

Introduction

Since the publication of the first Human Rights in the Commonwealth Status Report in 2008 the Commonwealth Secretariat has continued working with member states and stakeholders to support progress on the protection of human rights. Between November 2008 and October 2010, 39 Commonwealth states have participated in at least one human rights initiative delivered by the Secretariat and 22 new ratifications have been made to the main human rights treaties. The Commonwealth Heads of Government affirmed in 2009 their ongoing commitment to human rights as a core value of the association.

Heads made reference to the rights set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. These rights increase access to education, work and healthcare. They promise that all citizens can vote, practice a religion of their choosing or petition their government for change. New issues in human rights continue to be brought to the forefront of international thought. Climate change and its impact on human rights, especially for those in developing countries, is a new area that has been given attention in recent years. Since the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities came into force in 2008, disability rights have also received more thought and an increased commitment from states. Efforts to protect human rights will always need revision and renewed thought – but the underlying

principles of non-discrimination and equality remain relevant and need to be promoted.

This 2010 edition of the Status Report is the second that surveys key baseline information on human rights efforts across all Commonwealth members. It focuses on the rights of persons with disabilities and records many inspiring stories that detail the positive steps taken over the past two years to promote the opportunities for persons with disabilities to enjoy the same rights as others. Cyprus has established a dedicated department to ensure persons with disabilities do not face social exclusion. Uganda announced a new programme which will provide grants to increase the income of persons with disabilities. Guyana has launched a national strategy for persons with disabilities and New Zealand reviewed the effectiveness of its Sign Language Act. All these initiatives will help to create societies in which persons with disabilities enjoy independent lives and where they are full citizens.

This publication marks two years of progress made by Commonwealth states in protecting human rights. The information on each country's formal engagements with the international human rights instruments has been updated and new data on the human rights Optional Protocols has been included. Updated quantitative analysis of the country data shows where each region stands with their legal commitments.

There are also some changes from the first edition. A new methodology has been adopted to assess treaty reservations. This has allowed for a more accurate overview of each state's international legal commitments. Other information

has been updated as states have made more detailed information available. Changes have made the publication more accessible; formatting has been modified and text size increased to allow greater legibility for readers with low vision. A country page has also been added for Rwanda, the Commonwealth's newest member state.

I hope this publication will be of practical use for all of those working in the Commonwealth.

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