

ADVANCING FUNDAMENTAL VALUES

The collective commitment of the Commonwealth to the promotion of fundamental values has further deepened since the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Limassol, Cyprus, in 1993. Midway through the last decade of the 20th century, member countries are placing more emphasis than ever before on the value of democracy and democratic processes, the promotion of sustainable development and the alleviation of poverty, fundamental human rights in all their aspects, the rule of law, independence of the judiciary, and just and honest government. These are the pillars of good governance.

The roots of the Commonwealth commitment to these values lie in the Declaration of Commonwealth Principles issued by Heads of Government in Singapore in 1971. This Declaration affirmed members' belief in peace, prosperity, liberty and equality for all, and in the benefits of international co-operation. Twenty years later, at Harare, Heads of Government, in considering the role and priorities of the association into the next century, reaffirmed these and other principles in another seminal statement, the Harare Commonwealth Declaration, and attached great importance to the promotion of Commonwealth fundamental values.

The Commonwealth is particularly suited to advance these values. In most member countries, the traditions of parliamentary democracy, accountable administration and respect for human rights are already well established. Common traditions and institutions, particularly in governments, parliaments and the judiciary, facilitate useful exchange of experiences and enable swift response to requests for Commonwealth assistance.

The Commonwealth Secretariat's approach to the promotion of these values has been an integrated one which reflects a multi-sectoral concern with political, economic, social and cultural dimensions.



The Commonwealth places greater emphasis on democracy, development, rights and the rule of law

This approach was further strengthened by Heads of Government who, at the Cyprus CHOGM, stressed the importance of maintaining the balance between the promotion of fundamental political values and social and developmental considerations. In endorsing the 1993 Vienna Declaration on human rights, they affirmed that human rights were universal, indivisible and interrelated, and

declared that democracy, development, and respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms were interdependent and mutually reinforcing.

In an effort to explore how best to develop a Commonwealth agenda which holistically promotes development, human rights and democracy, the Secretariat organised two workshops, one at Windhoek, Namibia, for Southern Africa in July 1994, and the other at Colombo, Sri Lanka, on a pan-Commonwealth basis in June 1995. These brought together representatives of government and civil society from various parts of the Commonwealth to discuss their mutual roles in such an agenda.

The Secretariat is seeking to reflect this integrated, multi-sectoral agenda of democracy, human rights and development in all its political and socio-economic activities.

Membership and Fundamental Values

At Cyprus, Heads of Government considered

the application from Cameroon for Commonwealth membership and resolved to welcome that country to the next CHOGM in Auckland, New Zealand, in November 1995 as the association's fifty-second member, provided that Cameroon's efforts to establish a democratic system, consistent with the Harare Commonwealth Declaration, would by then have been completed.

A mission of distinguished Commonwealth citizens visited that country in July 1995 with a view to apprising itself of the progress made in Cameroon's democratisation programme, and facilitating a final decision by Heads of Government on Cameroon's membership of the association. (The Commonwealth and its members are described in Appendix I.)

THE COMMONWEALTH AND DEMOCRACY

The most visible face of the Commonwealth's commitment to its fundamental political values has been the transition, through free elections, of military regimes and one-party states to democratic, civilian, multi-party systems of government.

Seven member countries have gone through this process since 1991 and by mid-1995, all countries which were one-party states had either made the transition to multi-party systems or had announced time-tables for doing so. Only three military governments remained among the Commonwealth's 51 members. And in 1994, more than 30 years of implacable opposition by the Commonwealth and the wider international community to the apartheid regime of South Africa ended with that country's first non-racial democratic elections, bringing freedom to the majority population and hope for a better future to Southern Africa as a whole.

There have been some setbacks. In July 1994, a military *coup d'état* in The Gambia overthrew the democratically elected government. In Sierra Leone, while the military government remained committed to a time-table for transition to democracy, worsening civil conflict threatened to undermine the process and indeed the stability of the country itself. In Nigeria, the announced time-frame for the restoration of representative governance was extended following another military takeover of government, causing widespread disappointment.

Democracy's most basic and visible expression is

through the ballot box but the Commonwealth recognises that democracy is more than the holding of elections. The Secretariat therefore works, on request, to strengthen the capacity of key institutions which sustain democracy and civil society. These include parliaments, judiciaries, human rights institutions, electoral commissions, administrative systems, the legal profession, the media and other elements of just and honest government. It has also sought to sensitise governments, judges, lawyers and others to the importance of administrative law.

In all these activities, the Secretariat works closely with such other Commonwealth bodies as the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA). It has also co-operated with the United Nations and other international organisations.

Observing Elections

Commonwealth Observer Groups monitored six elections at the request of governments in the two years since mid-1993. For two countries (Seychelles, July 1993; Malawi, May 1994) the elections marked a transition from one-party to multi-party systems of government. For Namibia (December 1994), the general election was the first after independence in 1990 and the presence of the observers was seen as an important contribution to the consolidation of that country's democracy. In Pakistan (October 1993), Commonwealth observers were asked to monitor elections held in a highly