

# Executive summary



This Report of the Commonwealth Secretary-General covers the period 1 July 2001 to 30 June 2003. It describes the work of the Commonwealth association of 54 member countries, and more specifically the activities and achievements of the Commonwealth Secretariat, the association's principal intergovernmental organisation.

Encouraging sustainable development and strengthening democracy have long been Commonwealth goals. Development and democracy is the theme of this Report and also closely reflects the special theme of the 2003 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Abuja, Nigeria, in December. Deliberations in Abuja will be informed by the Report of the Expert Group on Development and Democracy set up by the Secretary-General, based on a mandate from the 2002 CHOGM in Coolom, Australia.

Democracy remains central to the Commonwealth project. The last two years have seen the Secretariat redoubling its efforts to uphold the fundamental values articulated in the Harare Commonwealth Declaration of 1991, reinvigorated by the mandates emerging from the Coolom summit.

The Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group on the Harare Declaration, mandated to deal with serious or persistent violations of the Commonwealth's fundamental values, reviewed developments in Fiji Islands, Pakistan, Solomon Islands and Zimbabwe. The Commonwealth Chairpersons Committee on Zimbabwe (the 'Troika') constituted at Coolom dealt with the situation in that country.

The Secretariat provided technical assistance and training to strengthen democratic institutions and culture. Commonwealth Observer Groups observed elections in nine countries.

With a stronger mandate to make more proactive use of the Secretary-General's good offices, the Secretariat has reinforced its capacity to head off conflict and, where it does occur, to hasten reconstruction and assist with institutional safeguards to promote stability, in close co-operation with other international and regional partner organisations. The following countries had recourse to the Secretary-General's good offices: Cameroon, Fiji Islands, Guyana,

Swaziland, Tonga, and United Republic of Tanzania (Zanzibar).

Work to strengthen the rule of law has continued, with emphasis on the necessity of strong legal frameworks for development and democracy. The 2002 Commonwealth Law Ministers Meeting in St Vincent and the Grenadines focused on: issues of land and development; combating terrorism (particularly assisting with implementing relevant United Nations resolutions); trade, investment and competition; new technologies; and freedom of information and privacy. The Secretariat's development of model laws which can be adapted to individual members' legal systems was a valued part of its legal work.

The Secretariat also reinforced its capacity to promote human rights including through the integration of human rights standards across all its Divisions, emphasis on the indivisibility of civil, political, economic and social rights, and collaboration with other bodies in the human rights field. Expert groups were convened to determine best practice regarding freedom of expression, association and assembly; combating trafficking in women and children; rights of victims of crime; and internally displaced persons. Human rights publications were disseminated and existing Commonwealth youth networks employed to train youth in human rights issues.

Working towards a fairer global trading system, the Commonwealth has helped members pool their resources and amplify their voices at world forums where the key decisions are made that directly affect them. Technical support has been provided for the Doha Round of trade negotiations. Trade capacity-building has included the 'Hub and Spoke' project to benefit countries in the Africa, Caribbean and Pacific regions. The Commonwealth has continued to stand up for the rights of its members to trade transparently in financial services.

**Above:**  
Marlborough House,  
London, headquarters of the  
Commonwealth Secretariat

## Expert Group on Development and Democracy

The Coolum CHOGM requested that the Secretary-General establish a high-level Expert Group to recommend ways in which the 1999 Fancourt Commonwealth Declaration on Globalisation and People-Centred Development could be carried forward, focusing on how democracies might best be supported in alleviating poverty and promoting pro-poor development. The Group comprises ten experts from a range of disciplines and professional backgrounds related to international development and good governance. It is chaired by Dr Manmohan Singh, former Finance Minister of India.

The Expert Group met in November 2002, and May and July 2003. The Group will forward its report to the Secretary-General who in turn will submit it to Heads of Government at the 2003 Abuja summit. The report will be the background document for the special theme of the summit, 'Development and Democracy: Partnership for Peace and Prosperity'. The report is expected to address issues related to confronting the crisis of global poverty, efforts by developing countries to consolidate and deepen democracy, and ways of making democracy and pro-poor development mutually reinforcing.

Efforts have continued to enable all Commonwealth countries to enjoy the benefits of globalisation, to channel more official and private investment to developing countries and to help overcome endowed handicaps of small vulnerable economies. The Commonwealth Private Investment Initiative grew in strength and reach. The prospects for heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC) of a sustainable exit from debt while reaching the Millennium Development Goals, received attention through ministerial meetings, advocacy and technical support.

The Secretariat's work in promoting economic growth and poverty reduction, supported by the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation, has included assistance in export and investment promotion; enterprise and agricultural development; financial and private sector development; natural resource management; negotiating maritime boundaries; tourism; and debt management. Public sector reform remains a priority; more than 70 public sector reform assignments in some 30 countries were completed in the two-year period under review.

With 32 member countries qualifying as small states, the Commonwealth continues to be a particular advocate of their interests. Its efforts have succeeded in getting the needs of small states taken seriously at the UN and the World Bank. The larger part of the Secretariat's capacity-building and technical assistance resources has continued to be directed towards small states, helping to equip them to deal with the challenges of globalisation. Nine small states made use of the Joint Office for Commonwealth Permanent Missions to the UN in New York.

In pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals, the CFTC has continued to work to

bridge the skills gap, mainly through the placement of experts in key posts and the provision of training to public sector staff. Some 300 experts and consultants were fielded to developing countries, and more than 6,000 people trained over the review period.

The Commonwealth supports the empowerment of women by helping eliminate discrimination, promoting equal opportunities for women and men, and recognising that gender equality is essential to poverty eradication and sustainable development. The past two years have seen enhanced interest among governments and citizens in mainstreaming gender in government policies and programmes, including national budgeting. Other areas of focus included promoting women's involvement in peace processes and post-conflict reconstruction, and strengthening partnerships for eliminating violence against women.

The Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP) works to empower young people through programmes in youth enterprise development, national youth policy development, youth participation and training youth workers through the CYP's Youth in Development Work Diploma and Certificate programmes. Other areas of activity during the reporting period included bridging the digital divide through training in information and communications technology, youth service awards and the Ambassadors for Positive Living programme of peer counselling and awareness-raising to combat HIV/AIDS.

Health and education activities during the reporting period focused on the Millennium Development Goals. The recruitment, migration and retention of workers in health

and education received close attention, as did the impact of HIV/AIDS and particularly the gender dimensions of the problem. A multi-sectoral approach to combating HIV/AIDS was adopted, including technical assistance, gender analysis and partnerships with other organisations. Education initiatives included efforts to improve access and equity in education, the development of head teacher training modules, the sharing of best practices for school improvement, and continued support for the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan.

To help ensure that development efforts are environmentally sustainable, the Secretariat assisted member countries in preparations for the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development. Commonwealth Environment Ministers at their 2003 meeting highlighted areas where the Commonwealth was well placed to support member countries in implementing the outcomes of the Summit. The Iwokrama International Rainforest Programme evolved from a research-based organisation towards a dynamic business-oriented institution.

Efforts to raise the profile of the Commonwealth included a programme of awareness-raising through the CYP regional centres, media relations including press conferences, media interviews with the Secretary-General, and the issuing of 180 press releases over the two-year period. Three documentary films on the Commonwealth were produced and distributed, as were a range of information and publicity materials including the Commonwealth Day poster. New technologies including websites and e-mail also played a greater role in public affairs work. Some 100 books on various areas of Commonwealth work were published.

The Secretariat has implemented a series of governance, structural and organisational changes over the past two years, informed by the Report of the High Level Review Group adopted by leaders at the Coolum summit. The divisional structure of the Secretariat was adjusted. New arrangements for strategic planning were instituted, and new working partnerships forged with other intergovernmental organisations. Several evaluation studies were completed and others begun, in the effort to promote results-based management. Considerable efforts were also made to strengthen partnerships with and among the Commonwealth family of intergovernmental and civil society organisations.