

# Health and Vitality

## The Commonwealth Challenge



Commonwealth Day Monday 13 March 2006

### A message from Her Majesty The Queen Head of the Commonwealth

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There are few feelings more satisfying than waking to a new day with a sense of wellbeing. Good health is a precious gift.

Yet many do not share in this. Some forty million people today are living with HIV/AIDs, well over half of whom are Commonwealth citizens. Half a million women die each year in pregnancy and childbirth – and the death of any mother has huge consequences for the rest of the family. Yet very many of these deaths are preventable with adequate healthcare. Ignorance and lack of understanding about these issues sometimes breed uncertainty, even fear and the inclination to turn from those who are unwell. But we know, for example, that someone who is HIV positive can, with proper support, lead a full and rewarding life.

I am pleased that Commonwealth governments are playing their part in tackling disease and improving health for all. Polio, for example, used to cast its shadow across many countries. Today, thanks to concerted international action, just a handful still need to eliminate polio. The same approach and commitment to other global scourges, such as malaria and tuberculosis, can achieve equally impressive results.

There is also much we can do through non-governmental organisations and especially as individuals. Poor health is sometimes linked to the way we choose to live. But many of us can often take steps to eat better food or take more exercise. We can also as communities work to improve our surroundings to make them cleaner, safer places in which to live.

The importance of good health is so wonderfully exemplified on the sports field. Sporting events can be the spur to extraordinary human achievement. Sport also demonstrates the value of co-operation and team-work, and the importance of mental and physical control. In Melbourne, in just a few days' time, I will be opening what are known as 'The Friendly Games'. Commonwealth athletes will gather once more in a spirit of goodwill and fellowship, and will strive to achieve new heights of excellence. As we watch our finest sportsmen and women compete, we will see clearly what exercise at the very highest level can contribute to both body and spirit.

There is a traditional proverb which says, 'He who has health has hope, and he who has hope has everything.' This year, as governments search for new ways to tackle these important challenges, we as individuals can also play our part so that, in pursuing health and vitality for all, we bring hope to the world.

**Elizabeth R.**

13 March 2006