

## THE RIGHT TO HUMAN DIGNITY

The Commonwealth believes that every person has a right to human dignity. This includes all aspects of human rights, fundamental freedoms, as well as the right to development and women's rights. Indeed, respect for these rights is recognised as an essential ingredient of the association's fundamental values.

The importance attached to human rights issues by the Commonwealth is evident in all its major Declarations, from the Singapore Declaration of Commonwealth Principles (1971) to the Harare Commonwealth Declaration (1991). At the 1993 Cyprus CHOGM, Heads of Government made a clear commitment to human rights in all its aspects. They firmly supported the 1993 Vienna Declaration adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights and declared that democracy, development, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms were interdependent and mutually reinforcing.

The Secretariat seeks to reflect this integrated, multi-sectoral agenda in all areas of its political and socio-economic activities. Through it and a range of other measures, the Secretariat hopes to promote greater awareness of human rights. It also does this through assistance in institution-building, and through education and training of public officials.

Assistance to institution-building includes national capacity-building for the fulfilment of reporting obligations under the various international and regional human rights instruments, assistance with setting up and strengthening national and regional human rights institutions, and the

strengthening of the national capacity for human rights training.

At their meeting in Mauritius in November 1993, Commonwealth Law Ministers considered how they could improve the quality of the services they, as public officers, are expected to deliver to the general public. One of these is human rights and the ministers have been monitoring the progress made in ratifying the relevant international covenants,



*The Commonwealth Secretary-General at the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights*

such as those on economic, social and cultural rights, civil and political rights, and discrimination against women.

At Malta in May 1995, a seminar held jointly with the Government of Malta and the UN was held to promote awareness regarding international standards among government officials. It was attended by diplomats from

15 Commonwealth countries and provided an opportunity for piloting a manual on human rights for Foreign Ministry officials that the Secretariat has been preparing.

A critical area of focus for human rights activity has been the promotion of greater awareness of human rights concerns among public officials, judges, teachers and other target groups, training of public officials and exchange of information on human rights jurisprudence and training materials.

A well-established programme of training of public officials has been developed over the years and enhanced by the development of training manuals. Two specialised manuals are nearing completion, one for the judiciary, which has already received inputs from a group of judges and magistrates who attended the Commonwealth Judges' and

Magistrates' meeting in August 1994; the other, for prison officers, has received comments from participants at a joint training workshop on the management of prisons and prisoners held with the UN African Regional Institute on the Prevention of Crime and Treatment of Offenders (UNAFRI) in November 1994. A gender perspective is being incorporated in these manuals.

As a reflection of the commitment by member states to the International Bill of Rights, and to enhance the capacity for reporting under the various international and regional instruments, a regional workshop in Zambia for officials in charge of reporting was held in July 1995. A workshop on improving low-cost publishing for human rights documents was jointly organised by the Secretariat, African Publishing Network and the Afro-Asian Book Council in Harare, Zimbabwe, shortly afterwards.

In response to the need for the training of reporting officers with responsibility for national efforts to meet obligations under the African Charter, a pilot workshop was held in Banjul, The Gambia, in July 1993 in collaboration with the African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies. A workshop on legal literacy education was also held in August 1993 in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

With the Cyprus CHOGM endorsing the Vienna Declaration on human rights, the Secretariat has made a conscious effort since 1993 to find ways of promoting democracy, human rights and development in an integrated manner. Efforts are also made to ensure that greater awareness of human rights issues is promoted within the Secretariat itself.

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# DISCREET DIPLOMACY AND CONSENSUS-BUILDING

**T**he Commonwealth 'family' takes advantage wherever possible of the closeness and familiarity built up by the special ties that bind members to seek solutions to internal, bilateral or regional problems, or come to consensus on wide-ranging matters.

In the two years since mid-1993, the Secretariat, and the Secretary-General personally, have been increasingly involved in quiet diplomatic efforts to defuse tension or help resolve actual crises.

In 1994-95, the Secretariat was closely involved in the management of crises of one kind or another in Lesotho only months after that country's impressive transition to multi-party democracy at elections observed by the Commonwealth in March 1993. In January 1994, fighting between two factions of the military threatened to undermine

the new democratically elected government. Responding to a request from the Government of Lesotho, the Secretary-General despatched two emissaries who mediated between the factions, brought them together, and persuaded them to stop fighting, lay down their arms and pledge loyalty to the Government. The Commonwealth mission liaised closely with a fact-finding Task Force established by three countries of the region – Botswana, South Africa and Zimbabwe.

The Secretary-General's emissaries returned to Lesotho in April 1994 when disaffected soldiers abducted several Cabinet Ministers and murdered the Deputy Prime Minister. A tense situation was once again defused, allowing the Government and political parties to focus attention on outstanding issues identified in a Report prepared by Presidents Masire of Botswana and Mugabe of