

PREFACE

The Commonwealth Secretariat is the intergovernmental body serving the 53 member countries of the Commonwealth. The Human Rights Unit of the Secretariat has a mandate to assist Commonwealth members in their efforts to better promote and protect human rights, in accordance with the fundamental values of the Commonwealth, including international human rights standards. One core function of the Unit is to ascertain, consolidate, develop and promote 'best practices', from around the Commonwealth, on issues concerned with human rights. This publication is an example of such an approach to best practice.

The Model National Plan of Action on Human Rights has been developed by the Human Rights Unit (HRU), with the advice and assistance of an Expert Group assembled in London in June 2007 for such a purpose. It is intended primarily to assist Commonwealth member countries in the process of developing their own national plan, in accordance with their national and international obligations and imperatives and their own perceived priorities, for the promotion and protection of human rights at the national level.

Three assumptions underlie the production of this Model, and the very idea of national action plans on human rights: firstly, experience shows that authentic and sustainable national development and prosperity is best assured where attention is given to participation, inclusion and the human rights issues that inform these processes. The second assumption is that developing a national plan does not necessarily mean adding yet another bureaucratic layer to what may be already-stretched national

departments: while certain extra efforts are certainly required, the idea is that human rights objectives coincide with the core duties and functions of most areas of government. Thirdly, this publication is a *Model* only and not intended to be prescriptive. It is intended to provide a basis from which to work.

The development of this Commonwealth Model Plan is intended to stimulate national level planning, against the backdrop of work towards a 'Universal Periodic Review' mechanism underway in the Human Rights Council of the United Nations, and the human rights imperatives underlying the Millennium Development Goals (to which national plan objectives would normally be strongly linked). Finally, it is being launched at the outset of 2008 which will mark the 60th anniversary of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, an opportunity to call for renewed focus on national level implementation. This Model is part of the Secretariat's contribution to facilitating that process.

The Human Rights Unit, which has produced this model, would like to thank the following Expert Group members, drawn from a variety of backgrounds and from across of the Commonwealth, for freely giving of their time and expertise in order to contribute to the production of this Model:

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The Human Rights Unit would also like to acknowledge with appreciation the work of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, whose comprehensive 2002 publication *Handbook on National Human Rights Action Plans* provided a basis for the deliberations of the Expert Group and for the production of this Model.

The process of formulating and implementing a national action plan is, by definition, not something that can be achieved *for* a country, but only *by* a country, according to its priorities and particularities. Nevertheless the Human Rights Unit stands ready to assist governments in member countries with the process of tailoring a national action plan that meets their own needs while advancing Commonwealth values.

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