

Promoting peace, preventing conflict



Assistance to member states with adhering to the Harare Commonwealth Declaration is a key component of the Commonwealth Secretariat's work to promote just and stable government and to prevent internal conflicts. The 'good offices' role of the Secretary-General is the Commonwealth's primary mechanism for addressing political problems and conflicts where they do arise.

At their March 2002 meeting in Coolumb, Australia, Heads of Government approved the conclusions of the High Level Review Group which included a call for more proactive use of the good offices role. In line with the Group's recommendations, a Good Offices Section has since been established in the Secretariat's Political Affairs Division, with additional staff and an enhanced budget.

Increasing emphasis is placed on capacity-building, with particular attention to post-conflict reconstruction and measures to make future conflict less likely. Another development stimulated by the High Level Review Group's recommendations is increased co-operation between the Secretariat and other international organisations with similar objectives.

Several Commonwealth member countries have made use of the Secretary-General's good offices over the past two years.

In Zanzibar, United Republic of Tanzania, the Commonwealth has focused its efforts on encouraging the two main political parties to agree to end a dispute over the conduct and results of the 1995 and 2000 elections. It is a moral guarantor of the agreement (called *Mwafaka*) between the parties. The Secretariat has also been involved in providing assistance in the establishment of an independent electoral commission for Zanzibar. The Joint Presidential Service Commission has been receiving active support and co-operation from the Secretariat, which also sent an expert team to observe the May 2003 by-elections for the Zanzibar House of Representatives. The Secretariat is planning to hold a workshop for the new members of the House of Representatives and is engaged in ongoing support to Zanzibar.

Following the suspension of Zimbabwe from the councils of the Commonwealth in March 2002, the Secretary-General has

continued to make every effort to engage with the Government of Zimbabwe. This situation has proved particularly intractable. In March 2003 a decision was taken to leave Zimbabwe's suspension from the councils of the Commonwealth in place, and for Heads of Government to revisit the issue in December at the 2003 CHOGM. Meanwhile, Commonwealth leaders in the region continued their efforts to promote dialogue between the main political parties.

In Fiji Islands, where the Commonwealth has been monitoring developments, the Secretary-General's good offices have been employed through the engagement of his Special Envoy to Fiji, Justice Pius Langa, Deputy Chief Justice of the South African Constitutional Court.

In pursuit of his good offices role in Swaziland, the Secretary-General encouraged HM King Mswati III in reaching his decision to allow public input into the Constitutional Review Commission process. In addition, Commonwealth experts assisted with advice on a draft constitution, which was released in May 2003 for comment. In November 2002, the Secretary-General nominated a legal expert to mediate in a conflict between the Executive and the Judiciary over the failure to implement judgments that were alleged to run counter to traditional values.

Following a request from President Bharrat Jagdeo, and with the concurrence of the main opposition party, the Secretary-General appointed Sir Paul Reeves as his Special Envoy to Guyana. The former Governor-General of New Zealand has assisted in addressing what appeared to be a political impasse. His main objective was to encourage the resumption of dialogue between the leaders of the principal parties and a wider dialogue involving civil society. The Special Envoy has also worked to promote a new political environment,

Above:

The 'Troika': (left to right) President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria, Prime Minister John Howard of Australia (Chairperson) and President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa

Opposite (top):

HM King Mswati III of Swaziland receives a new draft constitution, developed with Commonwealth support

Opposite (bottom):

Voter registration papers in Guyana, where the Secretary-General's Special Envoy has worked to promote a new political environment



encouraging Guyana to transcend politics structured largely along ethnic lines and to build greater inclusiveness and unity into the process. Sir Paul's engagement in Guyana has received wide recognition and support from the international community.

The Secretary-General appointed Christine Stewart, former Canadian Secretary of State for Africa and Latin America, as his envoy in Cameroon, where she has worked with the Government on the implementation of reforms to enable the country to comply more effectively with the Harare Commonwealth Declaration. As a result of

Ms Stewart's engagement, combined with Commonwealth technical assistance, wide-ranging reforms are currently under way in the areas of election management, human rights, the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary, and decentralisation. Ms Stewart's work there is being supported by Cameroon's other international partners.

Following consultations with the Prime Minister of Tonga, the Secretary-General appointed Sir Douglas Graham as his Special Envoy to assist the Kingdom with its parliamentary processes.

