the balance between centre and regions. I hope that without making basic changes in what we have previously agreed we shall have the wisdom to find solutions which, on the one hand, will maintain confidence among all sections of Kenya's population, and on the other, will ensure that the Government has the means to govern.

The wish of us all is that an independent Kenya would enjoy political stability and economic progress. An essential condition for both these objectives is a constitution firmly based upon agreement and goodwill of all sections of the people. To achieve that agreement and to establish that goodwill is our task at this Conference. With the help of you all I feel sure that we shall succeed."