

## Information and Public Affairs

The announcement by Heads of Government in 1995 of the Millbrook Commonwealth Action Programme gave a substantial boost to the Commonwealth's international standing and brought with it much favourable comment.

The renewed interest in the Commonwealth was sustained through the subsequent deliberations of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG), its November 1996 visit to Nigeria, various election observer missions to member countries, and the Roundtable on Good Governance and Democracy in Africa in February 1997. Together, these activities were seen as a demonstrable commitment by the Commonwealth to upholding its principles.

The greater demands that came with this increased attention led the Secretariat to commission in 1996 a review of the publicity and information programme. This was carried out by Mr Derek Ingram, a respected British journalist, who spoke to hundreds of people all over the Commonwealth and concluded that many governments, their officials and members of the public were often unaware of Commonwealth activities, and that many young people, in particular, were in ignorance of the association, its aims and its activities.

The Ingram Report, which highlighted the joint responsibility of the Secretariat, member governments and Commonwealth NGOs to publicise the Commonwealth, is expected to form the basis on which the Secretariat will reformulate its strategies for the rest of the decade.

Already, new methods of communication are being introduced, including the launching of the Commonwealth and the Secretariat on the Internet's World Wide Web.

### World Wide Web

In November 1996, the Commonwealth Secretariat joined the Information Superhighway, thus dramatically increasing its potential audience to include the 70 million Internet users all over the world.

Its World Wide Web site was planned primarily as an information and resource point for government officers, academics, scholars, NGOs and journalists, but it has since been developed to be attractive and relevant also to other users, especially young people. Visitors to the site can access the Secretariat's press releases and features, information on more than 50 Commonwealth NGOs, as well as news and other information on Commonwealth and Secretariat activities.

A special section, *Know Your Commonwealth: A Guide for Young People*, was created on the Secretariat's Web site in time for Commonwealth Day 1997. This was designed as a colourful introduction to the Commonwealth for schoolchildren. The Secretariat's address on the World Wide Web is <http://www.thecommonwealth.org/>



*Her Majesty the Queen, Head of the Commonwealth, talks to guests at the Secretary-General's Commonwealth Day reception*

## **Media Relations and Public Affairs**

Major media organisations and journalists in all Commonwealth countries have been kept up to date with Commonwealth initiatives and activities through over 130 news releases and numerous press briefings ahead of such important events as the July 1996 launch of the Commonwealth Africa Investment Fund by President Nelson Mandela and the Roundtable of Heads of Government of Commonwealth Africa on Democracy and Good Governance in Africa. CMAG held seven press conferences on various issues during the review period.

The principal vehicle in the print media for disseminating information on the Commonwealth continues to be the quarterly magazine *Commonwealth Currents*. This was redesigned and relaunched in early 1996 to include opinion and other reflective articles from contributors. The magazine is mailed to more than 31,000 subscribers across the Commonwealth, about one-third of them parliamentarians. A series of *Commonwealth in Action* booklets was produced to stimulate interest in the various regions of the Commonwealth.

## **The Features and Broadcasting Services**

Both the features and broadcasting services underwent considerable change in the period under review as they refocused their activities to concentrate on projecting the Commonwealth to regional audiences. Adjustments were also being made to take into account the recommendations of the Ingram Report.

Following two series of magazine-style radio programmes on the Commonwealth for Southern Africa and another series on CFTC-funded activities in the South Pacific, a consumer survey was undertaken in order to better identify the specific interests of both public service broadcasting and private radio stations and the best ways to encourage local broadcasters to report on Commonwealth activities in their countries.

Radio is the most effective way of reaching Commonwealth citizens, but television has enormous influence especially among decision-makers and opinion-formers. Three promotional videos on the Commonwealth and the CFTC were therefore being made for use at meetings and by schools and NGOs.

About 70 feature articles on various Commonwealth activities were produced during the period on subjects ranging from science and technology, herbal medicine, through industrial development, to export marketing and the work of individual CFTC experts in the field. These were distributed to news organisations in all member countries and associated states, and to many non-Commonwealth countries through the Caribbean, pan-Asian and pan-African news agencies.

### Commonwealth Day

The themes for Commonwealth Day 1996 and 1997 were respectively, 'Working in Partnership' and 'Talking to One Another'. To promote these themes, and the Commonwealth in general, thousands of colourful, educational posters were produced and distributed to schools and NGOs in member countries in time for Commonwealth Day, which is observed on the second Monday in March. Both posters featured the flags of member countries, a map of the Commonwealth and statistical information. Schools in Barbados and Ghana in 1996 and in Australia and Bangladesh in 1997 were specially targeted. The Head of the Commonwealth and the Secretary-General's messages were distributed to radio stations all over the Commonwealth.

*Celebrating Commonwealth Day ...in Ghana this school holds a mock parade of 'representatives' from each member country*



### Publications

Following two reports by a publications consultant (1993, 1995), it was agreed that an in-house Publications Unit offering professional publishing, design and marketing services and advice would be set up. As a first step, an in-house design service was established in early 1996 to create a corporate identity for Secretariat sale publications. More than 50 such books and journals were designed in this style, including the *Economic Papers* series and the toolkit for the CYP's National Youth Policy 2000 project.

Book promotion efforts continued with the Secretariat exhibiting, as before, in the annual Zimbabwe International Book Fair, Africa's premier publishing event. The Secretariat continued to publish the authoritative reference book, *The Commonwealth Yearbook*, in partnership with a



*Press interest mounts at the 1995 CHOGM in New Zealand ... here New Zealand Prime Minister Jim Bolger and Commonwealth Secretary-General Chief Anyaoku announce the suspension of Nigeria*

commercial publisher. A version of the book is also available on the World Wide Web.

### **Media Development**

In support of the development of a strong, free and independent media as one of the foundations of democracy, the Secretariat encourages skills training in a wide variety of areas. It does so through the Commonwealth Media Development Fund (CMDf), a fund subscribed to voluntarily by Commonwealth member countries, which it administers.

At the 1995 CHOGM, the Australian Government announced it would resume its contribution to the CMDf with a grant of A\$50,000 annually. The British Government, through the Department for International Development, contributes £180,000 a year.

The CMDf pays for training partners, including such NGOs as the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association, Commonwealth Journalists Association and Commonwealth Press Union, to organise courses which focus not only on writing skills and technical expertise but also on gender issues, specialist reporting, computer and media management skills, advertising and sales, and broadcast engineering. A list of these workshops and seminars is at Appendix III.