

Chapter 9: The Way Forward

Promoting dignity and dialogue

- 251 The Commonwealth Commission for Respect and Understanding was established in response to growing concerns about systematic group violence in the world, and the widespread disrespect and anger that prepare the ground for it. Antagonism and violence along the lines of exploitable divisions have taken on a global character in recent years. They find expression in acts of terrorism against civilian populations, and in violent confrontations over territories and entitlements. Even some of the military strategies to combat terror have made their own contributions to casualties, including that of civilian populations.
- 252 A meeting of the Heads of Governments of Commonwealth countries is a good occasion for discussing and coordinating public policies within the group which has greatly benefited in the past from such interactions. It is also an excellent opportunity to examine the state of the world and the problems that the Commonwealth countries share with other countries around the globe. Aside from its territorially confined functions, the Commonwealth is an important global player in an increasingly interdependent world, and it has a duty to do what it can in trying to solve shared problems across the globe. This report, therefore, is concerned not only with what can be called the 'home affairs' of the Commonwealth (that too, of course, very importantly, but not just that), but also with the Commonwealth's role in directing attention to policy issues of general interest in the world, across regional boundaries.
- 253 One of the principal points of concentration of this report is the need for more active multilateralism to address shared problems in our strife-ridden world. The Commonwealth, with its considerable background – and success – in using multilateral means, can have a very important influence in pressing for that important approach. Indeed, the focus on dialogue on the basis of acknowledgement of the dignity of all people has been a quintessential mode of operation in the Commonwealth – it is even tempting to call it 'the Commonwealth approach'. There is every reason, we argue in this report, to emphasise, rather than renounce, this well-used approach in addressing the gigantic problems of peace and security that the world faces today.
- 254 Efforts to defeat terrorism call for a clear-headed understanding of the nature of contemporary group violence. It is possible to argue that the limited achievements, and sometimes counterproductive results, of well-meant initiatives to further peace in the world are closely linked with deficiencies in the underlying readings of the nature and genesis of global violence. Since the consequences, for example in Iraq, seem to have surprised and disappointed even some of the earlier advocates of these policies, the time for rethinking is surely now; all countries, irrespective of their past policies, should have a strong interest in this process. Even when past policies have achieved, at least

initially, considerable success, for example in Afghanistan, the follow-up events have revealed serious difficulties that call for diagnostic analysis of what should have been done differently.

255 The Commonwealth has a long tradition of learning from critical examinations of its past policies, and the history of the Commonwealth is a testament to the importance of open-mindedness in undertaking retrospective scrutiny for prospective improvement. As it happens, even at the time when some of the more debatable campaigns were launched, there were also other readings of contemporary events – very different from those that inspired the campaigns – that were also defended in other quarters in the world, many of them within the Commonwealth countries themselves. Paying fuller attention to the wealth of understanding that existed then, could have, quite possibly, helped in a better-informed pursuit of world peace and security. Efforts in search of peace can, in fact, be ineffective and counterproductive if they are based on a deficient appreciation of the underlying nature of global conflicts. The scrutiny that genuinely multilateral consultations and interactions can provide has pervasive importance and usefulness in determining the appropriate means for pursuing peace and security.

Conclusion 1: Use of Dialogue and Multilateralism

256 The Commonwealth has a well-established approach to tackling conflict and political differences, involving multilateral consultations and extensive dialogues, even when the positions held by different parties seem distant. In a world in which different people, despite sharing a common interest in peace, security and justice, find themselves divided by mutual incomprehension and scepticism, and sometimes even suspicion, the affirmation of the importance of multilateralism, with mutual respect, can help to create a more positive climate for toleration, support and collaboration. We attach great importance to the Commonwealth's role in placing constructive emphasis on the use of a dialogue-based approach to dealing with issues of group-based conflict in the world today.

257 More particularly, we urge the Commonwealth to use its considerable successful experience to contribute to mobilising the international community, working with and within the United Nations and other international organisations. There is, we argue, a strong need for doing what we can to ensure that channels of dialogue remain open, that there are discussions to identify common platforms, that shared interests and concerns receive general attention, and that potential flashpoints are identified and addressed.

258 In the half decade following 9/11, global support for, and identification with, the US as victims of an extreme outrage has shifted undeniably. A large part of the general attitude has moved towards irritation, sometimes even hostility, in relation to the US-led strategy. It is instructive to examine why this has happened, and what could have

been done to prevent it. A greater use of multilateralism and the policy differences that this would have made are natural candidates to examine in answering these questions. The Commonwealth can play a hugely constructive role in the world today in bringing to the fore the importance of multilateralism and the effectiveness of a dialogue-based *modus operandi* in dealing with issues related to violent conflict.

Conclusion 2: Commitment to Civil Paths — Not to be Displaced by Military Initiatives

259 Commonwealth governments can help to promote a better understanding of the far-reaching implications of the general recognition that tackling global terrorism is far more than a security problem. Aside from governmental initiatives, civil society organisations can also play a constructive role here. The recognition that terrorism is more than a security problem is by no means novel in the world, but its bearing on the choice of policy priorities has been considerably eclipsed by the recent focus on military options and strong-armed security measures. Probing and robust policing is certainly very important in preventing terrorist activities. And yet terrorism has many complex underlying factors. Security policies, while generally important, cannot on their own, come anywhere close to solving – or even suppressing – the problems of terrorism. Many of these problems have to be more fully addressed through civil means, in addition to what the security procedures can achieve.

260 The recruitment of terrorist activists and the creation of a climate where violent deeds are tolerated by a large section of a normally peaceful population undoubtedly rely on impassioned advocacies of violence and emotional evocation of some special group identity, to the exclusion of all other affiliations. There is a need for much more dialogue and discussion on the richness of human identities and also on the need to avoid placing people in rigidly separated boxes, linked with religion or community. The cultivation of a non-denominational national identity can also be very important in providing political cohesion within a country, without denying the claims of broader identities that people may also wish to pursue, linked with continental loyalties (such as Europe, Asia, Africa or the Caribbean), or even the shared human identity that all enjoy. Policies here have to pay particular attention to the nature and content of school education, as well as public discussion. The avoidance of sectarian divisions within a nation can be a very important component of the civil approach to peace, and the positive features of a non-divisive national political identity need, right now, a clear and ungrudging recognition.

261 The civil paths must also include addressing past – or present – humiliations, and what is widely seen as continued ‘injustice’ at the expense of the less-privileged parts of humanity. Extremism and radical search for violent ‘solutions’ operate through various alliances with those who have reasoned complaints about the nature of the world in which we all live.

262 We live in a world that has come to be dominated by military actions and violent encounters, where even those who are opposed to such methods tend to concentrate almost entirely on the counterproductive nature of the violent routes to peace, rather than on the positive and constructive role of civil initiatives. The Commonwealth can greatly serve the world, in addition to itself, in bringing the civil paths very strongly in focus for public policy across the world, including of course in the Commonwealth countries themselves. What is particularly needed now is not so much a detailed 'civilian manifesto', but a firm recognition of the necessary role of civil routes to peace and security. Very few things are as important today, we argue, as this general understanding and affirmation.

Conclusion 3: Addressing grievance and humiliation

263 Among the civil initiatives, particular importance has to be attached to those policies that promote the understanding and remedying of the underlying causes of grievance. In defeating terrorism, the perceived sense of grievances demands serious attention. When there is some basis for complaints, the case for corresponding institutional reform can be strong. The reach and effectiveness of that civil approach can be illustrated with the success of the visionary Scarman Report in 1982,^{xxix} led by Lord Scarman in Britain, which greatly helped in overcoming the hostilities that found expression in race-related riots in 1981 in Brixton and Birmingham. Such riots have not returned in Britain since then, although similar ones have occurred elsewhere.

264 And when, as is sometimes the case, the confrontational perceptions are based on confusion or planted through extremist instigation, those misapprehensions would still have to be addressed through civil means, with good use of discussion, open scrutiny and a willingness on the part of others to listen to complaints and grievances.

265 Good use can be made of the experience of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa. Its mode of operation included the need for the government both to acknowledge the perspective of the aggrieved, with detailed factual records, and also to make room for the burying of past hostilities when the inherited inequities are properly addressed in the present.^{xxx}

266 The outcomes of these changes would have to be periodically evaluated, in a systematic way, since long-standing problems are not amenable to a 'once and for all' eradication. These evaluations should include tangible ways in which the perspective of aggrieved groups receives an airing and commands attention. And yet progress must ultimately be judged by the gradual elimination of the sense of grievance, both (1)

xxix Scarman 1981.

xxx Mani 2002.

through remedying measures, and when necessary, institutional reforms, and (2) through addressing perceptions of inequity with genuine interest and concern. While detailed plans would have to be worked out in the light of specific circumstances in each country (we have presented some possible ways and means to consider in different chapters of the report), the general strategy of going in this direction has to be clearly recognised and affirmed.

Conclusion 4: Political participation and inclusion

267 If participation is an important part of a multilateral approach to world peace, the critical role of political participation within the borders of a country can hardly be overemphasised. While this recognition is hard to escape, its far-reaching implications often receive inadequate attention.

268 There is, first of all, the importance of a national identity that allows each citizen (and broadly even residents) of a country to participate in the political affairs of an undivided nation, as equals. The political sense of belonging to a nation need not be mediated through a person's religious or cultural identity: they have, of course, their own domain of relevance in other activities, like worship and the conduct of private lives and social intercourse. A national identity can be used to give each person an acknowledged equality in political participation, irrespective of religion, race, caste or community. Peace and the avoidance of violence within the borders of a country are very dependent on the cultivation of a non-divisive national identity – necessary for civil participation in the affairs of the country – without undermining the broader political or social identities that people also have across those borders.

269 The development of civil society is another area to which special attention has to be paid. While 'faith groups' are often well organised and well financed (sometimes from abroad), the non-religious identities, linked with language, literature, occupation, etc., have frequently been eclipsed by the increased role of religious politics in recent years. (For example, secular Bangladeshis in London often complain that their voice has been reduced both by the activities of faith groups and by the official priority given to religion over language in classifying the immigrant population.) The variety of groupings needs support, rather than dissuasion, since the diversity of groups helps to bring neglected concerns to public attention.

270 There is a delicate issue of leadership in pursuing the activism of civil society. There is much evidence to indicate that leadership can be very important in championing unpopular causes. Leadership can come from different groups of concerned as well as aggrieved people, including grassroots activists. Political leaders who draw attention to inequality and neglect may require special support, despite the worry that sometimes arises in the minds of the guardians of law and order. However, vocal but peaceful

political participation can have the dual role of (1) leading to a more informed making of public policy, and (2) removing discontent about not being heard, which can ultimately contribute to rage and violence.

Conclusion 5: Women's Political Participation

271 It is particularly important to pay special attention to women's political participation, since this is often seriously neglected. In this field, the Commonwealth has quite a wealth of initiatives and experiences, from which the different countries can benefit.

272 We have suggested particular procedures for making better use of the ties of the Commonwealth for this purpose, including:

1. the use of cross-Commonwealth measures of participation of women in electoral politics, both as candidates and as voters;
2. development of training and exchange programmes for women politicians, and aspiring entrants, to share experiences and lessons across different Commonwealth countries;
3. use of findings of research identifying particular barriers to political participation that women experience in different countries, and addressing the difficulties in the light of experiences in other countries; and
4. sharing of models of successful incorporation of women into civic and political life.

Conclusion 6: Contributions of the Media and Communication

273 A flourishing media can make a very large contribution in strengthening the civil paths to peace and security. Since governments are often tempted to restrain the press for one reason or another, the overall importance of a free media does need a firm acknowledgement. A flourishing media can make public discussion better informed, allow alternative points of view to be more fully expressed, and also help make the shared objectives of the nation and the world more analysed and understood. In our chapter dealing with the media (Chapter 6), we have proposed a number of specific policies, dealing with both traditional means and new methods of communication, but in addition, it is extremely important to recognise the role of an unrestrained and flourishing media in helping political participation and dialogue, allowing grievances to be aired and addressed, and facilitating the hearing that public appreciation and complaints should receive.

274 This is not to deny that there are cases in which the media has been used to generate hostility to others and to promote violence. While some restraints would, thus, be useful and sometimes necessary, particular care has to be taken to make sure that the steps to do this are proportionate and balanced so as to safeguard the survival and health of legitimate free expression, which is central to the civil paths to peace and security. It is always best if self-restraint is undertaken out of a sense of professional and social responsibility rather than the restraints having to be imposed externally.

Conclusion 7: Education and the role of young people

275 In the civil paths to peace and security, it would be hard to exaggerate the importance of non-sectarian and non-parochial education that expand, rather than reduce, the reach of understanding and reason. We have discussed, in Chapter 7, a number of specific policy proposals that would help the Commonwealth countries to learn from each other's experience.

276 Commonwealth governments do, of course, recognise that young people are the inheritors of global change. This recognition has two different implications. First, it is important to understand the contribution of young people which is already enriching contemporary politics and social practice – one type of illustration comes from the use of 'YouTube', but there are many other types of constructive initiatives as well. Second, the understanding that today's young people will have serious responsibility for the future, which in turn has implications for policies that try to help the young people of today to acquire the skill, efficiency and inclination to play active roles in shaping solutions to problems that they will have to deal with in the future. Nothing perhaps is as important here as making young people appreciate each other's dignity, despite their diversity, and also the importance of the creative functions of dialogue and discussion.

A concluding remark

277 This report has been informed by the importance of human minds in the pursuit of peace and security. This does not, in any way, underestimate the relevance of more standard thinking on the subject of war and peace. Military operations can, sometimes, be justified, and security measures are certainly extremely important in the prevention of violence and in the sustaining of peace. And yet it is the battle for human minds on which the successes and failures of terrorism ultimately depend.

278 Systematically 'engineered violence' makes effective – and often lethal – use of selected group identities with adversarial attitudes towards other groups, combined with the downplaying of many other identities that human beings also have, including the broad commonality of our shared humanity. In resisting engineered violence, we need as clear an understanding as possible of the ways and means through which the

thinking of a large number of activists is influenced in a violent direction. The battle for the human mind is at least as important in resisting terrorism and brutality as battles to secure physical bridgeheads.

279 This should not be a difficult point to appreciate, given the manifest nature of global violence and terrorism, including the way the process of recruitment works from the potential catchment population, and the way widespread frustrations and grievances are used to build up a favourable climate for violence, with tolerance of violent deeds (often seen as 'retaliatory violence'). But difficult or not, the practical implications of the point have not received the attention they strongly deserve. Our concentration has been to bring out with clarity the implications of this general understanding.

280 Given the nature of the subject matter, some of our conclusions are more general than others, with recommendation of an approach, particularly the use of multilateralism and the Commonwealth's well established method of dialogue with recognition of mutual dignity. We have requested the Secretary-General to develop concrete steps that, depending on their specific circumstances, member governments might find helpful to consider. The Commission urges member countries to examine carefully these suggestions as developed.

281 While precise policies must depend on specific circumstances and vary from country to country, the Commission wants to emphasise the overwhelming importance of agreeing on some general policy priorities at the present time. This is exactly where the Commonwealth, with its history and experience of dialogue, multilateralism and civil initiatives can play a critically important role. There is something of importance here that remains very pertinent and useful for the Commonwealth itself, but which also has, we have argued, very wide relevance for other countries as well. The Commonwealth does have something to offer to our troubled and fierce world, in addition to having reason to reaffirm its own commitments and to making fuller use of them in working for peace with dignity.