

## PART I: COMMONWEALTH VALUES

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### Values, Principles, Standards

Commonwealth countries are all committed to the fundamental principles, including human rights, outlined in the *Harare Commonwealth Declaration* of 1991. The *Harare Declaration* reaffirms the *Declaration of Commonwealth Principles* agreed in Singapore in 1971. This Commonwealth commitment to human rights has been shaped by the organisation's historical origins, including colonial independence struggles, and the united positions the Commonwealth has adopted on issues of human rights, for example, its leading and principled opposition to racism and *apartheid*.

The commitment has also been consistently and strongly reaffirmed by Commonwealth Heads of Government in their formal statements at various meetings, in which they have committed themselves and their countries to work with renewed vigour for the protection and promotion of the fundamental political values of the Commonwealth.

These fundamental Commonwealth values include commitments to:

- democracy, democratic processes and institutions which reflect national circumstances, the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary, just and honest government; and
- fundamental human rights, including equal rights and opportunities for all citizens, regardless of race, colour, creed, or political belief.

The *Harare Declaration* also includes pledges to work in specific areas of special relevance which are reflected in the *Universal*

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*Declaration of Human Rights* 1948 and other international human rights instruments. These include:

- equality and equal opportunity for women;
- provision of universal access to education;
- promotion of sustainable development and alleviation of poverty;
- extension of the benefits of development within a framework of respect for human rights;
- protection of the environment; and
- combating drug trafficking and abuse and communicable diseases.

Of relevance to a national action plan on human rights, in the *Aso Rock Commonwealth Declaration on Development and Democracy* (December 2003), Heads of Government declared their commitment to establishing in their respective countries a 'machinery to protect human rights':

"[7] We commit ourselves to make democracy work better for pro-poor-development by implementing sustainable development programmes and enhancing democratic institutions and processes in all human endeavours. We recognise that building democracy is a constantly evolving process. It must also be uncomplicated and take into account national circumstances.

Among the objectives we seek to promote are the following:

- i. a participatory democracy characterised by free and fair elections and representative legislatures
- ii. an independent judiciary
- iii. a well-trained public service
- v. machinery to protect human rights
- vi. the right to information
- vii. active participation of civil society, including women and youth..."

## Putting Principles into Practice – national plans

These principles, arrived at by international consensus, still require national level implementation. Commitment to shared Commonwealth principles and the organisation's fundamental political values is given firm and tangible expression when countries take specific national-level constitutional, legislative, administrative and other measures to respect and fulfil, promote and protect, for all persons, those rights recognised as fundamental to development, stability and well-being in democratic societies.

By taking deliberate actions to address human rights and to ensure equal participation in national political life and economic development, countries are working towards the ideals of a just, peaceful and prosperous society envisioned by the modern Commonwealth.

The purpose of a National Action Plan on Human Rights is to enable these principles to be translated into practice at a national level, in a systematic and coherent way adapted to the country's circumstances.

## The Commonwealth Secretariat

By their statements in the 1995 *Millbrook Commonwealth Action Programme of the Harare Declaration*, Commonwealth Heads of Government requested that the Commonwealth Secretariat work to "provide advice, training and other forms of technical assistance to governments in promoting the Commonwealth's fundamental political values," including assistance in building the capacity of governments and institutions to deliver on human rights objectives.

From the basis of this and other mandates including those arising out of the *Singapore, Harare, and Aso Rock Declarations*, and the *Latimer House Principles*, the Secretariat acts as a trusted partner for governments, providing advice and assistance. This includes providing support to member countries in the promotion and protection of human rights. The development of this Model National Action Plan on Human Rights is in response to needs expressed by members, in particular smaller states. Its publication is part of the comprehensive assistance available to member governments. For example, provision of support towards tailored national action plans for countries, upon request. In this way the Secretariat helps

member countries to further Commonwealth values by national-level actions: *putting principles into practice.*

### **Commonwealth Values: Human Rights**

*"...we believe in the liberty of the individual under the law, in equal rights for all citizens regardless of gender, race, colour, creed or political belief, and in the individual's inalienable right to participate by means of free and democratic political processes in framing the society in which he or she lives..."*

*...we recognise racial prejudice and intolerance as a dangerous sickness and a threat to healthy development, and racial discrimination as an unmitigated evil...we oppose all forms of racial oppression, and we are committed to the principles of human dignity and equality..."*

*...we recognise the importance and urgency of economic and social development to satisfy the basic needs and aspirations of the vast majority of the peoples of the world..."*

1991 Commonwealth Harare Declaration  
Commonwealth Heads of Government