



COMMONWEALTH

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Media Statement

For Immediate Release

27 March 2007

Valuing New Zealand in the Commonwealth

New Zealanders may view the Commonwealth from many angles but its value is still as relevant today as when it was first formed, Commonwealth Secretary-General Don McKinnon said in a speech to the Orewa Rotary Club today.

Speaking in his former electorate, Don McKinnon said the Commonwealth is not sitting on the shelf of international organisations.

“The Commonwealth constantly adapts to the times, and is as relevant today as it was to our family forebears in this country. Certainly, the Commonwealth is more relevant to New Zealanders today than is widely recognised.”

Mr McKinnon said while New Zealand is a donor to the Commonwealth in gross terms, it is a beneficiary in net terms: “Commonwealth membership makes New Zealand a member of a worldwide community of values. The bonds of values are both spoken and unspoken: either way, they are very strong.”

Mr McKinnon said democracy and development were the two foundations of the modern Commonwealth.

“Two-thirds of the world’s HIV/AIDS sufferers live in Commonwealth countries, 30 million children in the Commonwealth will never see the inside of a primary school and a further 40 million will never experience secondary education.

“The disadvantaged are very much our Commonwealth concern,” Mr McKinnon said.

And the world’s issues are New Zealand’s because – in a fast-globalising world – a challenge for one is a challenge for all.

“Because Pacific problems and world problems – be they of political instability and economic hardship and the levels of migration that come from them, or of transnational crime, terrorist threats, drug-running, or the spread of HIV/AIDS – have the capacity to wash up on New Zealand’s shores.”

The most obvious Pacific issue at the moment was Fiji, in the aftermath of its military coup last December.



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“The bad news is that Commodore Bainimarama continues to lead an interim civilian government while wearing a uniform. And the people are suffering human rights abuses that are going largely unreported because the media has had to impose a muzzle on itself. People have died. Too many people have ended up at Queen Elizabeth Barracks to have their views challenged and changed by intimidation and force.”

“The good news is that external and internal pressure is having its effect. The Commonwealth has started to re-engage with Fiji. We want Fiji back in from the cold. We want to see allegations of corruption dealt with. We want to help tackle the root causes of what has become a coup culture. We want elections held as quickly as possible and we have offered Commonwealth technical assistance to make that happen.”

Mr McKinnon said a stable, secure and prosperous Pacific “is good for New Zealand”.

“New Zealand can help achieve that, but it can’t do it alone. No country can. The Commonwealth can help and it is contributing towards New Zealand achieving its goals in the region. The power comes from the network,” he said.

Note to Editors

Mr McKinnon, a former New Zealand deputy prime minister and foreign minister, is in New Zealand for the week 26 - 30 March.

He will visit Wellington tomorrow where he will meet with the Governor-General of New Zealand Anand Satyanand and other political leaders, including Prime Minister Rt Hon Helen Clark. He will also brief the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Select Committee of the New Zealand Parliament on Thursday afternoon.

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