

## A Commonwealth of Principles

After celebrating its 50th anniversary in 1999, the Commonwealth enters the new millennium firmly committed to the fundamental values outlined in the Harare Commonwealth Declaration of 1991. The Commonwealth's distinctive roles, as identified in this landmark document, are in the promotion of democracy, human rights, good governance and the rule of law, sustainable socio-economic development and consensus-building on global issues.

The Harare Declaration has also become a benchmark for existing as well as aspiring members. Between 1995 and the end of this review period (30 June 1999), the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group on the Harare Declaration (CMAG) has met 11 times to deal with serious and persistent violations of these principles by member countries. Commitment to these principles also lies at the heart of criteria for membership agreed by Heads of Government at the 1997 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Edinburgh.

In advancing its fundamental political values, the Commonwealth has continued to promote and consolidate democracy in a number of ways: through the actions of CMAG, the observation of elections and strengthening of democratic practices and institutions (see Chapter 2), and the Secretary-General's good offices role. It also seeks to build consensus within the Commonwealth and in the wider

international community on a variety of issues, using its multi-layered consultative mechanisms, including CHOGM, various ministerial meetings and meetings at the level of senior officials.

### The Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group on the Harare Declaration

The Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group on the Harare Declaration was created at CHOGM 1995 in New Zealand

At the heart of the Commonwealth ... consultation and consensus. The Secretary-General (*left*) and UK Prime Minister Tony Blair meet the media after CHOGM 1997



**Commonwealth**  
Heads of Government Meeting  
**Edinburgh 97**



Renewed mandate for CMAG, here meeting with Nigerian Foreign Minister Ambassador Ignatius Ollisemeka in 1998 (*front row, second from right*)

as one of the specific measures under the Millbrook Action Programme to support adherence to the Harare principles.

At CHOGM 1997, Heads of Government renewed CMAG's mandate and reconstituted CMAG's membership. Zimbabwe remained in the chair, New Zealand as vice-chair, Barbados replaced Jamaica, Botswana

replaced South Africa and Canada, Ghana, Malaysia and the UK remained as members. The group met five times during the period covered in this Report (1 July 1997 to 30 June 1999).

CMAG continued to focus on the three member countries then under military regimes during much of the review period: The Gambia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone. All three completed transitions to civilian rule by 30 June 1999. The terms of reference of the Group's future role are being considered, and it is expected to meet again before the November 1999 CHOGM in South Africa to prepare its report to Heads of Government.

*Nigeria* – Nigeria had been suspended from membership at CHOGM 1995 in New Zealand for violating the Harare principles. In 1997, CMAG reported to Heads of Government that the regime of General Sani Abacha had proposed a new timetable, ending on 1 October 1998, for a return to civilian democracy and

### Membership criteria

When assessing applications for Commonwealth membership, Heads of Government will take into account the following criteria: the applicant country should, as a rule (a) have a present or past constitutional link with an existing Commonwealth member, (b) comply with Commonwealth values outlined in the Harare Declaration and (c) accept Commonwealth norms and conventions. Countries are accepted as members by consensus.

These criteria were recommended by an intergovernmental group comprising countries which had hosted previous CHOGMs. Membership of the Commonwealth reached 54 with the return of Fiji Islands on 1 October 1997 after a 10-year lapse.



Back in the family ... after a 10-year lapse, Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka (*right*) leads Fiji Islands back to CHOGM, here seen with Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong (*left*) of Singapore and Prime Minister Jean Chrétien of Canada at the Retreat in 1997



New era ... at the historical elections in Nigeria in 1999, President-elect Olusegun Obasanjo and the leader of the Commonwealth Observer Group, Sir Ketumile Masire (right)

recommended that Nigeria remain suspended. Any decision on Nigeria's future relations with the Commonwealth would be taken after that date.

The situation changed dramatically, however, following the sudden death, in June 1998, of General Abacha. His successor, General Abdulsalami Abubakar, put in place a new transition programme to restore civilian democracy by May 1999, and the state of human rights and the rule of law greatly improved in the months leading up to that point. In October 1998, CMAG met with the new Nigerian Foreign Minister, Ambassador Ignatius Olisemeka, and took note of the new transition programme.

Following the completion of the electoral timetable (see *Chapter 2*), culminating in the election on 27 February 1999 of General Olusegun Obasanjo as a civilian President, CMAG recommended Nigeria's full reintegration into the Commonwealth on the assumption of office of the democratically elected President

on 29 May 1999. This was subsequently unanimously endorsed by Commonwealth Heads of Government and Nigeria was fully reinstated as a member on that date.

*Sierra Leone* – Following the military coup in May 1997, CMAG led widespread international condemnation of the illegal regime and backed the military intervention from neighbouring member countries of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) which helped to restore the elected civilian government of President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah in March 1998. A CMAG Ministerial Mission, which visited Sierra Leone later the same month, underscored the Commonwealth's solidarity with and support for President Kabbah's elected government.

CMAG also appealed to the Commonwealth and the wider international community to provide humanitarian assistance to the country and responded quickly to a request from President Kabbah for

Commonwealth assistance with the reorganisation of the Sierra Leonean police force.

After a renewed outbreak of the fighting, CMAG encouraged President Kabbah to engage in dialogue with the Revolutionary United Front, and became one of the moral guarantors of a peace agreement signed on 7 July 1999 in Lomé, Togo.

*The Gambia* – With the completion of the transition to civilian governance in The Gambia in 1997, CMAG's focus on that country since CHOGM 1997 has

moved to the consolidation of the transition to democracy. This includes providing Commonwealth technical assistance and encouraging the creation of a more tolerant political environment, including by pressing for the removal of the bar to political activity on certain political parties and individuals.

### **Conflict Resolution and the Good Offices Role**

The Secretary-General or his representatives often work

discreetly to help member countries resolve internal problems which threaten their stability or to assist the transition to democracy from one-party or military rule.

In this review period, the Secretary-General established close contact with General Abubakar's new administration in Nigeria in June 1998 to encourage the changes announced by him towards the return of a credible democracy in Nigeria. His appeal to Commonwealth countries led to widespread support for



On the ground ... a CMAG ministerial mission visited Sierra Leone in March 1998

### **Largest CHOGM**

The 1997 CHOGM in Edinburgh, UK, brought together the largest number ever of member countries – 51 delegations, 43 of which were led by Heads of State or Prime Ministers (Nauru and Tuvalu were Special Members and as such did not attend CHOGM; Nigeria was ineligible to

attend because it was suspended). The meeting also celebrated the return of Fiji Islands to the association after an absence of 10 years, its membership having 'lapsed' in 1987 after a military coup.

This meeting had as its special theme 'Trade, Investment and Development: The Road to Commonwealth Prosperity' and

adopted the Edinburgh Economic Declaration, which underlined the Commonwealth's resolve to become a vehicle for enhanced commercial and economic co-operation. The next CHOGM is to be held in Durban, South Africa, from 12 to 15 November 1999. In the year 2001 it will be held in Australia.

Heads of Government at the 1997 CHOGM in Edinburgh



ECOWAS's efforts to restore constitutionality in Sierra Leone, and he and his special envoy have maintained contacts with all parties to the conflict in that country to promote dialogue to end the violence. The Commonwealth was one of the moral guarantors of the 1996 Abidjan Peace Accord and also of the Peace Accord signed by President Kabbah and the rebel leader Foday Sankoh in Lomé in July 1999.

In Tanzania, mediation efforts based on proposals put forward by the Secretary-General culminated in May 1999 with a Commonwealth-brokered agreement providing for an end to a four-year-old political impasse in Zanzibar. And mediation efforts in Solomon Islands by the Secretary-General's Special Envoy, General Sitiveni Rabuka, led to another Commonwealth-brokered agreement on 28 June 1999 to end inter-communal conflict on the island of Guadalcanal.

The Secretary-General has complemented CARICOM (Caribbean Community) efforts to find a solution to the political crisis that emerged in the aftermath of the December 1997 elections in Guyana. After implementation of the Herdmanston Accord had been stalled, his intervention and discussions with both government and opposition leaders led to the Government and the main opposition party agreeing to resume dialogue.

The Secretary-General remained in touch with the Lesotho Government and regional leaders with a view to promoting stability and constitutional rule in that country. The Commonwealth Secretariat also helped to establish and support a new Independent Electoral Commission in Lesotho. During the constitutional crisis in Pakistan in December 1997, the Secretary-General's visit helped to stress the importance of constitutionality and the sovereignty of parliament.

Support was also provided to the efforts of regional leaders to address the constitutional crisis in St Kitts and Nevis which arose from a proposal that Nevis secede. The Secretariat subsequently assisted the work of the Constitution Task Force that was established by the Government of St Kitts and Nevis in 1998.

### Consultation and Consensus-Building

The Commonwealth plays an important role in building consensus on issues of global importance. At the apex of the system of consultations are the biennial CHOGMs. Widespread consultations are also held at ministerial level – in this review period, Commonwealth ministers of education, finance, health, law and youth affairs have met. Senior officials meet regularly every two years between CHOGMs and the Secretary-General meets Commonwealth representatives in London

### Healing touch for police

Six senior serving and former police officers from four Commonwealth countries – Canada, Sri Lanka, the UK and Zimbabwe – began helping Sierra Leone to rebuild its police force in October 1998.

The Commonwealth Police Development Task Force for Sierra Leone was led by Mr Keith Biddle, a

retired Assistant Inspector of Constabulary in the UK. The others were: Mr Adrian Horn (UK), Senior Assistant Commissioner Rudo Muchemanyi (Zimbabwe), Inspector Earl Peters (Canada), Senior Deputy Inspector-General Dr Dharmadasa Silva (Sri Lanka) and Chief Inspector David Tingle (UK). The six were each sponsored by their governments and the UK Government supplied additional operational and logistical support to the group as a whole.

The reorganisation of the Sierra Leone Police Force (SLPF) was considered an urgent priority by the Government after the

months of widespread devastation by the previous illegal military junta. The Commonwealth team worked with the SLPF and in consultation with the UN Observer Mission in Sierra Leone to develop a strategic plan for the rebuilding of the force. Drafting a mission statement for the SLPF, entitled 'A Force for Good', was one of the Commonwealth team's early achievements.

The Commonwealth police experts worked in Sierra Leone until they had to be withdrawn following increased rebel activity at the end of 1998 and the project was suspended in February 1999. Following the signing of the Lomé Peace Agreement between the Government and the rebels, the Task Force is to be reactivated later in 1999.



Rebuilding job ... the Commonwealth Police Development Task Force meets the Secretary-General before leaving for Sierra Leone

periodically to exchange views on current issues and for briefings on important Commonwealth meetings.

To help small states have a voice in the international community, the Joint Office for Commonwealth Permanent Missions to the United Nations in New York, under the overall management of the Secretariat, has continued to provide an important service. Nine Commonwealth small states (Belize, Dominica, The Gambia, Grenada, Maldives, Seychelles, Solomon Islands, St Lucia and Samoa) were provided with office space and facilities to

maintain their representation at the UN. Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom continued to assist with the bulk of its funding, together with annual contributions from India, Malaysia, New Zealand and Singapore.

In its pursuit of consensus-building on global issues, the Commonwealth places great emphasis on its relations with other international bodies. As in the past, the Secretary-General and other Secretariat officials met UN officials and Permanent Representatives of Commonwealth countries during the annual sessions of the UN

regional organisations concerning issues of peace and security.

Relations with La Francophonie have been progressively strengthened. In March 1998, the Commonwealth and La Francophonie jointly fielded an election observer group for the Seychelles Presidential and National Assembly Elections – the first such joint exercise with another international organisation. In the same month, the Secretary-General attended La Francophonie Day celebrations in Paris as a guest of Dr Boutros Boutros-Ghali, the Secretary-General of La Francophonie. A joint colloquium between the two organisations on Democracy in Pluralistic Societies is being planned in the next biennium.

Relations with UNESCO were also strengthened. In March 1998, the Commonwealth Secretary-General participated in the UNESCO Conference on Cultural Policies for Development in Stockholm and was a regular contributor to a high-level group which, under the joint auspices of UNESCO and the City of Valencia, prepared a Draft Declaration of Human Duties and Responsibilities in the Third Millennium. The Secretariat and UNESCO jointly organised a colloquium, entitled *Towards a Constructive Pluralism*, in Paris in January 1999 (see Chapter 2).

The Secretariat also works to build Commonwealth-wide and international consensus on a variety of other issues which are described elsewhere in this Report.



Bringing people together ... the Secretary-General (*middle*) at the signing of an agreement between opposing political parties in Zanzibar in 1999

General Assembly. Bilateral meetings were also held in London and Brussels with representatives of the European Commission. The Deputy Secretary-General (Political) attended the summit of CARICOM in July 1998 and, in December that year, co-chaired a UN-sponsored meeting on co-operation between the UN and