

The Commonwealth after Perth

Implementing Change

The Round Table
The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs





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The Commonwealth after Perth Implementing Change

The Report of a Round Table Conference held at
Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge, on
9–10 January 2012



The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 2011 Perth, Western Australia

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Preface

Two years ago, in January 2010, The Round Table gathered together a range of expertise at a conference at Cumberland Lodge, Windsor. Entitled *A Great Global Good?*, the purpose of that meeting was to digest the outcomes of the Trinidad and Tobago Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting (CHOGM), of October 2009. In particular The Round Table was interested to assess the mounting pressures for reform and renewal of the Commonwealth. It also wanted to play a full part in the review process begun in Port of Spain which would eventually lead to substantial changes being proposed at the 2011 CHOGM, held in Perth, Western Australia.

Initially, Commonwealth Heads of Government in Port of Spain had wanted to lower expectations and limit the scope of any review. The CHOGM communiqué spoke of a focus on Commonwealth institutions and processes, and not on policies and priorities. In particular, governments wanted to shake up the Commonwealth Secretariat. Many felt it had failed to streamline its programmes or accelerate the internal reforms needed to bring the organisation in line with international standards and practices.

However, by the end of the meeting in Trinidad, leaders were to decide on a novel mechanism for carrying the review forward. It would not be conducted, as in the past, by a committee of senior officials reporting to a select number of Heads of Government. Rather, the review would be undertaken by an Eminent Persons Group (EPG), composed of men and women of distinction from around the world. Whatever the intention, this decision would transform the importance of the review from its original and rather limited purposes. Such substantial figures would require an agenda for their enquiry which was worthy of their time and effort.

Accordingly, the EPG was asked to undertake “an examination of options for reform in order to bring the Commonwealth’s many institutions into a stronger and more effective framework of co-operation and

partnership”. The group was also charged with exploring how the Commonwealth could increase its impact, strengthen its networks and raise its profile.

A particular feature of the EPG was its chosen method of working. It consulted very widely, and received a host of formal submissions from Commonwealth and other organisations, including two memoranda from The Round Table. EPG members have also gone out of their way to seek views, and canvass opinion wherever they can.

By taking a very public road to Perth, the EPG hoped to build a constituency of support for its recommendations. This whole approach was frustrated when it became clear that the EPG report would not be made public in advance of the discussion in the Retreat by Heads of Government. This decision, and the cursory manner in which Foreign Ministers initially dealt with the report, incensed the EPG, and many others also. It also fuelled suspicions that the report would be largely ignored.

While Heads of Government later rescued the process, instructing their Foreign Ministers to give each of the report’s 106 recommendations proper scrutiny, the PR damage had been done. In the eyes of many, the prospects for change appeared to be minimal. This may explain why perceptions of the success - or failure - of the Perth summit vary so widely.

The Round Table’s conference at Sidney Sussex, Cambridge, in January 2012, sought to address these issues and arrive at its own analysis. It aimed to identify the achievements of Perth; and, as importantly, to assess whether any significant reform was likely as a result. The conference report *The Commonwealth after Perth: implementing change* summarises the opinions and judgements of some of those who were most closely involved. It marks an important moment at the start of a crucial year for the Commonwealth.

Stuart Mole

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Speakers

James Mayall

Emeritus Professor, Sidney Sussex College

Stuart Mole

Chairman, the Round Table

James Mayall began by welcoming everybody to Cambridge and to Sidney Sussex College in particular. It was a source of pleasure to him personally that The Round Table should have chosen to hold a Commonwealth conference in Sidney Sussex, a college with which he had had a long association. The college had a distinguished history. During the Civil War it was known as a 'puritan' college and Oliver Cromwell had been a student, so its devotion to the Commonwealth had historic roots. Over 350 years later, the modern Commonwealth of Nations was embarked upon a course of significant change and he was confident that The Round Table would make an important contribution to that process, not least through this conference. He wished the meeting well.

Stuart Mole added his welcome to participants to what had by now become firmly established as The Round Table's traditional post-CHOGM review. Two years previously, in January 2010, The Round Table had got in on the start of the Eminent Persons Group (EPG) reform agenda, with a conference entitled 'A Great Global Good? Reviewing Commonwealth Institutions and Processes'. It had stayed with the EPG process, making two submissions to the group, and helping to organise a meeting in London immediately prior to the Perth CHOGM, and another set of meetings in Perth itself. It was therefore appropriate that The Round Table should

be holding yet another conference, to review the outcomes of Perth.

Stuart Mole said that he had been surprised by the markedly different assessments of the outcomes of the Perth CHOGM. Some saw it as a landmark conference, while others described it as a damp squib. But commentators were as one in recognising that the Commonwealth now faced a very busy year. It had yet to be seen how the reforms of CMAG would bed down, and the same could be said of the greater latitude given the Secretary-General to speak out on issues of the moment. Most importantly, there was a good deal of unfinished business from the EPG report. Almost half of the EPG's recommendations had been deferred for further consideration (including the most contentious recommendation of all, that for a Commissioner for Democracy, Human Rights and the Rule of Law). Even of those recommendations agreed, many had yet to be given proper shape. For instance, it had been stated that the new Commonwealth Charter would go through a substantial process of consultation and drafting before going to the Foreign Ministers in the autumn. But little had been heard of what this involved. Clearly there was a lot of work to do, and very little time to make it happen. It was therefore all the more important that the stakeholders in the process should be clear about what needed to be done. This was the essential purpose of the conference.

The Eminent Persons Group

The group comprised Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi (Chairman); Hon. Michael Kirby (Australia's longest serving judge); Asma Jahangir (a leading human rights lawyer and campaigner in Pakistan); Senator Hugh Segal (a Conservative politician and former senior public servant from Canada); Patricia Francis (a trade expert and business facilitator from Jamaica); Sir Malcolm Rifkind (a former British Foreign Secretary); Sir Ronald Sanders (a journalist and former Caribbean diplomat); Sir Ieremia Tabai (the first President of Kiribati, and a former

Secretary-General of the Pacific Islands Forum); Dr Emmanuel Akwete (founding Executive Director of the Institute of Democratic Governance in Ghana); and Samuel Kavuma (the Ugandan Chair of the Commonwealth Youth Caucus). Graca Machel (an international campaigner for women and children and one-time Minister of Education in Mozambique) was invited to join the group but was not able to participate in its work after its first meeting.



Members of the Eminent Persons Group with the Commonwealth Secretary-General

Session 1

The Perth CHOGM - A British View

Chair	Keshini Navaratnam <i>Former BBC World presenter</i>
Speakers	Lord Howell of Guildford <i>Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office</i>
Respondent	Mark Robinson <i>Hon. Treasurer, The Round Table</i>

Lord Howell began by saying that when the Coalition Government came to power in the UK in 2010, there was a good deal of catching-up to do, in terms of emphasising Britain's role in the Commonwealth, and indeed in terms of helping to reinvigorate the Commonwealth itself. The Commonwealth was now operating in a very different environment from what it had been used to, or from what had been the case even as late as the 1990s. The information revolution, the internet and the social media were transforming all aspects of national and international life. The main effect on the Commonwealth had been to produce a progressive weaving-together of different parts of the Commonwealth network – the non-governmental and semi-governmental fields, businesses, lobbies, professions and associations, as well as the purely governmental and intergovernmental dimensions. The result was invigoration and a new sense of purpose and vitality in the Commonwealth network. But policy-makers had perhaps been slow to understand what was happening. The Perth CHOGM represented an opportunity to take stock of these changes, and to discuss how best to re-position and reform the Commonwealth in order for it to flourish in the new international environment.

While there had been some areas where the British government would have wanted more progress, Lord Howell completely rejected the 'failure' school of thought on the CHOGM. No-one who had been to Perth and attended the associated Commonwealth People's Forum, the Commonwealth Business Forum, or the Commonwealth Youth Forum would have come away with that impression; and even at the governmental level the CHOGM had resulted in significant progress on a whole series of measures.

The Perth CHOGM and associated meetings had been impressively organised. There had been a vast humming network of events, which somehow the media had failed to convey. The essence and strength of the Commonwealth was precisely in its span and depth, a

subtle but widespread sense of community and willingness to work together which brought together the peoples as well as the governments of now 54 countries. The associated pillar gatherings had demonstrated the staggering vitality of Commonwealth networks. On the business side, which was important to all governments, there was an enormous attendance, great interest from outside the Commonwealth, and a large number of deals and contacts made, as well as liaising, dialoguing, and networking. The Business Forum alone was sufficient answer to those who described the Perth gathering as a failure. Similarly, the People's Forum was very well attended, with a vast range of interests, organisations, lobbies, faith groups, and so on, with the local government side very active, all of them demonstrating a vigorous commitment to the Commonwealth's core values. The Youth Forum outside Perth, which Lord Howell had himself attended, was yet another instance of the vitality of the Commonwealth: a gathering buzzing with ideas and energy, driven by some remarkable young people. In judging the Commonwealth, it was necessary to be aware that this was not just another intergovernmental organisation; indeed, rather than a top-down pyramid it was a bottom-up network.

At the intergovernmental level, which of course was the most visible side of the Commonwealth, the Perth CHOGM received two ground-breaking reports, from the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) and the Eminent Persons Group (EPG), the latter tasked by the Trinidad and Tobago CHOGM of 2009 with putting forward recommendations for the reform and reinvigoration of the Commonwealth. Ahead of the CHOGM, the British government was determined to see progress on both reports, and worked hard, as did some other governments, to push the reforms forward. Significant parts of the EPG report (such as the recommendation for a Commonwealth Charter) were indeed agreed. Perhaps most importantly, the CMAG report was agreed in its entirety, broadening very

significantly CMAG's mandate and allowing it to address concerns before they became crises. CMAG's record to date had not been perfect but it had been pretty good; nevertheless it had always suffered from the defect of not being mandated to engage with countries about whom there were concerns until there had been a complete breakdown or overthrow of constitutional government. Now, CMAG would be able to monitor and support Commonwealth values, and to address concerns early on, before they resulted in a political and constitutional crisis.

It was the vitality of the Commonwealth's organisations and its commitment to core values, as well as an expectation of benefits, which made the Commonwealth so attractive both to its member states and to other countries currently outside its fold. Lord Howell had been told by someone high up in the Rwandan government that joining the Commonwealth was the best foreign policy decision the country had taken. Membership of the Commonwealth had helped solidify the country's nascent democracy, and had transformed its trade and investment scene. Similarly, other countries were lining up to join, motivated not by historical sentiment or historical ties, but by the opportunity to join a vibrant network with an emphasis on promoting core values which were vital for good governance and prosperity, and within which, in a telling phrase heard repeatedly at Perth, there might be quarrels, but never enmity. There was perhaps something to be said for developing some sort of observer or associate status, as a stepping stone to full membership, or to allow territories which fell short of full statehood to begin participating in Commonwealth networks.

What of the future? The Perth CHOGM didn't achieve everything. In particular, there was much unfinished business left over from the EPG report. The British government hoped that there would be rapid progress at all levels to implement, follow up or complete the decisions made at Perth. When the new CMAG met in April, it would need to take some decisive steps to move forward the reforms agreed at Perth. As for the unfinished business of the EPG recommendations, the Secretariat was already working on refining those recommendations, and a ministerial task force would be established to examine the ideas the Heads had passed on (including the most controversial, the idea of a Commissioner for Democracy, the Rule of Law, and Human Rights), with a first meeting in June; meanwhile the Secretary-General and (where appropriate) CMAG would also work on the proposals. There would be national consultations on the Charter, to make sure that the resulting document was accessible and relevant to all Commonwealth citizens. The Foreign Ministers would then meet in New York in September to review and make decisions on this widespread and detailed consultation and refinement process.

Lord Howell concluded by saying that the Queen's

Diamond Jubilee would provide the backdrop to much of this process, and a perfect opportunity to highlight the role of the modern Commonwealth. The Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Trust, which was being set up under the chairmanship of Sir John Major to help tackle curable diseases and to forward education, had a strong Commonwealth flavour, and one of its strands would see links built between schools, universities, health professionals and so on, throughout the Commonwealth. There was perhaps an irony here, that the Commonwealth was an enormously modern organisation, ideally positioned to promote development and political progress in the twenty-first century, yet at its heart and centre was the role of Her Majesty the Queen, as Head of the Commonwealth. Whatever disagreements there might be, all countries in the Commonwealth, and not just those which retained the British monarch as head of state, were united in their admiration and support for the Queen as Head of the Commonwealth. It would be fitting if her Jubilee Year saw the Commonwealth take the necessary steps to enable itself to achieve yet more for all its governments and peoples.

Keshini Navaratnam thanked Lord Howell for his presentation, which had highlighted the Commonwealth's ability to be a club for the twenty-first century, relevant to both the developed and the developing countries. He had also highlighted the timing of Perth, on the eve of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, the Queen's extraordinary role as Head of the Commonwealth, and the way that the Jubilee would focus global attention on the Commonwealth.

Mark Robinson, who had been in Perth for the CHOGM and associated meetings, said that he also was not a member of the 'failure' school of interpretation. He welcomed the very positive attitude of the British government, which was taking a real interest in the Commonwealth and was at last abandoning the traditional British reluctance to take initiatives. A more positive attitude towards the Commonwealth – what it had achieved, what it could achieve, what needed doing in order for it to achieve those things – was long overdue. On the whole, the results of Perth had been positive, and in some areas very encouraging. This was not to say that there hadn't been problems. Mark Robinson had attended the civil society consultation with Foreign Ministers (which incidentally ran half an hour over time), and one remark which had really stood out and chimed with the feeling of those present was when William Hague said, without equivocation, that he and the British government were bitterly disappointed that the EPG report had not been released and widely discussed and analysed with interested parties, including Commonwealth civil society,

before CHOGM. If there was any truth in the 'failure' school of thought, it derived from disappointment at the way the EPG report appeared to have been handled.

Mark Robinson said that at Perth there had been a strong and palpable feeling that the Commonwealth needed reforming and renewing. The expectations were great, but some of the achievements were by no means insubstantial. He personally saw the adoption of CMAG's report as enormously significant. Various individuals and organisations had been trying to achieve these reforms for a very long time. That they were adopted in their entirety perhaps owed something to a distraction effect from the EPG report. Nevertheless the changes would be very significant. As for the EPG reforms, he had always thought that there would be controversy around the Commissioner proposal, much though he supported it himself, and it was also true that a number of countries saw the proposal not as the EPG had intended. Some refinement of the proposal and clarification of its scope would clearly be necessary before it could gain acceptance. He and others had been slightly taken aback by the final CHOGM press conference, at which it appeared to be said that the Commissioner proposal had been rejected. Happily, according to the communiqué, this had not been the case, but it was important for civil society organisations and other groupings, as well as sympathetic governments to keep up the pressure. The Commonwealth was often attacked for being weak on human rights issues, yet no UN body, for instance, could suspend a member on the grounds of persistent violations of human rights, whereas the Commonwealth had always been ahead of the game, and if the EPG recommendations were approved could certainly continue to be.

Lord Howell had also talked about the Commonwealth as a network. This was enormously important. The Commonwealth consisted of many organisations and many levels and means of engagement. At the same time, as the statements coming out of Perth on such issues as health, education, food security, and climate change, to name but some of the major issues, made clear, the challenges ahead of the Commonwealth were very great. The watchword for the Commonwealth of the twenty-first century should be partnership. By harnessing the vitality and strength of the Commonwealth network, of which Lord Howell spoke so eloquently, the governments and peoples of the Commonwealth could make the association yet more relevant and effective.

Discussion

- Asked whether he thought that the Commonwealth should be taking a more proactive role in issues which were not just Commonwealth issues but global ones, such as food security or climate change, Lord Howell observed that the proof was always in the pudding. For example,

the Ramphal Foundation had produced an important report on migration, which highlighted both the Commonwealth and the global dimensions of the issue. The presentation of reports such as this to a CHOGM gave them a certain status and underlined the importance of action on the issues raised. But, as with other issues, there needed to be demand from some parts of the network and commitment and follow-up from others, and a clear demonstration that this was an area on which the Commonwealth could indeed make a difference, or was the best organisation through which to channel resources.

- Lord Howell was asked whether there was any scope for a more robust Commonwealth role in conflict prevention and resolution. Lord Howell was again cautious, saying that the Commonwealth couldn't do everything, and shouldn't seek to replace other, perhaps more appropriate, international institutions. It was true that the Commonwealth had a vast reservoir of experience in this field, and that Commonwealth member states contributed significantly to international peace-keeping operations. Nevertheless the priority for the Commonwealth, and the area of its greatest strengths, was more in what was called soft power, and especially the creation of trust and understanding between its member states, and bringing countries together on equal and non-threatening terms.

- It was suggested that governments in Britain frequently came to power promising to re-energise Britain's relationship with the Commonwealth, only to lose interest fairly rapidly. Given that the Coalition Government was now into its second year, Lord Howell was asked whether this would prove the case with the current government. In response, he asserted that he personally and the Coalition as a whole were determined that Britain should take an active, positive, and sustained role in the Commonwealth, and that it was in Britain's interests to do so.

- A more sceptical attitude was expressed towards the outcomes of the CHOGM, and the willingness of the Heads and Foreign Ministers to seize the opportunity to reform the Commonwealth. For instance, Lord Howell had spoken of the Commonwealth network, and had pleasingly emphasised the importance of governments working with other stakeholders; yet the proposal in the EPG report that there should be regular meetings between Foreign Ministers and representatives of civil society, in the years in between CHOGMs, had been deferred for further consideration. In response, Lord Howell said that the proposal had indeed been deferred, but it hadn't been rejected. It was regrettable that some countries had not given enough attention to the EPG proposals before the CHOGM, but it was also the case that it was always going to be unrealistic to expect agreement on so many proposals at one meeting. He himself hadn't expected this

particular seed to sprout immediately, but it was still a live prospect, and one which the British government would like to see carried forward.

- Lord Howell was pressed on the question of membership. Various countries were known or thought to be interested in joining. South Sudan had already tabled its application. Yemen and Palestine were frequently mentioned. Aung San Suu Kyi was on record as saying that she would like Burma to join. Somaliland, with its important links with Kenya as well as its historical ties, was also sometimes discussed. Should the Commonwealth open its doors to all comers? Lord Howell responded by saying that the Commonwealth should continue to adopt a case-by-case approach. Burma would be warmly welcomed as a member, but that was probably at best some way down the road. Somaliland was a rather different case. Somaliland had followed policies which were very much to its credit, but it was not UK policy to encourage the break-up of Somalia. Plunging into this situation in this way was to risk fragmentation, conflict, and real tragedy and disaster. For the moment it was British policy to encourage Somalis to work together, not to do something akin to picking off the best bits.

- Again on the question of membership, Lord Howell was asked whether he thought the current situation regarding the criteria for membership was entirely satisfactory. Until relatively recently it had been assumed that membership was restricted to countries which had had an historical relationship as part of the British empire. That principle had been spectacularly breached in the cases of Mozambique and Rwanda, probably rightly so. But the language of exceptional circumstances seemed to beg a lot of questions. Was there a case for developing more objective criteria for membership, especially as regards historical connections? Lord Howell replied by saying that he had no objection in principle to countries which had no historical connections with the British empire joining the Commonwealth. On the other hand, he often thought that membership was treated in too clear-cut and either/or a way. It might be helpful to find ways in which countries could join parts of the Commonwealth family and not others, for instance joining some of the pillar organisations and working from there, thereby building up both Commonwealth associations and a case for full membership.

- Asked whether there were any plans to organise a meeting of Commonwealth leaders in connection with the Queen's Jubilee in June, Lord Howell emphasised that such plans were very much the prerogative of the Palace, but that he did think that some sort of Commonwealth leaders' meeting was likely.

- It was suggested that all the talk of a new

Commonwealth operating in a new environment sometimes lost sight of the fact that the future of the Commonwealth lay in its young people. What more could be done to bring young people into the decision-making processes, not just as poster material, but as shapers of their own futures? Lord Howell responded to this point by saying that he certainly hadn't meant to under-emphasise the role that young people should and could play in shaping the future of the Commonwealth; after all, more than half of the Commonwealth's population was under 25 (and very much more in some countries). It was important that the Secretariat and governments themselves should do all that they could to include young people in the decision-making processes, and also to engage young people with the Commonwealth. For instance, he supported the Secretary-General's idea of a Commonwealth portal, which would enable the younger generations to use the latest technology to empower themselves in a Commonwealth context. He also thought that much more should be done in schools to tell young people about the Commonwealth and the way it could facilitate their own networks and their own goals and ideals. At present, too many young people were leaving school with outmoded understandings of the international order.

- It was ventured that the bottom-up Commonwealth was thriving, but the top-down Commonwealth was not in such good shape. There were some governments which were pushing in the right direction, but some others which were arrogant, lazy or fearful. Was there anything the Secretariat and the 'good' governments could do to persuade the 'bad' ones to fall in line? Lord Howell said that there was some truth in this caricature, but that it needed nuancing. It was perhaps more true to say that governments were responding, particularly in democracies, to the bottom-up pressures. Citizens wanted the Commonwealth to be reinvigorated, and they expected their governments to do something about it. While there was still work to do, the Perth CHOGM showed that all governments did in fact realise, albeit to varying degrees, that the Commonwealth had to change. It was important that those governments which were most persuaded of the case for reform didn't allow the pressure to slacken. The British government saw it as an important British interest that the Commonwealth should be reinvigorated, since the Commonwealth featured highly in the government's strategy to readjust Britain's position in a networked world. As David Cameron had said in his Mansion House speech recently, the future world lay with networks rather than blocs, and the Commonwealth was well placed to make itself one of the key international networks of the twenty-first century.

Session 2

The Perth CHOGM – Assessing the Outcomes

Chair	Victoria Schofield <i>Senior Member, Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford</i>
Speakers	Simon Gimson <i>Director, Secretary-General's Office, Commonwealth Secretariat</i> Vijay Krishnarayan <i>Deputy Director, Commonwealth Foundation</i> Carl Wright <i>Secretary-General, Commonwealth Local Government Forum</i>
Respondent	Patsy Robertson <i>Chair, Commonwealth Association</i>

Simon Gimson said that he had been struck by the divergence of views about the Perth CHOGM. Some counted it a success; others had registered their disappointment that it hadn't delivered all that had been anticipated. It was perhaps true that there would always be those in life who saw a glass half full and those who saw a glass half empty. But from an intergovernmental perspective, the Perth CHOGM represented a glass more than half full.

Simon Gimson and his Secretariat colleagues had come away from the CHOGM feeling pleased, and indeed relieved that the progress made had been substantial. Much of this could be attributed to the EPG which, because it had set such an ambitious agenda and high ideals, had the political impact of pulling some governments from a point of reticence towards one of being more willing to accept change, so that the CHOGM outcomes were eventually at a higher level and quality than perhaps might have been the case otherwise. Undoubtedly, for instance, without the EPG report it would have been much harder for the CMAG reforms to have gone through. These reforms were something the Secretary-General had been working on quietly for the last four years; indeed they had been an aim of Chief Emeka Anyaoku when he was involved in the original setting-up of CMAG.

CMAG reform was a game-changer. Previously CMAG had only come into play in circumstances of a military coup or some other unconstitutional overthrow of an elected government, but from now on, if a government abrogated a constitution, suspended a parliament,

postponed elections, or systematically eroded political space, human rights, civil liberties, media freedom, or judicial independence, that government could face the prospect of a CMAG 'yellow card'. There was of course work to do in translating CMAG's new mandate into actuality, and in getting right the linkage of CMAG's enhanced role to the Secretary-General's good offices role. But it would be helpful to the Secretary-General in some circumstances that if a country did not start getting itself back on the right lines in terms of Commonwealth expectations and standards, it could end up on CMAG's agenda. There would of course be many expectations which would have to be met and objective and coherent measures needed to be established: the tricky thing, for instance, would be when the media blew up a story in London about an event occurring in one country arguing that it should be brought to CMAG's attention when in fact there might be an even more serious event occurring in another country that didn't happen to have made the front pages of the London papers at all.

Also important was the agreement at Perth to mandate the Secretary-General to speak out in ways he couldn't before, given the previous requirement for a collective Commonwealth view to emerge before the Secretary-General could speak publicly. Now, he would be able to exercise his judgement and speak publicly much more.

As regards the EPG report, Simon Gimson again thought the cup more than half full. More than a third of the EPG's 106 recommendations had been adopted outright, and a similar proportion would be looked at in greater detail; ten or so had been overtaken by the CMAG

reforms; and only eleven had been rejected outright. The interest which the Heads took in the report was indicated by the fact that they had insisted that Foreign Ministers work until late in the night to come up first thing the next morning with recommendations for the Heads. That said, given the criticism of some that there had not been wholesale adoption of the 106 recommendations by the Heads, it had never been realistic to think that the Heads would simply accept all the EPG's recommendations without serious consideration, and sadly the time for such consideration was necessarily limited at a CHOGM.

There had been other outcomes of the CHOGM which were worth highlighting, including important statements on sustainable development, climate change, issues particularly affecting small states, food security, and so on. Important from the Secretariat's point of view was the mandate to the Secretary-General and Secretariat to develop their own draft strategic plan. This was a welcome development for the Secretariat. A small organisation, with only 280 staff (the same size as Caricom, or as someone had pointed out, the catering department at the UN), it was asked and expected to deliver a global agenda. It was valuable for the Secretariat to be able to identify where it thought it could best make a contribution, rather than being pulled in 54 different directions.

The Perth CHOGM had emphasised the way the Commonwealth was now an important contributor to the global discourse at an intergovernmental level. For instance, the Secretary-General would shortly be hosting a meeting of the G20 Working Group on Development. He would continue to use his position to plant Commonwealth advocacy and ideas at the heart of the global debate.

On membership, the Perth CHOGM was notable mainly for the agreement to accept South Sudan as an applicant for membership. Other countries were of course also in the queue, or reputed to be considering Commonwealth membership. Though the criteria for membership were in need of some clarification, the accepted principle was now that any country with a meaningful relationship with a Commonwealth country (not just with Britain) was eligible for membership.

Simon Gimson had heard many views about whether the Commonwealth was succeeding in raising its profile. Part of the problem was that the Commonwealth had to work in 54 countries. Just because the Commonwealth did not feature in the news pages of one country's newspapers, it didn't mean that it wasn't in fact hitting the headlines elsewhere across the world. However, the new mandate for CMAG and the new latitude given to the Secretary-General to speak out without waiting for a collective Commonwealth view to emerge were both

bound to make some difference to media opportunities and the way people perceived the Commonwealth.

Vijay Krishnarayan spoke about the civil society aspects of the Perth Commonwealth meetings. These had of course focused on the Perth Commonwealth People's Forum, which was held from 25 to 27 October at a venue only 100 metres from the CHOGM itself.

The Commonwealth People's Forum was the culmination of a long process. In order to broaden participation and representativeness, preparatory regional consultations had been held, which attracted more than 250 participants, who between them developed the first draft of the civil society statement. This, in contrast to previous years, had been prepared well in advance of CHOGM so that it could be presented to Foreign Ministers at their meeting in New York in September, and could inform the discussions of the Heads themselves.

A year off, the Commonwealth Foundation had planned for 250 participants at the People's Forum in Perth. In the event more than 300 registered, along with around 40 support staff; the Australian government was very supportive in enabling the Forum to expand. The Forum attracted politicians as well as representatives of civil society (Lord Howell was among those who had participated in the Forum events), and civil society at large, not just Commonwealth-accredited bodies. Particularly successful was the round table between Foreign Ministers and civil society, which brought together representatives of 42 governments and 50 civil society organisations.

Following the Commonwealth People's Forum, the Commonwealth Foundation had conducted a major evaluation exercise, which revealed a high level of satisfaction with the civil society statement as representing civil society views, and an emphasis on the opportunities that the People's Forum had provided for learning and networking.

It was difficult to gauge the extent to which the Commonwealth People's Forum was an influence on the CHOGM itself. The Forum could perhaps best be described as a window on CHOGM rather than a means of directly influencing it. Traditionally, civil society looked closely at the texts of CHOGM communiqués and the like, to try to find evidence of the passing-on of phraseology from civil society submissions, but drawing a straight line was rarely possible. It was clear that civil society made some impact, particularly on the choice of topics covered by the communiqués. Thus the Commonwealth Human Ecology Council had clearly been influential regarding fisheries, and the Ramphal Commission regarding migration. Civil society activity was also seen in the statements on food security and forced marriage. Yet of the thirty recommendations from the EPG report accepted

outright by the Heads, few if any made any explicit mention of civil society. Recommendation 91 of the report, which called for regular meetings between Foreign Ministers and representatives of civil society organisations, had been rejected outright, although a similar recommendation (no. 70) remained on the table. This perhaps reflected the ambivalence of some Heads towards engaging with civil society.

For the Commonwealth Foundation, the outputs from the CHOGM had been generally positive. Heads had recognised the importance of civil society, mandated the re-launch of the Commonwealth Foundation so that it could respond effectively to mandates, and envisaged closer collaboration between the Foundation and the Secretariat. This indicated that Heads were increasingly showing that they were listening to civil society voices, and civil society in turn was becoming more sophisticated in the way it was engaging with Commonwealth processes.

Carl Wright, referring to the 'glass half full'/'glass half empty' debate, said that he was also unequivocally of the former camp. The Perth CHOGM was, in his view, a landmark meeting in the way that the Auckland CHOGM of 1995 had been. There had been very high expectations, and a widespread recognition of the need to modernise, fuelled by the process of CMAG reform and the EPG report. The CHOGM was a success in logistical terms. There had been a good turnout of Heads of Government (India, Jamaica and New Zealand notably excepted). There were active parallel business, youth and people's fora. And at the intergovernmental level there was marked progress.

Like everyone else he knew, Carl Wright was disappointed at the handling of the EPG report, and the decision not to publish the report ahead of the CHOGM. There had not been enough media interest or public discussion and scrutiny, as a result (though the potential for such interest and scrutiny had been shown by the fact that the EPG had received some 330 submissions); and some Foreign Ministers and officials neglected to give it due attention, either. But it was also true that some proposals in the EPG report needed greater thought. Not many had been rejected outright. Of the two headline proposals – or those which had attracted most of the media attention – it had always been clear that the Commissioner proposal was likely to be controversial without a good deal more clarity on the details. As for the Charter, not only was it unrealistic to have expected this to be adopted in its entirety at Perth, but such an outcome would have precluded any civil society or citizen input into what some considered an incomplete document (missing, for instance, any mention of the Aberdeen principles on local democracy), and indeed any

opportunity of publicising the Charter through the process of generating it.

The most important outcome of the CHOGM was the agreement to reform CMAG. This had been called for for many years, and had been strenuously resisted for an equal time. It was a major step forward to mandate CMAG to act in situations which fell short of the overthrow of constitutional government.

From a local government point of view, Carl Wright was pleased that the communiqué underlined the important role of local government in promoting strategies for localism, sustainable development and local economic growth as set out in the CLGF's Cardiff Consensus for Local Economic Development.

The reform of CMAG was especially important, along with the recognition that CMAG should act in circumstances of the suspension of any democratic institutions (such as local government), not just national parliaments. There was also a valuable opening of doors. It should now be possible for associated and civil society organisations to submit evidence directly to CMAG; and the communiqué envisaged closer collaboration between the Secretariat and these associated organisations in taking forward Commonwealth programmes, noting that which in some cases the latter were better placed to implement than the Secretariat itself. The Commonwealth Local Government Forum was already in discussion with the Secretariat about joint collaboration on some of the CHOGM mandates. The new relationships also opened up the field to more external partnerships, perhaps sometimes brokered by the Secretariat, for instance with the EU or with non-Commonwealth development agencies, or private trusts.

Firming up the CMAG reforms and completing the EPG review process were clearly the two major tasks for the immediate future. It was important for civil society voices to continue to be heard in these two areas. It was important also that the Commonwealth should engage with Sri Lanka in the run-up to the 2013 CHOGM, making sure its influence was felt in issues relating to human rights and good governance; to remain engaged with Fiji, and with Zimbabwe; to be proactive as regards South Sudan and other potential members such as Burma; and to be inclusive and joined-up in its approach to all the tasks, mandates and challenges. There might be only 280 employees in the Commonwealth Secretariat, but if one added all those active in the Commonwealth's associated and civil society organisations the Commonwealth's reach was very many times greater.

Discussion

- Asked to clarify the position as regards the Charter, Simon Gimson said that all national governments had

been asked to do their own consultations by the end of March so that officials could look at a draft Charter document in April and send it to a Ministerial Task Force in June, which would submit a final draft for consideration by all Foreign Ministers at their meeting in New York in September and thereafter adoption by Heads of Government.

- Vijay Krishnarayan said that he thought the battle for the content of the Charter would be fought largely at the national level. It was a particular challenge to Commonwealth civil society organisations to get involved in the process of consultation.
- It was pointed out from the floor that nothing so far had been heard from the British government about any such consultation; it was also suggested that perhaps the Secretariat and the Foundation were not doing enough to drive the process forward. There were also problems with the envisaged process in that many Commonwealth countries simply didn't have the resources to organise adequate consultations within the time-frame laid down.
- Simon Gimson agreed that the situation was not ideal. The onus was on the national governments. There was at least a draft Charter in circulation. Another issue was how the results of the consultation might be captured and translated into a revised draft document.
- It was suggested that the parts of the EPG report which had been deferred for further consideration were by no means guaranteed an easy ride. It could not be assumed that all members of the Commonwealth would be willing to sign up to some of the proposals in the report. This was especially true of the Commissioner proposal. But what did the opposition stem from? Was it the old problem of national sovereignty? Or indeed was it a feeling that the 'West' was trying to impose its own agenda? It was often said in India, for instance, that the Commonwealth was largely driven forward by the ABC (Australia, Britain, Canada) countries, with the small states co-opted, and the others looking on rather suspiciously from the sidelines.
- Responding to this last point, Simon Gimson said that national sovereignty was one concern that had put some brakes on the reform agenda, and might continue to be an obstacle. It was also true that a North-South divide had manifested itself in some of the positions taken at the CHOGM, particularly on the Commissioner proposal. A large number of governments were also worried that development issues might lose out if all the focus went on promoting democracy. Successive Secretaries-General had had to work hard to build bridges and prevent the kind of North-South sterility that hampered the UN and other institutions. But it was also true that the EPG proposal for a Commissioner, while addressing a major concern, also left a large number of questions unresolved: how the Commissioner was to be appointed; to whom he or she

would be responsible - whether he or she would be a free agent; and what the Commissioner's relationship with the Secretary-General and CMAG should be.

- Carl Wright said that he thought it was important, if the EPG reforms were to succeed, that the agenda should be driven forward with the willing and active collaboration of non-ABC countries. These countries needed to feel that they could take ownership of the reform process, and in order to do this they needed to be able to feel that they had a stake in the outcomes.
- Asked to comment on why one EPG recommendation on regular meetings between civil society and Foreign Ministers had been rejected while another had been deferred, Simon Gimson said that as he understood it, Ministers had been concerned to ensure that any such meetings should be clearly structured and not merely unplanned exchanges of opinion.
- It was suggested that the Perth CHOGM was best regarded as the beginning of the reform process, as so much had yet to be agreed. Only in September would it be possible to take stock of whether Perth had been successful. Even then, the proof of the pudding would be in the implementation of the reforms.
- On this last point, Simon Gimson said that there was already a range of tools to assess the implementation of mandates, which is what most although not the majority of recommendations would result in. As far as the Commonwealth Secretariat itself was concerned, there was an active Board of Governors who kept close tabs on the Secretariat's work, and expected regular progress reports.
- Carl Wright suggested that perhaps a special body or sub-committee of Ministers or officials should be set up within the context of the new CMAG dispensations to monitor how member states implemented the core political values of the Commonwealth: such a body could perhaps review annual reports to be submitted by member states themselves, as happened in some international bodies like the Council of Europe or the ILO.
- It was reported that almost unanimously the young people from forty countries who had gathered at Fremantle for the Commonwealth Youth Forum had been disappointed at the way the EPG report was handled. When the report was finally made available, many were shocked to find that their own governments hadn't bothered to make submissions. This was disappointing, to say the least, and didn't augur well for implementation if so many member governments were so clearly uninterested in seeing change happen.
- Simon Gimson said that it was true that only a minority of governments had submitted evidence to the EPG; it was also clear that some Ministers and officials hadn't read the report ahead of CHOGM. He agreed that this posed a problem, given that most of the EPG's

recommendations involved action by member governments rather than by the Secretariat, and would only be effective if implemented by the member governments themselves.

- Vijay Krishnarayan agreed that this was a real issue. There was no faulting the members of the EPG themselves, all of whom had devoted substantial amounts of time, unremunerated in any way, to compiling the report; and who also had set out a very clear strategy for public consultation and debate prior to the CHOGM.
- It was suggested that each successive CHOGM had different participants but on many topics the same scripts. This indicated that not much was being done to measure impact. The Commonwealth (like other international bodies) was often criticised for issuing high-flown declarations and then not following them up. What could be done to measure the implementation of what had been said two years previously?
- Simon Gimson said that for the Commonwealth certain issues were eternal – such as the problems of small states or the unequal terms of trade. Progress depended in large part on the Heads themselves, and how committed they were to implementing their agreements. As far as the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Foundation were concerned, there were plenty of measures in place to monitor implementation. The Secretariat now had international accounting standards and results-based management, and a good deal of accountability and transparency. There was a large amount of information available about the implementation of mandates, even if it didn't always get read. Politicians tended to focus in a different way from administrators and were not much preoccupied with what had happened two years previously.
- Vijay Krishnarayan said that it was indeed a frequent critique that every two years the Heads were too free and easy with their mandates, and gave little thought to follow-up. The suggestion of a two-yearly reporting mechanism might be helpful. It would force Heads to look at their outcome documents with one eye on the fact that they would need to be revisited. The civil society statement had included a similar idea – that there should be a Commonwealth civil society commission to review the CHOGM communiqué and report back to the next CHOGM on its implementation. This was certainly an idea worth looking at.
- Carl Wright added that there should perhaps be a corresponding onus on associated and civil society organisations to say how they had responded to Commonwealth priorities by shaping their own strategic plans and aligning themselves with the objectives set out in the CHOGM documents.
- The point was made that the Secretariat and the Foundation were severely underfunded, having seen their

resources shrink year by year in real terms; while at the same time each successive CHOGM tasked them with more and more mandates. The situation now was that the Commonwealth institutions were given a shoestring for work that required a long rope. Despite the economic climate, the EPG was perhaps wrong not to have stated clearly that the Commonwealth institutions needed more money; without that it was imperative that the Secretariat should have the ability to reject mandates, or to end them if it was clear that other organisations could do the work more effectively.

- Simon Gimson said that he couldn't agree more. One hopeful outcome of CHOGM was that the Secretariat would now have the opportunity to draft its own strategic plan, which was likely to be much narrower than the mandates which Heads might like to confer. It was of course very easy to say that the Secretariat should do X or Y if it was cost-free.
- It was suggested that whether the Secretariat had 280 staff or twice that or half, the problem of mandates would remain. There needed to be some robust mechanism for dialogue between the Secretariat and member governments, so that after every CHOGM they could cost everything that had been agreed, and prioritise accordingly or seek extra funding. Of course, some things the Secretariat could do would be cost-free: for instance a well-timed statement on Burma.
- Carl Wright agreed with the latter thought. The Commonwealth should be doing more to engage with burning issues, and this needn't come with a hefty price-tag. The Commonwealth could do things differently, through networks and partnerships. And it had an insufficiently used dimension in the form of a Chairperson-in-office.
- Simon Gimson said that the Secretariat was indeed increasingly working through partnerships, with the EU and many other bodies.
- The decision to confirm Sri Lanka as the venue for the next CHOGM attracted some discussion. One participant described this as a blot on the CHOGM. Another suggested that it was always going to be unlikely that the Heads would somehow disinvite Sri Lanka after the CHOGM had already been once postponed from there. The issue of Sri Lanka's human rights record wouldn't go away, and the Secretary-General would need to expand and enhance his engagement with the Sri Lankans over the next two years.
- Vijay Krishnarayan said that since the decision had been taken, the Foundation as an intergovernmental agency would act accordingly, and he hoped for a vibrant and inclusive People's Forum in Colombo in 2013.
- Simon Gimson said that the Secretary-General was indeed in frequent contact with Sri Lanka; nine days after CHOGM he had met the President of Sri Lanka at the

SAARC Summit in Maldives and talked about the Commonwealth's goodwill as well as its collective concerns as conveyed by many citizens and some member governments. A very active discussion was also going on at other levels.

Patsy Robertson (respondent) highlighted the optimism which pervaded the speakers' analyses of the Perth meetings. There had been a very good People's Forum, a good Business Forum and a good Youth Forum. CMAG would be transformed (though why had the CMAG document still not been released?). The Secretary-General's good offices role would be strengthened, and he had been given greater leeway in speaking out and even criticising member governments without having first to build a consensus. Was there indeed a need for a Commissioner if CMAG and the Secretary-General had already been given the means to address the issues as they arose? Similarly, one might ask, was there a real need for a new Charter, when the Commonwealth already had the Singapore, Harare and Millbrook declarations?

The failure to publish the EPG report before CHOGM had clearly been a big mistake. There were many excellent recommendations in it, but the public had not had time to debate them and ministers and officials had not always bothered to read them. The cloud of secrecy was perhaps why so much attention focused around the known but contentious and indeed questionable proposal of a Commissioner, which distracted from many other ideas. There was still much unfinished business from the report.

Patsy Robertson also highlighted the CHOGM communiqué's failure to say anything at all about the one issue that really concerned Commonwealth citizens, the global economic crisis. Given that the Commonwealth brought together a cross-section of states from among the most developed to among the least developed and most

vulnerable, this was surely a great oversight and a missed opportunity to make the Commonwealth relevant to its citizens' concerns.

There would be other important issues over the next two years. The Secretary-General would indeed need to work hard to defuse tensions over Sri Lanka – on the one hand those governments who felt strongly about Sri Lanka's human rights record, and on the other those countries who felt equally strongly that the means of ending a horrendous civil war which had been going on for many years was entirely Sri Lanka's own business.

Several participants had raised the issue of resources, one vividly and perhaps rightly saying that the Commonwealth institutions were being given a shoestring when only a long rope would do. This was a real issue, which needed to be tackled urgently, and independent of other elements in the reform process.

Pierre Trudeau had once said that the point of CHOGMs was that Heads could speak to each other about their own problems in a way they couldn't to ministerial colleagues or officials. Sadly, CHOGMs were no longer just or even primarily meetings of leaders. Stripped of the opening ceremony, cultural programme, etc., etc., the meetings were now barely a day long. Perhaps the most important thing for the Commonwealth was to re-discover the core significance of CHOGMs, which was as an opportunity for Heads to meet on terms of equality and friendship, and to develop the kind of relationships which would ensure that the Commonwealth remained valid. It was all very well to say that the civil society organisations or the business or youth leaders had good meetings; but if leaders left CHOGMs after only perfunctory discussions and with an underfunded Secretariat which was barely delivering on issues of importance to them, it could hardly come as a surprise if they let the Commonwealth gradually wither.

Session 3

The Commonwealth after Perth

Chair

Stuart Mole

Chairman, The Round Table

Speaker

H.E. Kamalesh Sharma

Commonwealth Secretary-General

Kamalesh Sharma began by acknowledging the tremendous work done by the EPG, and the skilful chairmanship of Julia Gillard, the Prime Minister of Australia. Without the former, attention would not have been focused on reform with the intensity it was; without the latter it was doubtful whether such progress could have been made. The CHOGM had had a truly phenomenal agenda; and in effect the Heads had only had one day of real business. It was difficult to conceive that in different circumstances, and with a different chair, it would have been possible to have had an outcome which distilled so much.

The Secretary-General believed that the outcome of Perth justified describing it as a landmark CHOGM, and a tremendous success. After many years, very significant reforms of CMAG had at last been agreed. Although many of the EPG proposals had been deferred for further consideration, a tight timetable had been set for their consideration. Going forward, there was clearly much work to do, in concert with the Chair of the Commonwealth. But the Perth CHOGM had also achieved much.

The Perth CHOGM had also underlined why the Commonwealth had such appeal, and why it was important in the twenty-first century. It had a genius for skirting polarities and international divisions found elsewhere – whether between East and West, or between North and South. It created common ground in a post-colonial context. It helped to propel forward the global agenda. The world was heading in a direction where it had to act collectively. The new world order of the twenty-first century needed to be a collective one not just a rebalanced one. Experience had shown that one failed state could wreak havoc. The marginalised could bring down the rest. The cost to the world of failing to be inclusive did not bear thinking about.

The Commonwealth was already doing things well. But everything it did well now it needed to do even better. This was why the Perth CHOGM was important. Here he again acknowledged the role of the EPG in creating the climate for change. It was perhaps inevitable that not all

of its proposals would be accepted at once, without further discussion and scrutiny. To make sustainable advances in the way the Commonwealth operated, those advances could only be based on what the member states themselves actively wanted. In the crucial area of governance, for instance, it was important that member states themselves were ready for an enhanced degree of self-scrutiny. CMAG could only operate effectively if the member states of the Commonwealth wanted it to. CMAG reform had been on the table for many years, and the Secretary-General himself had worked hard to prepare the ground, as had his predecessors. The reforms agreed at CHOGM were ground-breaking, and also a tribute to the highly skilled chairing of the meeting by Julia Gillard: one by one the delegations had agreed that the Commonwealth simply had to take the steps to reform CMAG. For the Secretary-General himself, this was an important outcome. For the first time, the good offices role of the Secretary-General had a backstop. It would now be possible to engage with governments with the latter knowing that this was the beginning of a process which could potentially end up with attention from CMAG. The degree of engagement would go up, and so too would expectations of members states throughout the Commonwealth in terms of their respect for and compliance with the norms of democracy, human rights and good governance.

In this as in other areas, the Commonwealth created value, and in doing so helped create global value. This was why the Commonwealth was increasingly interacting with outside actors as well. At Port of Spain, the 2009 CHOGM had been attended by the United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, and the President of France, Nicolas Sarkozy. The Commonwealth was developing strategic partnerships in a range of programmes, with such bodies as the UN, the EU, Francophonie; regional associations such as SADC, CARICOM and SAARC; and, the development arms of non-Commonwealth countries. Its statements on such issues as sustainable development, global warming, the issues faced by small states, or food security, were listened

to; its reports were read. Internationally it was viewed as streamlined, effective, and credible; a framework through which to achieve solid outcomes. Increasingly it was recognised as a global interface. The Secretary-General would shortly be hosting an informal meeting of the G20 Working Group on Development at Marlborough House, a process started when, soon after the creation of the G20, he had written to all its members, pointing out that they needed to work to build bridges between those inside the G20 and those outside it. His fundamental point had been, and remained that the G20 could not be some sort of 'magic circle' enlarged from the days of the G7 or G8; it needed to view itself as the 'T20' – a group of Trustees for the concerns and needs of the wider international community – if its decisions were to have global legitimacy and relevance. The G20 might account for 90 per cent of the world's GDP but it needed to take into account the views of the 90 per cent of the world's countries that were not seated at the table.

In the future, networking and building strategic partnerships would be crucial areas for the Commonwealth to develop. This applied also to relations between the official institutions and civil society. The Secretariat could be doing much more in partnership with other Commonwealth organisations, who brought a great deal of expertise and influence. For instance, in the field of good governance, the Secretariat and the organisations representing parliamentarians, judges and the media were all working towards the same goals. Equally important was the Commonwealth's advocacy role. Everything began with the legitimacy of an idea. The Commonwealth's way of doing things made it potentially a source of great wisdom for global benefit. Even in areas where the Secretariat itself couldn't do a great deal directly – such as education, or health – this didn't mean to say that the Commonwealth couldn't make an impact. Rather, things had to be done in different ways, or in different contexts.

Perhaps symbolic of the Commonwealth's role as a network, or a promoter of connectivity, was the project to create the 'Commonwealth Connects' portal. This could open up best practice, provide the raw material for data mining, forge partnerships, facilitate communities of practice, and reach all those people who didn't really know about, or had misconceptions about, the Commonwealth. The Secretary-General had been delighted to see how much enthusiasm there was for this project.

There were many areas in which the Commonwealth could build global value: the culture of democracy and the rule of law, respect for civil liberties and human rights, sustainable development, the creation of economic wealth, and the creation of social wealth. The Commonwealth's values of tolerance, mutual respect and

understanding were needed now more than ever. And key to all of this was the younger generation. This was why the Commonwealth mainstreamed youth as well as women's issues. It was only through engaging and empowering the younger generation that permanent good could be done.

Discussion

- Picking up on the Secretary-General's reference to education as an area where the Secretariat couldn't do a great deal directly, but where the Commonwealth could make a difference, one participant said that education sometimes seemed to be a forgotten issue, despite it underlying everything else. What would the Secretary-General like to see from the next Education Ministers' meeting, and what could the Commonwealth do to promote education? The Secretary-General responded by saying that the Commonwealth had to define what it could do well, and had to prioritise. It could encourage member states to mainstream education, and it could spread best practice about how they could enhance educational opportunities. The major goal was to see that there was at least universal primary education. The meetings of Education Ministers were important events, and perhaps the most progressive and inclusive of Commonwealth Ministers' meetings. The Commonwealth of Learning did superb work, using the latest technologies to tackle the enduring problem of providing educational opportunities.

- Another participant raised the issue of finance. The Secretariat had always been profoundly under-funded, but it was being increasingly squeezed in real terms. Could this go on? The Secretary-General said in response that he was convinced that if the Commonwealth Secretariat could make a compelling enough case, the member states would come up with the funds. The Secretariat had to show that it had cut out wasteful expenditure; and that it acted responsibly in handling existing resources. He believed the Secretariat could do this with conviction. Once the Secretariat had agreed a strategic plan, it would of course come with a bill attached, but this was not going to break anyone's bank. If the Heads were convinced that the Secretariat was using its existing resources well, they could be convinced to provide more.

- In the interests of elucidating what the effects of CMAG reform might be, the Secretary-General was asked how things might have been different had the reforms to CMAG been in place, say, six years previously, in the case of Sri Lanka. How might things have turned out differently, and would Sri Lanka still be hosting the next CHOGM? Another participant thought that a better test case might be Fiji, where many observers had seen the

coup coming long before it took place. Had CMAG had its new powers in 2006, could the Commonwealth have had an impact then rather than waiting for the coup to take place? In response to these questions the Secretary-General drew a distinction between the rule of law and human rights, including access to justice. If justice was not dispensed properly, this was one concern and needed to be treated accordingly including by the Commonwealth. But this was not the same as if the whole of a member state's judiciary was suspended, where a response by the Commonwealth needed to be of a different kind altogether and where CMAG especially had a potential role which would now be enhanced. Whilst it would be difficult to speculate on what might have been the case in the past, the reforms to CMAG were important especially in allowing a more positive and front-footed engagement in future. And from the Secretary-General's point of view they would give stronger credibility to his engagement with member states when Commonwealth values were under the spotlight. If things looked serious, the Secretary-General would have to say, 'I've done my best, but now it is over to CMAG'.

- Asked where he stood on the proposal for a Commissioner on Democracy, the Rule of Law and Human Rights as proposed by the EPG, the Secretary-General said that at all costs two things must be preserved. The first was the ability of the organisation, unmatched in the world, to draw a long breath when looking at a political issue. For Maldives, the transition to democracy took some six years, and the Commonwealth was with the country all the way. The second was trust. It was important that a Head knew when talking to the Secretary-General that the latter was only there to help, not to look good, or to leak information. The same was true of contacts among officials. If these two real plus-es of the organisation could be preserved, then the idea of a Commissioner could be looked at, and indeed could be welcome. But the Commissioner idea as presently expounded needed to be refined and clarified, as regards the method of appointment, what sort of statements the Commissioner should be making, and so on.

- The Secretary-General was also asked his views on the expansion of the Commonwealth. A number of countries were now lining up to join. On the other hand, many members felt that (like the EU) the Commonwealth might lose some of its effectiveness by expanding too much further, or too rapidly. In reply, the Secretary-General noted that Boyle's law stated that when the volume of a gas expanded, it lost pressure. How to maintain the glue which held the Commonwealth together was all-important. At the same time, the Commonwealth had no wish to be exclusive. It was important to balance the two.

- Pressed on whether the Commonwealth was doing enough to engage with young people, the Secretary-

General said that no aspect of the Secretariat's work was more important to him than its work with young people. Youth issues needed to be mainstreamed in all Commonwealth activities. Many countries in the Commonwealth were predominantly countries of young people, and the future of every country (as well as of the Commonwealth itself) was in the hands of young people. The Perth CHOGM saw an important engagement between Heads and youth representatives, and the Secretariat was encouraging member states to have a comprehensive plan on youth issues. One area where he would like to see more effort was in encouraging youth enterprise, in order to capture the minds and enthusiasm of young people to be job creators rather than job seekers. Another important aspect of the Commonwealth's engagement would be through the Commonwealth Connects portal, which would include a youth section.

- It was noted that the People's Forum and a number of organisations campaigning in and around the Commonwealth meetings at Perth had made gay rights a touchstone of the Commonwealth's commitment to human rights. Would the Commonwealth be speaking out more loudly on this issue than in the past? The Secretary-General said that he of course subscribed to these rights as an integral part of wider human rights, and that they formed an important expression of Commonwealth values. Nevertheless this was a difficult area, given the strong cultural aspects to attitudes to gay rights in some parts of the Commonwealth. Here as elsewhere it would be foolish to push countries beyond the pace they could take, though this was not to say that they shouldn't be pushed. It was perhaps for each country to decide how best to implement gay rights. In India, for instance, it was decided that the law was inconsistent with the ideals the state subscribed to, and so should be removed.

- Invited to explore further his ideas about strategic partnerships, the Secretary-General said that the most important partnerships for the Commonwealth would probably remain those with regional organisations, such as SADC, CARICOM, and so on. These were perhaps the family partners of the Commonwealth. Important partnerships were also being built with Francophonie, the EU, the Nordic Council, individual European states, and also with private trusts and foundations. These partners appreciated the Commonwealth's breadth and depth, and its long commitment to both good governance and sustainable growth, which so often went hand in hand. These partnerships were essential to the Commonwealth, which was modest in resources but immodest in both its achievements and its ambitions.

- The Secretary-General was pressed to say how he would use his new powers to speak out on issues of moment without first consulting all the member governments. In reply, he said that the mandate given

was in fact rather narrower. There would still be a grey area where he would have to exercise a good deal of discretion about what it was appropriate for him to say and what not. But there was an increasing expectation from member states that the Secretary-General would engage with issues and problems, and it would be good in some circumstances merely to be able to say that this or that was an issue with which the Secretary-General was engaged.

- Asked whether he thought the various recommendations from the EPG which had been deferred for further consideration, or for financial costing, were being kicked into the long grass, the Secretary-General emphasised that this was by no means the case. There was indeed a tight timetable for looking at these issues, culminating in the meeting of Commonwealth Foreign Ministers due to take place in New York in September 2012.



H.E. Kamallesh Sharma

Session 4

Reforming Commonwealth Institutions

Chair	Meredith Hooper <i>Visiting Fellow, Wolfson College, Cambridge</i>
Speakers	Sir Ronald Sanders <i>Member, Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group</i>
	Dr. Danny Sriskandarajah <i>Director, Royal Commonwealth Society</i>
	Adam McCarthy <i>Deputy High Commissioner for Australia, London</i>

Sir Ronald Sanders said that, like every other member of the Eminent Persons Group, he was bitterly disappointed at what had happened to the EPG report. Notwithstanding the favourable gloss put on the situation by the Secretariat and member governments, the fact that the Heads had not grabbed hold of the report, agreed its recommendations, and implemented its plan was a great disappointment and a missed opportunity which the Commonwealth would come to regret. There was a real danger that the recommendations deferred for further consideration would be kicked into the long grass. There was one glimmer of hope in the situation, which was that the Canadian government had appointed Senator Hugh Segal as a Special Envoy for Commonwealth Renewal, reporting directly to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Prime Minister himself. Prime Minister Harper had been one of the outstanding leaders at the CHOGM, constantly pressing on the related issues of strengthening the Commonwealth's values and transforming how the Commonwealth was seen by its citizens and the world. It would nevertheless take great efforts on the part of Senator Segal and others to rescue the report.

It was of course always said that the Commonwealth existed, and worked, by consensus. But sometimes everybody hid behind consensus. There was not a strong enough attempt to make those who stood in the way, stand up and give their reasons. There was too much talk also about the expansion of the Commonwealth. It was time to focus on deepening. Otherwise the Commonwealth would slide imperceptibly into irrelevance.

One of the issues the EPG had highlighted was the need to reform the meetings of the Heads themselves. As the

Secretary-General had observed, CHOGMs now amounted to no more than a day's real work, once the opening ceremony and entertainments had been discounted. With the best will in the world, the Heads could not be expected to achieve all that was hoped or even expected in such a short time. This was why the EPG had recommended stripping the meeting back to its essentials, removing the opening ceremony and the formal sessions, so that the Heads could get straight down to the retreat.

The EPG had been specifically asked to look at how the Ministerial meetings worked. When they did make recommendations in this area, the Foreign Ministers rejected the recommendations, saying the EPG was trying to micro-manage them. This didn't portend well for the recommendations deferred.

There was still a big question mark over the question of values. Previous speakers had highlighted the reforms of CMAG and the fact that the Secretary-General now had greater latitude to speak out as two landmark achievements of the Perth CHOGM. Sir Ronald Sanders hoped that they were right. It remained to be seen whether CMAG reform would make a big difference. The fundamental weakness of CMAG was that it consisted of ministers who were conscious that their governments interacted in many ways such as support for international positions in UN agencies and elsewhere. There needed to be an independent body. It might indeed be true that the Secretary-General needed to assess each situation carefully. But having done that, he would need to speak loudly and clearly.

The EPG had said much about the Commonwealth's role in promoting democracy, but it had also made many

recommendations to strengthen its role in promoting development. The Secretariat was clearly underfunded, and that issue needed to be addressed in tandem with others. But the EPG had also recommended the increased use of strategic partnerships, with other international organisations, with the development arms of national governments, and with private organisations and civil society. One of the recommendations was that the Secretary-General should hold regular meetings with representatives of other Commonwealth inter-governmental organisations to exchange views and ideas and to build partnerships. It was to be hoped that this still might become a reality. The Commonwealth Foundation was also severely underfunded, and would not be able to mobilise civil society, help it to become more vibrant, and help it to contribute towards Commonwealth goals, without significant grant money.

Sir Ronald Sanders also thought that the Commonwealth Business Council needed reform. It was focused largely on big companies and big countries, and paid little attention to small and developing countries, which most needed investment. The idea that intra-Commonwealth trade could be stimulated by the Business Forum, as it presently operated, was unrealistic. The major Commonwealth trade was between a few countries, and the Forum represented (even if it facilitated) this. Little was being done to increase trade across the Commonwealth by intra-Commonwealth investment.

The Commonwealth suffered from a poor public projection. The information services of the Secretariat had been ineffective. But there were also questions which needed to be asked about the civil society organisations. Why was the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association not doing more to promote a positive image of the Commonwealth, perhaps by encouraging public broadcasters to share radio and television programmes? The same went for the Commonwealth Journalists' Association: there was an urgent need for Commonwealth stories, yet the CJA seemed to be doing little to fill that gap.

Several speakers had emphasised the need to engage young people. Mainstreaming youth issues was of the utmost importance, and still had a long way to go. It was one thing to pay lip service to the importance of youth, but it was another to be prepared to prioritise the different perspectives that young people might bring. This needed a pan-Commonwealth approach, and a greatly strengthened – and accountable – youth section in the Secretariat. As had been pointed out, young people were the majority in the Commonwealth: they were not just the Commonwealth's future but very much its present.

Danny Sriskandarajah said that a lot of speakers had addressed themselves to the question of whether

CHOGM was a success. He said he had left Perth disappointed – primarily because the spirit of what the EPG had been trying to do had not been upheld. The EPG was asked to come up with ideas to get the Commonwealth better fit for purpose and raise its profile. What happened in the lead-up to and in Perth ended up being focused on the EPG reporting process and how CHOGM would react to it. Danny Sriskandarajah himself was not sure if the major players at CHOGM recognised this, especially in how the CHOGM outcomes were being presented. The worst thing that could happen in public life was when people started to believe their own hype. There was perhaps a spin doctor's version of Boyle's law: the more hype, the less substance.

It had been suggested earlier in the discussion that the grassroots of the Commonwealth were alive and well, but let down by the leaders. Danny Sriskandarajah was himself not sure. There was a serious issue about how much key policy-makers bought into the Commonwealth; indeed how much they understood or were aware of it. But there was also a danger that the hinterland of the Commonwealth, its civil society networks, was also not as strong as some suggested. This was true even of the UK, let alone in India or Malaysia where these networks were almost non-existent. As for the issue (or problem) of engaging with youth, one thing that was certain was that the Commonwealth was not a given in younger people's lives, as it had been for their grandparents' generation. The Commonwealth did not feature either in people's personal lives or their understanding of the world in the way it had done say 50 years previously.

As far as the grassroots of the Commonwealth were concerned, Danny Sriskandarajah thought that there were in fact some very worrying signs. Lots of Commonwealth organisations were in various states of disrepair, failing to refresh themselves and finding funding a major challenge. There were some very successful Commonwealth civil society organisations, but it was perhaps telling that some of the most successful (such as Sightsavers, formerly the Royal Commonwealth Society for the Blind) had graduated from the Commonwealth family. Another fundamental problem with the Commonwealth civil society sector was that there were some serious co-ordination issues. Sometimes there was no obvious rationale for which organisation did what, and there were all sorts of cross-purposes. There was, for instance, a huge overlap between the Commonwealth Foundation and the Royal Commonwealth Society, with it appearing entirely random why one or the other ran the Commonwealth essay, photograph or film awards. Co-ordinating Commonwealth civil society activity had to be a priority.

Danny Sriskandarajah said that he was himself a little confused as to whether the Commonwealth was (or whether people wanted it to be) a club or a church. In a

club, you paid your subscriptions and expected certain benefits in return; a purely transactional process. If you felt you were getting good value for your money you would stay, if you didn't you would leave. There were clearly elements of this in the Commonwealth. On the other hand there were also elements of a church (although Danny Sriskandarajah admitted that this was perhaps not the right analogy). People went to church because they wanted to be better people. There was an aspiration to be good, to conform to certain values, and to help and encourage others to live up to those same values. There were perhaps elements of both in the modern Commonwealth, but it was important to be careful about what language, and which metrics, were being used when thinking through the shape that the Commonwealth should take.

Some mention had been made of institutional reform. It was Danny Sriskandarajah's view that the institutional structure of the Commonwealth was not fit for purpose to thrive in the twenty-first century. There was not necessarily a problem with the people or the policies. But the management style and culture was reminiscent of the British civil service in the 1960s and 70s. The Secretariat and Foundation both needed to modernise urgently. As far as the question of mandate creep was concerned, this was relatively easy to address. Either the Heads were not being held to account for their issuing of mandates (without offering the necessary resources) or the management was not being held to account for their poor delivery. It was sometimes too easy for one to blame the other. There was some good news, which was the prospect of reform of the Commonwealth Foundation, which had been given a new mandate, and from later in 2012 would be able to focus its activities on strengthening civil society in support of Commonwealth values, although it was regrettable that governments were unwilling to tinker too much with its governance arrangements. Parallel to the Eminent Persons Group looking at the values and programmes and priorities of the Commonwealth, there should perhaps have been a group of management consultants looking at its structures. Now was the moment to re-draw the Commonwealth institutional map. It was odd that the Commonwealth, which prided itself on having been an innovator in all sorts of fields, was so reluctant to innovate now. The challenge of the twenty-first century was to come up with new ways of doing things.

Adam McCarthy echoed what Danny Sriskandarajah had said about institutional reform. The Commonwealth had too many bodies and not enough resources; the inevitable result was that it spread itself too thinly. The institutional structure desperately needed rationalisation. On education, for instance, there were at least seven bodies

representing Commonwealth interests. Adam McCarthy had himself come to his present post without any background in Commonwealth issues, and it had probably taken him six months fully to understand the structures. To the outsider, they must look impenetrable. At some point this issue needed to be tackled.

That the Commonwealth was tasked to do too much without the resources to match was perhaps a given. As several participants and speakers had noted, there was a real issue with Commonwealth mandates. It might be said that the sun never set on a Commonwealth mandate. The question needed to be not whether a particular project or aspiration was worthwhile, but whether it was something to which the Commonwealth could bring a comparative advantage: whether this was an issue which needed the Commonwealth's particular set of skills and networks. In the areas of health and education, for instance, it was not at all clear what the Commonwealth could bring in the way of adding value. Other organisations were massively better resourced. If mandates resulted in one or two people working on a particular issue, the exercise was likely to be pointless. The sums granted to the Secretariat for particular projects - £24,000 to strengthen cooperation over transnational crime, £350,000 for promoting IT development - were mind-bogglingly small in the scheme of things.

It was often said that the two great ideals that the Commonwealth existed to promote were democracy and development. It was often further said that there should be an equal division of attention between the two, as if there was a rigid distinction or even trade-off between them. The two were in fact closely interlinked. More importantly, the Commonwealth could only ever be small fry as a development organisation. Most importantly of all, the Commonwealth had the ability to lead the way in showing how democracy could contribute directly to development.

Adam McCarthy agreed - as his government did - that the resources allocated to the Commonwealth institutions were a real issue. There was an issue here not only with the total amount of resources, but also with their provenance. Following the recent review of Commonwealth finances, the proportion of resources coming from just three countries, Australia, Britain and Canada, had been raised from 67% to 73%. This meant, for instance, that Australia's dues had increased by around 30% over two years, in the context of a 4% budget cut. What was most galling was that this extra money didn't go towards expanding the budget; rather it went to cutting the contributions of other countries (though notably Nigeria and a few other countries had kept their payments at the same level even though they would have been entitled to pay less). This was not a healthy position to be in. For one thing, this fuelled the belief that the

'ABC' countries ran the Commonwealth – though if one thing was clear it was that in the Commonwealth he who paid the piper didn't necessarily call the tune. The national contributions to the Commonwealth budget did not relate clearly enough to ability to pay. There were some large and some prosperous countries which failed to step up to the plate. It was notable also that on some recommendations in the EPG report, the opposition on cost grounds came from those countries which were not contributing as much as, on any scale relating to national income, they should. The issue was not so much one of equity as of the health of the organisation. If three of 54 members were footing almost three-quarters of the bill, there would always be a problem with too many mandates, or of failure to sunset mandates. There needed to be more of a sense of everyone in the Commonwealth being in it together.

Discussions

- Sir Ronald Sanders was taken to task for his comments on the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association and the Commonwealth Journalists' Association. Both of these organisations existed primarily to serve their own members, not to provide cheer-leaders for the Commonwealth. In fact they did do a lot to promote awareness about the Commonwealth: for instance, the CBA provided a Commonwealth news exchange service, which enabled members to swap stories from around the Commonwealth; and the CJA worked on a number of issues clearly related to the Commonwealth's core values (most notably, of course, issues relating to freedom of the media). But neither of them was funded by the Commonwealth Secretariat or Foundation, and could not be expected to do their jobs for them. Perhaps more importantly, it was the kiss of death for independent broadcasters and journalists to be seen to be promoting anything: their job was to explain and report, not to promote. Thus, the BBC didn't enjoy the reputation it did by promoting the British government, even if it contributed tangentially to promoting Britain by doing its job well. In response, Sir Ronald Sanders repeated his view that more needed to be done to promote the Commonwealth in the media and that the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association and the Commonwealth Journalists' Association had a special obligation to do so because they bore the name 'Commonwealth'. If the name was important to their 'brand', they had an obligation to themselves as much as to the rest of the Commonwealth to ensure that knowledge of the Commonwealth and its work was disseminated.
- Also on the question of the Commonwealth and the media, it was suggested that the Commonwealth was sometimes like a beehive: it was the focus of much activity, but the outside world rarely looked in. The Commonwealth needed to be seen to be relevant. Within the Commonwealth family there were plenty of high-profile issues that needed addressing. If the Commonwealth was seen to be tackling something which the world's attention was focused on, the Commonwealth itself would get more attention.
- Another participant agreed that this was fundamental to the way the Commonwealth needed to modernise itself: on the one hand by focusing its efforts only on those situations where it could actually make a difference, and on the other by thoroughly improving the way it projected itself and its work.
- It was suggested that the Secretariat and Foundation could perhaps learn from Commonwealth civil society organisations, many of which, despite not having stable long-term incomes, were focused much more clearly than the Secretariat or the Foundation on long-term, strategic planning.
- Turning to the wider issue of Commonwealth reform, one participant expressed regretful doubts about the Commonwealth's willingness to reform itself. The Commonwealth didn't have a strong record on institutional reform, and Perth had shown how difficult it was to get consensus. No single element had the authority to push reforms through, and the Secretariat seemed especially reluctant to take a clear lead.
- Responding to the latter point, Adam McCarthy said that in international relations it was always easier to block than to build. The configuration at Perth was perhaps peculiarly congenial to reform, given the congruence of EPG and CMAG reform, and a sea change in the approach by Britain, still by far the largest funder. Perth had been partly successful, but there was still all to play for in the next year; and if the full package of reform had not been achieved by the end of the year it was difficult to see a more favourable opportunity arising. But only a handful of member states were unequivocally committed to the full package of EPG reform. The nay-sayers were perhaps also only a handful. The biggest problem was the apparent indifference of the majority.
- Sir Ronald Sanders said that he thought it important to be realistic about why countries remained members of the Commonwealth. For the ABC countries the Commonwealth represented an inexpensive form of diplomacy, and potentially a useful bloc in the UN and elsewhere; the Commonwealth was also a bridge to the developing world. For many ACP countries, including especially smaller and more vulnerable states, it was conversely a useful means to interface with the wealthier countries, and an important source of technical assistance. For some other countries, such as India and Pakistan, the reasons were perhaps more defensive: they stayed in

primarily to prevent the Commonwealth from doing anything that undermined their own positions. In such a situation, there was a crying need for leadership, which could only come from the Secretariat and the Secretary-General himself.

- It was suggested that the indifference of so many potentially powerful and active supporters of the Commonwealth was the biggest worry; and that this needed to be tackled bottom-up as well as top-down. For instance, the regional centres of the Youth Programme could perhaps become the hubs for wider Commonwealth activities in each region. Part of the problem for the Commonwealth was that it was still perceived as, and indeed in many important respects still was, a very London-centric organisation.
- The question of finance was again raised, one participant saying that this was at the root of most of the Commonwealth's difficulties, but another arguing that the question of what the Commonwealth stood for needed to be tackled first. It would not take great resources to make the Commonwealth a real force for good in the area of shared values; and funding would then surely be that much easier to attract.
- A renewed plea was made for the Commonwealth to focus its efforts on where it really could make a difference. The Commonwealth was a very small fish in the development pond. But where it could really add value (and where it could make itself most relevant) was precisely in those areas of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, which the EPG had highlighted as its core activity. Perth of course showed some of the problems of such an approach, and the difficulty of gaining consensus on such issues as religious freedom or gay rights. But this was not to say that the Commonwealth's focus should not be upon improving its performance and its requirements of members in these areas. This was the Commonwealth's best hope for its own renewal, and for placing itself at the heart of global concerns.
- Agreeing with this latter sentiment, one participant said that the Commonwealth could not have had a better or more well-considered set of reform proposals than those contained in the EPG report. But a real problem was that the Commonwealth had no proper mechanisms for

analysing and then pushing through the proposals. There were serious grounds for doubting whether the process devised for dealing with the report was itself fit for purpose.

- Another participant agreed, saying that it would be quite startling if somehow the Heads, Foreign Ministers and senior officials didn't manage to kill off the EPG report, or any other set of proposals that threatened to dilute or constrain their own power.
- Adam McCarthy said that he thought the problem was not fundamentally, or primarily, a funding problem, so much as a buy-in problem. The real difficulty would be convincing some presently very indifferent states that they actually had a stake in reforming the Commonwealth. For Australia, and Adam McCarthy believed also for Canada and some other countries, the primary value of the Commonwealth was in its role as a values-based organisation. This was not mere altruism: Australia (and Canada) had a direct and immediate interest in promoting these values both regionally and globally, as the most effective means of countering instability and the problems of failing states. Indeed, the calculations of Australia had a hard edge, in that the country had a great interest in seeing democratic values embedded in its local neighbourhood.
- Danny Sriskandarajah emphasised that 2012 was a make-or-break year for the Commonwealth, and that, while he understood the pessimism expressed by some, he still hoped that a good deal more would be achieved. Returning to the club vs. church dichotomy to which he had referred in his speech, he saw the key to the situation as convincing enough people, and enough member states, that the Commonwealth was more like a church than a club.
- Sir Ronald Sanders concluded by saying that he continued to believe on the one hand that the EPG report said everything that needed to be said, and on the other that everything that it said needed to be said. The experience of what had happened to the report showed that while it was possible to talk of values shared by the people of the Commonwealth, it was not so clear that all the governments of the Commonwealth shared those same values.

Session 5

The Commonwealth and Global Challenges

Chair

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Speakers

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Sunanda K. Datta-Ray said that he was glad to hear Sir Ronald Sanders injecting a note of pragmatism into discussion of the reasons for membership of the Commonwealth. As with any international organisation, member states were in it for what they could get out of it. That was why nearly all the countries which achieved independence from British rule chose to stay in the Commonwealth. When Malaysia expelled Singapore in 1965, Lee Kuan Yew's first thought was how to get Britain to recognise Singapore – since if Britain did, all the Commonwealth countries would.

His sense was (and here he emphasised he was speaking purely for himself, and could not claim in any sense to be speaking on behalf of India or its government) that though it was unfashionable to say so, most Indians thought of historical ties with Britain when they thought of the Commonwealth. While India valued membership, it didn't want a too active Commonwealth. Least of all did Indians want knights from the Western world poking around under stones in their patch.

Although he was very impressed by all he had heard about the good work that the Commonwealth did, Sunanda K. Datta-Ray wondered why so little was heard of these achievements in India and, indeed, in many other Asian countries. The justified publicity that attended the Colombo Plan had not been repeated. The Commonwealth could perhaps blow its own trumpet more effectively. Indeed, the Commonwealth Secretariat could do with some professional trumpeters!

India had found the Commonwealth was a useful adjunct to its diplomacy: India's election to the UN Security Council, for instance, was largely due to the Commonwealth's support with Kiribati casting the final vote. The Commonwealth was also important to India as

a means of connecting with small countries in distant regions; it was in India's interest to enable them to make their voices heard at the UN and elsewhere. And of course the Commonwealth was one of the very few fora in which India didn't have to contend with China.

The real challenge for every country was of course the creation of wealth, and this was a particular challenge for the 50 Commonwealth countries which could broadly be classed as developing. Every country hoped to raise its standard of living through trade and investment. Here, Sunanda K. Datta-Ray said that the Commonwealth had a vital role even if it and the challenges were not like Big Ben and the Leaning Tower of Pisa – time matching inclination! But there was a success story which should be trumpeted more. Trade within the Commonwealth amounted to around \$4 trillion in 2008, or a sixth of total Commonwealth trade. India exported \$40 billion worth of goods to other Commonwealth countries, and imported \$53 billion worth. These were substantial figures. When India opened up in 1991-2, it chose Britain and other Commonwealth countries, such as Australia, as trade and investment partners in preference to non-Commonwealth countries. Britain and Australia had in turn benefited from Indian investment. The Tata group now derived some 65% of its earnings from Commonwealth countries, and 35% from India itself. David Cameron led one of the largest trade delegations in history when he visited Delhi recently. The preponderance of trade and investment between Commonwealth countries reflected many factors, but above all it reflected the fact that citizens of Commonwealth countries did not feel altogether strangers in other Commonwealth countries. A common language and common legal, administrative and political systems, and in many cases also diasporas, created a

sense of familiarity.

Given this commonality, there was scope for developing trade and investment further by providing the right political and legal framework. The India-Singapore Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement, covering trade, investment and services (as well as security and defence cooperation) had increased economic interaction between the two countries, and boosted third-party investment (such as American investment routed through American subsidiaries in Singapore) in India. No two arrangements could be identical, but the India-Singapore arrangements offered a model for a web of such agreements weaving together the Commonwealth. Given its recent experience of the EU, even Britain might consider diversifying its trade and investment. There was a natural fit between those Commonwealth countries which needed capital and trade, and those which sought markets.

It was easy to be pessimistic about the Commonwealth. If its main *raison d'être* remained historical, it would mean less to each new generation. Julia Gillard may have chaired the Perth CHOGM skilfully, but clearly was not Commonwealth-minded in the way that Robert Menzies had been. But if the Commonwealth could address the primary problem of development and show that it was relevant to the welfare of its citizens, it could one day emerge as one of the world's most powerful economic and trading blocs.

Janet Strachan focused on three linked development issues which had had a high profile in Perth, both within the EPG recommendations and in the Perth communiqué: climate change, sustainable development, and the particular issues faced by small and vulnerable states. In each area she set out some immediate priorities going forward and thoughts about where the Commonwealth could best make a difference, bearing in mind the need to focus on a few strategic actions.

On climate change, the Durban Climate Change Conference which had taken place in December 2011 (soon after the Perth CHOGM) had attracted widely differing assessments. Some saw the outcome as a cause for celebration: at last space had been created for a new agreement involving all major emitters, and the multilateral process had survived. Others saw the outcome as deeply disappointing: with a new agreement on emission reductions now only coming into force in 2020, the world faced a 'lost decade'. For some small states, this could prove too late.

The Durban conference outcomes presented two major challenges. The first was addressing the significant gap that existed between the pledge made in Copenhagen to limit climate change to 2°C, and the pledges for voluntary emission reductions now on the table. Not only

was it less probable that the Copenhagen target of 2°C (already criticised by many small states as insufficient) would be met, but there were implications also for technology innovation and investment through the price of carbon, and for the eventual cost of limiting climate change (given that more carbon-based energy infrastructure would continue to be built and operated, requiring eventual retrofitting or phasing out). The second concern was the challenge of monitoring progress on emission reductions, particularly as various different types of pledge had been made (the Kyoto countries relating to a 1990 baseline, the US to a 2005 baseline, China to emissions per unit of GDP, and so on).

Going forward, the Commonwealth – at all levels of governance – could adopt a twin-track approach. First, staying engaged in the multilateral process. There were a number of challenges, including addressing the implementation gap, mobilising the Green Climate Fund, and preparing the ground for the Rio+20 summit in June 2012, which would be an opportunity to build and concretise the idea of a green economy. Secondly, helping member states step up action at national and regional levels to build climate change resilience and disaster risk management. Governments and citizens in the Commonwealth needed to engage in national visioning exercises for a Green Economy; and building strong governance and accountability mechanisms to ensure that Green Climate Fund resources flowed effectively to the most vulnerable communities.

On sustainable development, it was again the case that the Commonwealth could help influence the debate through a few key strategic actions. Commonwealth member states were beginning to emerge from the multiple economic shocks of the previous five years (the food and fuel crises of 2008 and the global financial crisis). Alongside this recovery, there were increasing calls for a more holistic form of development, which would avoid such damaging lurches. There were plenty of models of what sustainable development might look like, and plenty of measures to assess progress. One key challenge was that sustainable development, which was centred on rights-based approaches, equity and law-based rule making, was running in parallel with an approach to economic development that was based on first-mover advantage; competition and the use of common environmental resources and services for free as though there were no ecological limits. These two spheres needed to be brought closer together, in terms both of concept and ownership, if sustainable development was to become a reality. This process required leadership at the highest level, integrating debate across different sectors and through into international institutions. New ideas and language would help to address deeply entrenched

interests and build coalitions of the willing. The Commonwealth could draw together different governments to look at the system more holistically, and had the potential to explore an institutional dialogue beyond the confines of the UN or the Bretton Woods system. It had leaders who were already engaged on the issue of international institutional reform, and were among those driving new ideas on sustainability in the context of Rio+20. The Commonwealth could also bring different ministries together to share ideas on concrete, practical ways to define and implement investment strategies to transition towards a green economy.

As countries emerged from the global financial crisis, some had suffered damage to social or human capital, and some found themselves with large domestic and foreign debt, large balance of payments deficits, and weakened currencies. The group of most vulnerable countries included some of the poorer Commonwealth countries, as well as smaller states, which were particularly prone to external shocks. The challenge was to build investment in development in the context of a challenging world economy, and continued uncertainty and rapid change. The Commonwealth was well placed to support its member states in rising to this challenge. It could do this in a number of ways: by working with regional organisations of small states to explore practical ways of facilitating climate financing for national priorities; supporting a concrete visioning of the institutional and governance requirements for a green economy; building the capacity of planning and finance ministries to drive forward practical transition pathways to a green economy through integrated investments across and between different sectors; exploring the role the diasporas could play; sharing design concerns for a financing mechanism for small states; and exploring innovative debt restructuring mechanisms.

Janet Strachan concluded by highlighting a number of particular challenges for the Commonwealth in the context of the Perth reform process, as it bore upon the issues she had highlighted. First, who implemented the CHOGM mandates? The CHOGM communiqué set out some calls for action by Commonwealth institutions, but mostly it set out commitments by member states. How could member states' progress on these commitments be assessed and celebrated? Secondly, the Commonwealth faced a critical decade of change. The changes being witnessed in the global economic and policy landscape were profound. The Commonwealth needed to stay ahead of the curve in the language, vision and engagement in the new development paradigm as it emerged. Crucially, this meant engaging with and empowering young people. The Commonwealth needed to pay far greater attention to communicating its message, but it also needed to have the courage to give young people free rein to take control of

the dialogue. Thirdly, there was the challenge of ensuring that the reformed Commonwealth would continue to provide 'club goods' to its members. The Commonwealth delivered many types of 'club goods', ranging from the exercise of soft power and political influence, through the provision of a network where members were 'at ease with each other', enabling business to get done quickly and easily, to a mechanism that could help member states to mobilise politically around shared values. Any reform process must, first and foremost, seek to secure and strengthen these goods because they represented the value of the Commonwealth to its members.

Richard Bourne, who had been asked to speak about human rights, began by recalling the words of Derek Ingram in a report for the then relatively new Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative in 1999, that the Commonwealth was about human rights or it was about nothing at all. Since then, human rights issues had only grown in salience, and the CHRI now boasted a staff of some fifty, based in New Delhi. Yet the context was not all rosy. There had been some quite serious back-tracking on human rights since the high-water mark of the early 1990s, the crucial change coming with the 'war on terror', which made human rights abuses mere collateral damage. Civil society protests in Libya, Yemen and Syria had had to become civil wars to achieve what they were seeking. There were ongoing problems for the International Criminal Court. The departure from the Commonwealth of Zimbabwe in 2003 (for the same reason that South Africa had left in 1961: because it did not wish to comply with Commonwealth standards) unfortunately was not the start of a new process; instead, CMAG engagement stalled. More recently, Rwanda was allowed to join the Commonwealth despite not being fully compliant with the Harare rules (its membership facilitated by the hubristic but not clearly well founded belief that membership of the Commonwealth would force it to step up its human rights compliance).

A number of speakers had highlighted CMAG reform as not far short of a triumph. But it remained to be seen whether the changes to CMAG would make a real difference, or were just a lot of hot air. The CHOGM had also given the Secretary-General greater latitude to speak out, and certainly from now on governments, civil society and the media would expect the Secretary-General to speak out more. But again how this played out in practice remained to be seen. The EPG had made a serious effort to take forward the Commonwealth's commitment to human rights, but its keynote proposal of a Commissioner for Democracy, Human Rights and the Rule of Law had proven controversial and been kicked into the long grass, possibly permanently. Meanwhile, the Perth CHOGM had also seen major differences over Sri Lanka's hosting of the

2013 CHOGM, and over gay rights.

The main weaknesses of CMAG were first that it consisted of Foreign Ministers who would have run for office but who were unlikely to have any real expertise in law and human rights; and secondly that these ministers were tasked to sit in judgement on their ministerial colleagues in other countries. It might not be true that they would always give the benefit of the doubt to fellow ministers, but there was a strong suspicion that this would be the case.

It was perfectly sensible of the Heads to have asked for more detail about the Commissioner proposal before deciding one way or another. Various issues regarding finance, expertise, method of appointment, accountability, and relationship to CMAG and the good offices role of the Secretary-General needed to be looked at and clarified. It might also be that the word 'Commissioner' was the wrong one, and that, for instance, 'Special Adviser' might be more appropriate. But there was clearly a crying need for some body or individual to provide independent, expert advice to CMAG and the Secretary-General – which, it should be emphasised, should include advice for instance on the UK's electoral laws and conduct of elections, as well as similar issues relating to developing countries. If the Commissioner proposal came to nothing at all, this would be a devastating setback for the Commonwealth.

The decision to confirm Sri Lanka as the host of the next CHOGM, in 2013, was perhaps not ideal in terms of Commonwealth values. But it was difficult to see how the decision could have gone the other way; and it was also true that Sri Lanka would not be the first host country to present serious human rights issues. What was to be hoped was that the Commonwealth would use the opportunity of the forthcoming CHOGM to engage closely with Sri Lanka, and to assist its efforts in peace-building and the implementation of a robust human rights regime.

The issue of gay (or lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) rights was a political hot potato in Perth. Some forty or more member states still proscribed homosexual acts, and this was quite clearly unacceptable from a human rights standpoint. Nevertheless this was not something the Secretariat could easily take a lead on. Rather, civil society organisations should do that, within the countries in question themselves. It was perhaps necessary to bear in mind that it was not so long since homosexuality had been decriminalised in the UK; and it was to be hoped that the salience of human rights issues within the Commonwealth would aid in the steady if gradual process of change.

The latter issue highlighted the fact that a commitment to human rights was not just about what the Commonwealth (or individual member states) said, but

also about what it (and they) did. It was now more than twenty years since, through the brave and far-sighted leadership of Chief Emeka Anyaoku, the Commonwealth had accepted that enough was enough, and that there needed to be some mechanism for ensuring Commonwealth compliance with basic standards of human rights. At the time this was a pioneering step. But the Commonwealth couldn't rest on its laurels. If the Commonwealth was not to fall behind and become an irrelevance, it required a great and continuing effort by all parties – member states, the Secretariat and civil society – to ensure not only that human rights issues were high up on the Commonwealth's agenda, but also that the Commonwealth's mechanisms for policing compliance with them were as robust as they could be.

Discussion

- It was suggested that the vision of a new, low-carbon green economy would be especially welcome in small island states; but that there was much work to be done in terms of developing the right skills to support this. Janet Strachan said that she completely agreed. Government policies needed to be reoriented towards expanding the educational and skills base, creating flexible and innovative work forces, as well as towards investing in the natural resource base of the economy. This was a point made by the Lake Victoria Commonwealth Climate Change Action Plan.
- Sunanda K.Datta-Ray was asked why it was that India seemed to be holding back, both financially and in terms of high-level commitment, in its membership of the Commonwealth, given the benefits to India he had highlighted, and given the fact that India now had its own man in the top job. He replied by saying that India always held back when finance was concerned, but that there was a deeper issue here, which was that, with the possible exception of the Nehru years, India had never shown any great interest in the Commonwealth, which indeed was still thought of primarily in historical terms as the 'British' Commonwealth. This was especially so to the extent that the Commonwealth prioritised democracy over development: there was a strong realist, and perhaps even cynical, school of thought in India that viewed Western concern with human rights as in itself an element of realpolitik. Certainly, it seemed to be true that, for instance, whenever the US encountered any problems with China it re-discovered the Dalai Lama.
- Janet Strachan was pressed on the point of leadership. It was clearly important to get the multinational organisations talking to each other on the related issues of climate change, sustainable development and support for small and vulnerable states; but surely there was a need for someone around whom the forces for change could

coalesce? Janet Strachan noted that coherence at the national level was the key to international coherence. The process needed to be driven from the highest levels but from within national contexts. But it was necessary to bear in mind that this would be a long process. In the immediate future, the priority would be to bring the green economy agenda and the agenda on the institutional framework for sustainable development closer together in the run-up to Rio+20.

- Asked why it was that CMAG reform seemed to be slow in being implemented, Richard Bourne said that he had no idea. Clearly there were some issues that needed to be thought through, particularly as regards the relationship between CMAG and the Secretary-General's good offices role, and how proactive CMAG might be. Nevertheless there didn't seem to be any particularly good reason why CMAG couldn't meet in the near future, and it was also odd that publication of the CMAG report had been so delayed.
- The question of a systematic review of the Commonwealth's achievements in relation to its commitments was again raised, perhaps by means of a two-yearly review. Richard Bourne responded by saying that the Secretary-General's report to each CHOGM did indeed contain such a review. Nevertheless there was certainly a case for an independent analysis, perhaps by a body such as the Commonwealth Advisory Bureau.
- Picking up on the point made by Sunanda K. Datta-Ray, it was asserted that the Commonwealth was in fact abysmal at blowing its own trumpet. This needed to be addressed as a matter of urgency. Many good suggestions could be found in Derek Ingram's report of ten years previously, which had been endorsed by Heads and then quietly forgotten. Sunanda K. Datta-Ray agreed, although he also thought that official PR was always treated with scepticism. There needed to be an independent voice, on the lines of Gemini News. As had been said in an earlier session, the BBC was a far more effective ambassador for Britain and British values as an independent voice than it would have been as a mere mouthpiece for the British government.
- It was suggested that the moment of truth for the

Commonwealth might come when the current Head of the Commonwealth departed the scene. Whether or not it was agreed that there should be a new Head (and the participant who raised this point was not at all convinced that there should be), that might spark a close examination of the Commonwealth as never before.

- One participant agreed with a point made earlier by Sir Ronald Sanders, and alluded to by Richard Bourne, that the real weakness of CMAG was that it consisted of Foreign Ministers who were perhaps over-inclined to find excuses for their ministerial colleagues. Clearly both CMAG and the Secretary-General were in need of independent, expert advice, a gap which the Commissioner proposal was designed to fill. But what could be done to ensure that any such Commissioner (or Special Adviser) was given sufficient standing without compromising or conflicting with the work of CMAG and the Secretary-General, and how would it be possible to ensure that the position was not, and was not seen as being, politicised? Richard Bourne agreed that this was an issue, but he didn't think it an insuperable one. After all, the Commonwealth, as well as such bodies as the UN and the EU, had been here before. There were a number of people around the Commonwealth who could fill such a role, whose integrity and independence was not in question.
- Another participant welcomed Janet Strachan's emphasis on the need to let young people have free rein. The Commonwealth had been talking about the importance of engaging with young people for many years, and yet not a lot seemed to have been done. If the same debate was still being held in ten years' time, there would be little hope for the Commonwealth. Janet Strachan said that she couldn't agree more. She urged a greater use of art, language, film, music, and even food as tools for celebrating the diversity of Commonwealth culture and enabling some of the politically difficult things to be aired and explored creatively. In promoting the use of new media and communications tools it would just be necessary for Commonwealth institutions to track and identify these dialogues within a Commonwealth frame.

Concluding Remarks

Chair

Stuart Mole

Chairman, The Round Table

Stuart Mole concluded the conference by referring back to his remarks the previous day. The conference had indeed highlighted the rather different assessments of the Perth outcomes, but this had in some respects resolved itself into a question of whether the glass was half full or half empty: even the most optimistic of commentators recognised that there was still a lot of work to do, while even the most pessimistic recognised that there had been some positive achievements. If there were grounds for a negative assessment of the Perth CHOGM, they mainly derived from dissatisfaction at the way the EPG report had been handled. Yet there were still many loose ends, not only with respect to the EPG's unfinished business, but also with respect to CMAG reform, and some elements of the EPG recommendations which had been agreed (such as the new Commonwealth Charter). The conference had also explored some of the obstacles to reform. An underlying theme was the need for leadership, both from Heads and from the Secretariat. Another was the issue of ownership: crucial to the reform

process was convincing the Heads of all the member countries that reform was in their own interests, and that it wasn't a case of the North trying to refashion the Commonwealth against the interests of the South. The conference had also heard that reform needed to extend beyond the official institutions themselves: indeed, it had heard some fairly hard-hitting criticisms of the associated Commonwealth and civil society organisations. They, too, had sometimes failed to coordinate their work; or live up to the standards of governance and accountability expected of others. Renewal was an issue for them also.

Above all, the conference had heard, especially in the final session, that major global issues were pressing in on the Commonwealth all the time; and that the global agenda needed the Commonwealth's input, regardless of the issue of institutional reform. There was therefore a narrow window of implementation open to the organisation – guaranteeing that 2012 would be a very busy year for the Commonwealth.



Participants

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* member of Round Table editorial board/international advisory board



Seminar participants



The Commonwealth Round Table Lecture



The Round Table dinner

The Round Table at Perth

As Commonwealth Heads of Government met in Perth, Western Australia, at the end of October 2011, *The Round Table – The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs* organised a series of events in the wings of the summit, in partnership with Murdoch University. These were designed to promote *The Round Table* as the Commonwealth's premier journal of international affairs; to inform and stimulate current Commonwealth debates; and to ensure that the journal's coverage of Commonwealth and global issues remains relevant and timely.

• The Round Table seminar

On the afternoon of the opening of the summit, a seminar on "The Commonwealth – a force for global good?" explored some of the key political and economic issues facing the organisation.

• The Commonwealth Round Table Lecture

This was followed by a Public Lecture (also hosted by Murdoch University) which was delivered by former Australian Prime Minister, Rt.Hon. Malcolm Fraser AC CH. The theme of the lecture, which attracted a large and distinguished audience, was "A Courageous Commonwealth".

• The Round Table dinner

At the conclusion of the lecture, The Round Table hosted a dinner for Malcolm and Tammy Fraser and around one hundred invited guests. Among those present was Lord Howell, Minister of State in the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and a number of members of the Eminent Persons Group (whose key report was before the summit). After the meal, Murdoch University's Vice-Chancellor, Professor Richard Higgott, led a discussion of some of the issues raised by Mr Fraser in his lecture. The event was generously supported by De La Rue plc and the City of Melville.

• Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM)

Round Table Chairman, Stuart Mole and Treasurer, Mark Robinson were among Round Table Editorial Board members accredited to CHOGM. Victoria Schofield, also a member of the Editorial Board, was accredited as The Round Table's media representative. Her report is printed in the January 2012 issue of *The Round Table - The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*.

