
FOREWORD

The 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is a fundamental instrument of human rights.

In the Commonwealth and the wider world, it provides a framework for protecting and promoting the rights of generations to come. In a young Commonwealth, in which an eighth of our 2 billion or so people are under five years old, we are more than ever conscious of its value.

Every government in the Commonwealth has ratified the CRC – the only human rights treaty to be universally ratified by our members. This bears witness to the Commonwealth commitment to uphold and protect the dignity and rights of its youngest citizens.

The Commonwealth, as a values-based organisation, also recognises the fact that the introduction of the CRC was a milestone in international law. It was the first legally binding international convention to outline commitments to human rights for all children. The 20th anniversary of the CRC invites us to take stock of how well the Convention is being implemented. In the end, international law is only as strong as the will and ability of governments to realise and implement their commitments to improve the lives of their citizens.

We fully recognise the positive impact of the CRC for children. It has seen children's parliaments established, legislation to protect children enacted and juvenile justice systems developed. Yet the challenge remains to observe both the spirit and the letter of the law, and to ensure the rights of children are firmly upheld.

I warmly commend this publication, which celebrates the CRC and its achievements. I value the fact that it presents the hopes and

sentiments of children, as well as of those working for children's rights. It quantifies how far we have come and how far we still have to go. In this task, the Commonwealth Secretariat stands ready to assist member countries as they continue their implementation of the CRC.

In 2009, the CRC shares its 20th anniversary with the 60th anniversary of the modern Commonwealth. Our slogan and exhortation to ourselves for the year is: 'the commonwealth@60 – serving a new generation'. We cannot mark the anniversaries without exploring how we can harness the vitality of our young population to generate improved development, and social and democratic dividends. The realisation of the rights set out in the CRC is more than a sound policy choice for the Commonwealth and a way of showing compassion for a vulnerable group. The Convention represents a collective practical commitment: all of our children have the right to see it achieved.

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Commonwealth Secretary-General