

## **Message to CHOGM 2009 from Commonwealth Youth Ministers**

We, Commonwealth Youth Ministers at our Seventh Meeting in Colombo, Sri Lanka, from April 27 to 30, 2008, reaffirm the Commonwealth's commitment to the engagement of young people and commend their invaluable contribution to sustaining the fabric of fundamental Commonwealth principles and values.

As Ministers of Youth we recommit ourselves unequivocally to the rights-based approach to youth development. We further reiterate our commitment to work with multi-stakeholder alliances that include the family and kinship, other government partners, NGOs and the private sector and with our most valued asset, young people and their networks in creating and implementing programmes at community, national and Commonwealth wide levels that effectively engage young people in their own development and the development of their communities and societies.

We note that in some countries contemporary challenges of development such as unemployment, poverty, health and HIV and AIDS, the effects of climate change, access to quality education, the digital divide and the social divide, gender bias and discrimination, lack of access to land and housing, civil conflicts, crime and violence among others, are affecting a varied Commonwealth population. Young people make up one third of this population. For ideological and structural reasons they are often far removed from access to services and resources and from any meaningful ability to impact the fabric of decision-making and national development. In this way, they are disproportionately impacted by the combined adverse impacts of unsustainable development and negative manifestations of globalisation.

Despite commendable efforts by the Commonwealth and its various partners, the relative deficit to integrate young people as strategic and valued partners in national development processes remains a major concern. This deficit is a reality of mainstream organizations working in finance and planning, agriculture, law, economic development, housing, political affairs, trade and labour, social policy research, energy and justice that have traditionally not seen themselves as working with youth issues or with young people in a direct way that impacts their development and livelihoods.

If we accept that participation is the very essence of development, then conscious efforts on the part of governments and other strategic partners to constructively engage and mainstream young people must become a central plank of national development strategies. The excellent innovation of the Heads of Government at its 2007 Meeting in Kampala and their unprecedented recognition of young people by engaging Commonwealth youth in social dialogue should become a Commonwealth good practice of social engagement among mainstream organisations.

CHOGM 2007 has recognized young people and their role as valued assets to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and to support the work of the Commonwealth institutions in peace building. Young people are willing and successfully taking lead roles to this end. However, peacebuilding, as with the achievement of Commonwealth pro-poor, and democracy and governance goals are inextricably linked to youth mainstreaming.

7CYMM recommends the Commonwealth Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment 2007-2015 as a Commonwealth blueprint for youth mainstreaming. We further recommend the widest referencing of this tool at all levels of mainstream Commonwealth institutions to ensure that the impact of all planned policies and programmes on young people in all spheres of development and at all levels of society is systematically evaluated and adequately addressed for the benefit of diverse youth populations. Similarly we recommend the widest support of mainstream Commonwealth institutions to achieve the earliest completion of the Youth Development Index in order to effectively measure impacts of youth development.

We recognize and commend the work of CYP as a valued partner and source of expertise and technical support, and as a leader and innovator on youth mainstreaming for youth empowerment. In this regard, we salute the call of the Heads of Government in 2007 in Kampala for a new financial arrangement to be developed for the CYP as an essential step in ensuring that adequate resources are dedicated to Commonwealth efforts to empower young people. Beyond this, however, we urge that active consideration be given to ensure that appropriate allocations are made in national budgets for mainstreaming youth development.

We submit the attached Communiqué to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago in November 2009 for their endorsement.

Seventh Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting (7CYMM)  
Colombo, Sri Lanka, April 30, 2008