

# Raising the Commonwealth's profile



Advancing the Commonwealth's fundamental values and maintaining and enhancing the association's public profile are key areas of responsibility for the Commonwealth Secretariat. These objectives are realised through a range of approaches, in partnership with member governments, the media, non-governmental organisations and other groups.

The Commonwealth's values and public profile are given visibility through: an active programme of media relations activities; promotional efforts targeted to decision-makers, young people and other specific groups; utilising new technologies to broaden the impact of information outreach; and the production of films, books and other publications.

## Reaching out to young people

The Report of the High Level Review Group adopted by Commonwealth Heads of Government at their 2002 summit in Coolom, Australia, called upon Commonwealth governments and organisations to "seek appropriate opportunities to promote and publicise the fundamental values and achievements of the modern Commonwealth, to foster greater awareness of the association". The Report said further that "the Commonwealth family needs to do more to highlight the value of the association among young people in education and other target groups".

In response to this mandate, the Secretariat has instituted a Youth Outreach Programme, under which young journalists take up internships as communications and public affairs assistants in the Regional Centres of the Commonwealth Youth Programme. The interns work to raise awareness of the Commonwealth, its values and achievements among young people in the regions, as well as assisting the CYP in its own promotional endeavours.

This collaborative programme is also designed to strengthen two-way communication between the Secretariat's London headquarters and contacts in the four regions of the developing Commonwealth. Interns were placed in the Africa, Asia and Caribbean Centres in 2002–2003, and the programme will be

extended to the Pacific region during 2003–2004.

## The Commonwealth and the media

Media interest in the Commonwealth has remained high over the past two years, with attention focused particularly on the Coolom summit in March 2002, the meeting of the Commonwealth Chairpersons Committee on Zimbabwe (the 'Troika') later the same month, and the XVII Commonwealth Games in July/August 2002. The Secretary-General received and responded to many requests for interviews on such topics as the situations in Pakistan and Zimbabwe, the ongoing struggle against terrorism, and the role of the Commonwealth in today's global community.

The 180 press releases issued by the Secretariat during this two-year period dealt with these and a range of other issues including political developments of Commonwealth concern, statements and reports from ministerial meetings and Commonwealth election observer groups, and trade issues. The Secretary-General placed particular emphasis on the urgent need for Europe and the US to increase market access and reduce agricultural subsidies to enable developing countries to trade their way out of poverty.

Media attention is also focused on the Commonwealth by the annual Commonwealth Lecture, organised by the Secretariat, the Commonwealth Foundation and other agencies, and delivered each year by a distinguished international figure. In 2002 the Lecture was delivered by Mary Robinson, then UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, on the theme 'Human Rights in the Shadow of 11 September'. In 2003 Professor Muhammad Yunus, founder of the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, spoke on 'Halving Poverty by 2015: We Can Actually Make it Happen'.

### Above:

The 2002 Commonwealth Games in Manchester, UK, helped raise the Commonwealth's profile internationally

### Opposite:

Promoting the Commonwealth's values and work around the world requires proactive media management and close relations with civil society

In 2001–2003, the Secretariat produced three films. *Paths to Prosperity* and *Partners in Development* focus on the work of the Secretariat and the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation. A third film, *Making a Difference*, deals with the historical background of the modern Commonwealth and the assistance it provides to its members today. Videos of all three films were distributed free of charge to broadcasters in member countries, and are available for sale from the Secretariat. Further such productions are currently being planned.

### Using new technologies

Work has continued on improving the official Commonwealth Secretariat website ([www.thecommonwealth.org](http://www.thecommonwealth.org)) and consolidating satellite sites of various Secretariat Divisions under the main site. The look and feel of the site were revamped in 2002 and more control added. The new post of Editor, Websites was created and staffed.

The Commonwealth News and Information Service (CNIS) continued to issue weekly e-mail news bulletins on Commonwealth issues and events to subscribers in governments, multilateral agencies, the media, non-governmental organisations and the academic community. Since July 2001 millions of readers have had access to the service via the main website and the e-mail subscriber list has grown from around 700 to more than 2,000. The primary focus of the CNIS bulletins is the work of the Secretariat; however it also covers activities of Commonwealth civil society organisations, responding to the Coolum Declaration's call for "stronger links and better two-way communication and co-ordination between the official and non-governmental Commonwealth".

### The printed word

As a knowledge-based organisation, the Secretariat has become a publishing house of repute in its own right. It published some 100 titles over the past two years. These titles cover policy issues, case studies and best practices in areas of Commonwealth expertise, including globalisation and multilateral trade issues, export and enterprise development, education, gender, public service management and reform, human rights and corporate governance.

The Secretariat's books have earned themselves a respected position in the marketplace, with orders received from academic and reference libraries across the Commonwealth and beyond. They are of particular value to government departments,



policy-makers, lecturers, practitioners and NGOs. In partnership with commercial publishers, the Secretariat also produces substantial reference manuals including *The Commonwealth Yearbook* and *The Commonwealth Ministers Reference Book*.

But the Secretariat's publications are not limited to books alone: it also produces a range of brochures, magazines, leaflets and posters providing general information about the Commonwealth, the Secretariat and the work of the association. These are distributed free of charge at Commonwealth meetings and public events such as open days and exhibitions.

Commonwealth shared records dating back 30 years are released each year by the Secretariat. In this review period, records from 1971 and 1972 were placed in the public domain and details of the files posted to the Secretariat website. These covered such Commonwealth milestones as the meetings of the Rhodesia Sanctions Committee, Pakistan's withdrawal from the Commonwealth and Bangladesh's application to join, and the 1971 CHOGM in Singapore, key outcomes of which included the setting up of the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation and the issuing of the Declaration of Commonwealth Principles.

### Commonwealth Day

Commonwealth Day, observed on the second Monday in March each year, continues to provide an occasion for celebrating and learning about the achievements and values of the association. The Secretariat produces a commemorative poster, overseeing distribution of some 250,000 copies around the Commonwealth, mainly to schools.

Parliaments, government ministries and diplomatic missions celebrate Commonwealth Day with speeches, exhibitions and other activities. Special events organised by the CYP's Regional Centres strengthen the focus on youth. Partner NGOs also play a key role, particularly the Royal Commonwealth Society, which programmes activities through its branches in many member countries and assists in identifying the theme each year. In 2002 the theme was 'Celebrating Diversity' and in 2003 it was 'Partners in Development', foreshadowing a major focus of the 2003 CHOGM in Abuja, Nigeria.

### Training for media professionals

The Secretariat supports the development of a strong and independent media in member countries as an essential component of a sound democratic society, by providing training in essential media skills. The Commonwealth Media Development Fund is an extra-budgetary resource funded by three member governments: in 2001–2003, Australia, India and the UK between them contributed more than £450,000 to the Fund. Working with a network of partner NGOs and training institutions, the Fund delivered training to some 750 media professionals from more than 40 countries in 2001–2003.