

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

The 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



Commonwealth emissaries (left and right) with a British observer after talking rebel soldiers in Lesotho into disarming

Zimbabwe following their visit to Lesotho in February 1994. In June 1994, the Secretary-General's emissaries were back to help deal with yet another crisis caused by a strike for better terms and conditions of service by members of the police force.

Two months later, a major constitutional crisis broke when the then King, HM Letsie III, dissolved Parliament and dismissed the elected Prime Minister. This new crisis was resolved with the intervention of the Presidents of Botswana, South Africa and Zimbabwe, with whom the Secretary-General worked closely, who brokered an eight-point understanding. This was a good example of Commonwealth support to a regional initiative by a group of Commonwealth countries.

The Secretary-General himself visited Lesotho in March 1995, in the midst of yet another problem created by the abduction by members of the National Security Service of their Director and another senior officer. Following the Secretary-General's personal intervention with the captors, the abducted officers were released on the last day of the Secretary-General's stay in Lesotho.

The Commonwealth's good offices were also invoked by Bangladesh. During a visit to that

country in September 1994, a three-point proposal made by the Secretary-General for the resolution of a chronic political crisis gripping the country was accepted both by the Government and the main Opposition parties. At issue was the demand by the Opposition that the Government should step down and that a 'neutral' caretaker government be established to oversee fresh elections.

On the basis of his three-point proposal, the Secretary-General subsequently designated an envoy – Sir Ninian Stephen, former Governor-General of Australia – to facilitate a dialogue between the two sides. Sir Ninian spent five weeks in Bangladesh in October/November 1994, during which he put forward substantive proposals himself in an effort to break the deadlock. Although in the end the deadlock was not broken, his proposals remained on the table as a possible point of departure for an eventual political solution. The political crisis in Bangladesh has continued and the Secretary-General has persisted with his behind-the-scenes diplomatic efforts to try to bring the two sides together.

In July 1994, the Secretary-General visited Sierra Leone to discuss with the Chairman of the National Provisional Ruling Council that country's proposed transition to democratic civilian rule. The escala-

tion of civil conflict in that country has, however, disrupted this programme. In February 1995, therefore, two emissaries of the Secretary-General, working closely with the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy, visited Sierra Leone to try to persuade the rebels to come to the negotiating table for peace talks with the Government. These efforts were not successful but the Secretariat continues to seek opportunities to help bring the conflict to an end and promote national reconciliation and democracy. It has also been assisting the Sierra Leone Government to strengthen democratic institutions such as the Interim Electoral Commission.

The Secretariat continues to monitor developments in Bougainville, Papua New Guinea, where civil conflict has persisted. Hopes of peace in October 1994 were dashed when talks broke down at the eleventh hour and ceremonies scheduled to celebrate a peaceful settlement had to be abandoned. The Secretary-General, who had previously sent emissaries to try to encourage talks, has more than once reiterated the Commonwealth's willingness to provide its good offices if requested.

Consensus-building

This good offices role combined with the Commonwealth's ability to build consensus on international political issues rest squarely on the

Secretariat's capacity to monitor closely political developments in the Commonwealth and on the association's acknowledged ability to promote consensus as well as to carry out its diplomatic activities discreetly, away from the glare of publicity. It does so in international affairs as much as it does in economic and development matters.

Among the standing mechanisms which exist in support of the Commonwealth's consensus-building role in international affairs are the Commonwealth Action Group on Cyprus and the Ministerial Committee on Belize. These mechanisms grew out of Commonwealth concern for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of these two countries.

At the Cyprus CHOGM, Heads of Government took the opportunity to reiterate their support for the independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and non-aligned status of their host country, the northern part of which remains occupied following the invasion by Turkey in 1974. The Commonwealth continues to support the UN Secretary-General's efforts to find a peaceful, negotiated settlement to the problem. The Commonwealth Action Group has not met in recent years.

Belize continues to be the object of a territorial claim from Guatemala despite hopes a few years



Cyprus, a nation still divided

ago that some settlement was in sight. The Commonwealth Ministerial Committee, which had not met for several years, met in the wings of the Cyprus CHOGM. Heads of Government reaffirmed their support for the security, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Belize and urged that country and Guatemala to resume and successfully conclude their dialogue.

The Commonwealth has continued to support and work with the UN to further common interests. The Secretariat has Observer status at the General Assembly where it monitors debates, decisions and developments of interest to the Commonwealth. On 1 August 1994, the Secretary-General attended a special meeting convened by the UN Secretary-General in New York of executive heads of regional and other intergovernmental organisations on how to enhance co-operation between themselves in pursuit of international peace and security. The Commonwealth and UN already co-operate closely in a number of areas, as they did in the period of transition before the 1994 elections in South Africa.

Likewise, the Secretariat liaises and co-operates with other international organisations. The Secretary-General and other senior officers attended summit and other high-level meetings of the Movement of Non-aligned Countries, the Caribbean Community (Caricom), the Organisation of African Unity, the European Union, the Southern

African Development Community, and other bodies. A Memorandum of Understanding was finalised with the South Pacific Forum and closer working relations established with the European Commission.

Taking up the mandate from Heads of Government at the Cyprus CHOGM, an intergovernmental group was established to explore ways in which the Commonwealth could make the fullest possible contribution to the work of the international community towards establishing a global humanitarian order. The group, chaired by Mr Bryce Harland of New Zealand, met twice (in May 1994 and February 1995) and was due to meet a third time in September 1995 to finalise its report. The group has been examining the international community's responses to situations involving massive human suffering and exploring ways in which the Commonwealth could complement the work of the UN in the field of international peace and security, primarily through quiet diplomacy, peace-making and peace-building.

While it explores these global themes, the Commonwealth continues to extend special support to the small member states who make up nearly half its membership. The Secretariat continues to administer a Joint Office for Commonwealth Permanent Missions in New York, which provides office accommodation and certain common facilities to nine small Commonwealth countries to facilitate their representation at the UN.

THE RULE OF LAW

Taking the Harare Commonwealth Declaration of 1991 as its reference point, the Secretariat, with the active support of member governments, Law Ministers, Attorneys-General and Chief Justices, has sought with renewed vigour to promote the rule of law, the independence of the judiciary and just and honest government. These are best assured by processes of government which are open and accountable—from electoral systems to individual

government decision-making. Such transparency affords people protection against the possible abuse of public office.

The growing number of countries who have embraced multi-party democratic systems of government has corresponded with increasing interest in the potential role of administrative law in facilitating the development of an enduring