

27 March 2007, Tuesday
Rt Hon Don McKinnon, Commonwealth Secretary-General
Orewa Rotary Club
Auckland, New Zealand

The Commonwealth & New Zealand: defining the dividends

****1****

Ladies and gentlemen, it is great to be back in New Zealand and especially my former constituency and once again address you, the Orewa Rotary Club. My topic tonight is the Commonwealth and New Zealand.

Straddling the two as a Commonwealth Secretary-General who is a New Zealander, I'm perhaps in a better position than my predecessor-but-one – the Guyanan Sir Sridath, or 'Sonny', Ramphal – to understand how New Zealanders would view the Commonwealth.

As a nation, we know the limitations of our size, influence and the cost of our remoteness, as well as its advantages. We also know that New Zealand has to play as part of a team, and that it can't sit on the bench or the sidelines too long. We are also practical and pragmatic – if it doesn't add value, it doesn't get supported.

Robert Muldoon, who you'll remember spoke to the Rotary Club for many years each January, once memorably told Sonny 'you're here to take the minutes'.

'Taking Minutes': that wasn't really Sonny's thing.

It only took him about two hours, at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Vancouver in October 1987, before he locked horns with Margaret Thatcher over what he claimed was Britain's indulgence of apartheid South Africa. Many New Zealanders will remember the battle over the interpretation of the Gleneagles Agreement of ten years previously.

And over his 15 years as Secretary-General, Sonny was one of the central players in achieving post-colonial, and especially African, independence for many countries.

My question tonight is posed several decades beyond that period of liberation last century which changed the world for ever, and which – in a period of 50-odd years – saw UN membership double ... treble ... almost quadruple in size. It is this: is the Commonwealth of 53 nations relevant? And given that New Zealand's voice and influence has changed worldwide over the same period, although not

by the same multiplier, is the Commonwealth relevant to New Zealand in particular?

I speak to you as Secretary-General, and as the Chief Executive of the Secretariat, with its around 300 staff, mostly based out of London, and an annual budget of around NZ\$100 million.

The answer I intend to leave you with, of course, is that the Commonwealth is not sitting on the shelf of international organisations. It is not gathering dust like a relic of a bygone colonial era. The Commonwealth can never afford to gather dust. Gather dust as an international organisation, and you're dead.

No, the Commonwealth constantly adapts to the times, and is as relevant today to individuals like you and me as it was to our family forebears in this country, 50, 100, and even 150 years ago when its seeds were first being planted. Certainly, the Commonwealth is more relevant to New Zealanders today than is widely recognised.

Let me explain.

The Commonwealth is home to nearly 2 billion people. It accounts for a third of the world's population, a quarter of its countries, and a fifth of its trade. It is home to countries large and small, rich and poor, and to people of every colour and creed. There are 11 Pacific members. It spreads into Africa, Asia, the Americas, Europe, and the Caribbean. It has a waiting list, with countries as diverse as Rwanda, Algeria and Yemen all wanting to join.

New Zealanders view the Commonwealth from many angles. For the older generation, it's an organisation that rose from the ashes of the British Empire. For more recent migrants, it's rather more perplexing. Some know that it was deeply involved in Africa from the 1960s to the 90s as I mentioned; others know it through sporting lenses, perhaps through the Commonwealth Games held in Christchurch in 1974 or here in Auckland in 1990.

Some New Zealanders may well still refer to 'the British Commonwealth', which in fact died in 1949. That was when newly independent India said that it could accept The Queen not as Head of State, but as Head of the Commonwealth. Since then, this Commonwealth 'family of nations' has been freely and equally tied together – one billion-strong India having as much voice as 11,000-strong Tuvalu; the United Kingdom having as much say as the United Republic of Tanzania; Malawi as much as Malaysia....

Many New Zealanders see The Queen as Head of State and Head of the Commonwealth as the same thing. Not so – they are very separate. And the blurring is probably reinforced by the Secretariat being about 400 metres from

Buckingham Palace. It could have been somewhere else, but there it is for now. Some day it may move, but that won't be my decision anyway.

But the Commonwealth has evolved the way it has – wisely in my view – because its members have allowed it to evolve and adapt over time. Take a look at New Zealand's history, speculate on its future, and you'll see strong parallels in terms of flexibility and adaptation...adding and subtracting as the years go by, with new storylines being added to its history almost every day.

New Zealand, with 52 other countries, all share values and a common understanding and a means of communication within which they feel comfortable.

Now tonight I *could* talk about the Heads of Government meeting here in Auckland in '95, when we set up the only mechanism in any international organisation with the power to suspend members or even to recommend their expulsion – something unknown to the UN, the EU, the AU, you name it. The same day at the Aotea Centre on Queen Street, we suspended Nigeria when its military leader executed the human rights campaigner Ken Saro Wira and his colleagues, and then worked hard with that country to restore it to democracy, and to full Commonwealth membership four years later.

I could also talk about some of the 85 organisations worldwide bearing the Commonwealth name, some of which are based here in New Zealand ... small and dedicated groups like the Association of Commonwealth Amnesty International Sections in Wellington, the Commonwealth Geographical Bureau in Dunedin, or the Conference of Commonwealth Auditors-General in Wellington. This week, we have a meeting in Auckland of the Commonwealth Local Government Forum. In August there will be a Commonwealth International Humanitarian Law conference in Wellington.

I could talk about some of the New Zealand names which have been intimately associated with the Commonwealth Secretariat, like Hunter Wade, Gerald Hensley, David McDowell, Chris Laidlaw, Jeremy Pope or Michael Fathers.

However, let me candidly say that New Zealand is – in gross terms – a *giver* to the Commonwealth. (We thank you for over NZ\$5 million per annum which I hope to see continue tracking upwards if we can prove our worth.) And let me look with you now at two of the ways that New Zealand *takes* from its Commonwealth membership. Because I believe that, in fact, New Zealand is a donor to the Commonwealth in gross terms, but a beneficiary in net terms.

****2****

First then, New Zealand's place in a 'better world'. When all is said and done, that is the Commonwealth's reason for being. If we are not improving people's lives, if we are not a force for good, then the Commonwealth is not doing its job.

Commonwealth membership makes this country a member of a worldwide community of values. The bonds of values are both spoken and unspoken: either way, they are very strong.

Those values are enshrined in our Singapore and Harare Declarations of 1971 and '91 respectively: unequivocal Commonwealth commitments to democracy, equality, justice, tolerance, the rule of law.

These are the principles that we defend. They are the principles that were shown in powerful relief when we look at today's Zimbabwe. That country took itself out of the Commonwealth in 2003, after we questioned the validity of its presidential elections of 2002. It was a loss for us – reflected in the appalling suffering of its people now – but a win for those values. In effect, President Mugabe was saying that he could not and would not adhere to the Commonwealth values, and that has since been proven with depressing clarity.

But the Commonwealth way is not normally so confrontational. We recognise that democracy is a journey and a work in progress – everywhere. There is room for improvement in the form democracy takes here in New Zealand, or even in the UK, where changes to the House of Lords are currently being debated.

In one of our African member countries, the challenge might be to improve the conditions under which people vote, when millions stand for hours or even days in the burning sun on election day. In other places, it might be the challenge of persuading people to vote at all – to appreciate the importance of truly owning the institutions that govern them, by participating.

We are helping, for instance, with the establishment of an independent electoral commission in Cameroon, in advancing the political reform process in Maldives, and in the implementation of the new constitution in Swaziland. We are defusing the political tensions that surround democracy, often through the behind-the-scenes diplomacy of my Special Envoys – people like Sir Paul Reeves in Guyana and Sir Douglas Graham in Tonga.

We are supporting the *forms* of democracy, like free and fair elections. We are supporting the *institutions* of democracy, like a parliament, a judiciary and an executive which are apart but work together; responsible armed forces and police; an independent and responsible media; a lively civil society. We are supporting the *culture* of democracy ... of citizens having a say in how they are governed.

This is the Commonwealth's great democratic enterprise, of which New Zealand is a part. No Commonwealth members are perfect in achieving these values, but all believe in them, and most do their best.

So democracy is one of the two pillars holding up this edifice that is the Commonwealth. The other is Development – and the two go hand in hand.

They are two sides of the same coin.

Take the audience in this room and see yourselves as representative of the world and the Commonwealth:

- Imagine you are the 1 billion people in the world living on less than NZ\$2 per day. Then more than three quarters of you are also Commonwealth citizens.
- Imagine you are the 40-odd million people in the world living with HIV/AIDs. Then two-thirds of you are also Commonwealth citizens.
- Or imagine the 30 million Commonwealth children who never see the inside of a primary school
- ... or over a billion Commonwealth people who are without safe drinking water ...

It's clear that our Commonwealth development challenges are huge. So are those of the UN, the World Bank and the IMF – we're not competing; indeed we're often working side by side.

So the Commonwealth runs development programmes in health, education, environment, youth and gender. These programmes run at both the policy and at the practical level.

To take just one example: health. At the policy level we have established two very important international protocols, now adopted by the UN and its agencies, for the migration of health workers. Frankly, slowing down wealthy countries stealing them. And at the practical level we are running a network of some 200 Young Ambassadors for (HIV) Positive Living, mentoring young people about AIDS in 20 countries across three continents, and making a huge difference in the lives of those they counsel and help. Young people are far more likely to listen to other young people talking about sex and its consequences than they are to me on the same subject.

The Commonwealth also promotes economic development.

Few know that the Commonwealth is the solo parent of debt relief: our ideas about bilateral and multilateral debt relief were world-leading, and they are now up and running. But when we first proposed them amongst our Finance Ministers in Canada in the late '80s, they were seen as outlandish. The Highly Indebted Poor Country – or HIPC – initiative and the decision by the G8 last year on debt forgiveness came from us. We perhaps don't take the credit we should, but we do take satisfaction from the results.

Perhaps more people know how we have championed the cause of developing countries being able to trade their way out of poverty.

For too long, the EU, the US and Japan have done very well from developing economies, and grown wealthy as a result. They have charged unfair tariffs and have subsidised inefficient farming. It's unacceptable. The Commonwealth fought racial apartheid in South Africa in the 1980s, now we are fighting trade apartheid. Two years ago all 53 of our leaders – from richer and poorer nations alike – called for the wealthy countries to give more than they take in the current Doha Round at the World Trade Organisation. We have continued working tirelessly for that.

There is still a logjam, and still we push. I met WTO Head Pascal Lamy in Geneva just two weeks ago. He said two things: one, that he feels a world trade deal is 'do-able'. Second, that he viewed the Commonwealth as a serious player in championing of the case for properly managed trade as the key to unlocking economic growth – and beating poverty.

Meanwhile we also fight for the interests of small states.

Small states have to work hard, investing time and effort over the long run, being consistent, and constantly contributing – usually disproportionately more than larger states.

It is proof that being internationalist rather than isolationist is the only successful foreign policy recipe for New Zealand and the many states around the world which are like us, or even smaller.

I took the OECD head on six years ago – over the way it was beating up on small countries allegedly acting as tax havens – and we won. There was virtually zero appreciation of small countries' lack of capacity to handle what they had bought into. A big country with a big government bureaucracy is one thing. A country with a population the size of Hamilton being asked to do the same things at the same speed is another.

The older challenges of small states where we are active are being compounded by newer concerns.

Take climate change. Three of our members (Maldives as I mentioned, plus Tuvalu and Kiribati here in the Pacific) are threatening to disappear under water.

And then there is the fact that more of the world's people now live in cities than in rural areas. And the reality of 'cities' is so often another word: 'slums'. We calculate that 330 million people in the Commonwealth live in slums, which compound every social and economic challenge we have ever faced.

The temptation is to think that these problems are not New Zealand's problems. I have two responses.

First, some of the global challenges we face *are* New Zealand's challenges.

For instance, rebuilding communities torn apart by differences of religion, or race, or tribe, or ethnicity. Two years ago in Malta, our Commonwealth Heads of Government asked me to look at this subject: to diagnose where our Commonwealth diversity works and where it doesn't. I have convened a talented Commission to look into the matter, headed by Indian Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen.

New Zealand has something to contribute to that debate. When I am interviewed on the subject, I talk about what we've done, and cite the commitment needed to grow a society, as inclusive of people of Pakeha as of Maori as of Pacific Island as of Asian descent. But does New Zealand have all the answers? I think it will also benefit from our Commission's work, looking at this issue from a global perspective.

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

My ancestors took a few months to get to New Zealand in 1841. Now most of the world can be in your airport in less than 48 hours.

In today's world, the good things (like trade, and culture and ideas) cross borders with as much ease as the bad things (like crime, disease and environmental damage). We are bound to people whose names and faces we may not know, but whose humanity we share.

The work we are doing globally is making the world a safer place and a more tolerant and respectful and peaceful place. For a country like New Zealand, that depends on foreign markets and open trading lanes for its survival and future, the Commonwealth dividend is difficult to calculate in dollar terms. But it's blindingly obvious.

The Commonwealth is New Zealand's ready-made introduction to 18 countries in Africa, to 12 in the Caribbean, and to five in South Asia.

****3****

Let me turn to my second point: how the Commonwealth benefits New Zealand in its own region.

If my previous arguments about an inter-connected world registered with you, then they will do so again in the smaller context of the Pacific.

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. What you don't see is what you get.

The most obvious of our Pacific problems at the moment is Fiji, in the aftermath of its military coup last December.

I had been in regular contact with Prime Minister Michael Somare of PNG and other regional leaders in the days and weeks preceding, and I well remember listening to Helen Clark on BBC radio on the morning of the coup. She was saying that Fiji's Commonwealth membership was in jeopardy. Indeed it was. The nine-nation Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group suspended Fiji a few days later.

As we expected, Fiji's interim government publicly remained defiant, but we know that privately that decision has had its impact. Events have since moved on, and this region itself has since - quite rightly - taken the lead.

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 – that isn't government by the people, for the people and of the people, and no amount of public relations spin can alter the fact.

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. Indeed, if a clear pathway to elections being held within the two years (between December '06 and December '08) is not defined, Fiji's future

in the Commonwealth, beyond its current suspension, will become open to question.

I am talking here about a region, its shared values, and shared approaches to putting them into practice. It was the Pacific Islands Forum's 'Pacific Plan' of October 2005 which provided the blueprint for national and regional development.

That regional concept is a reality, with the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands reflecting the shared political goals and the practical skills of 15 countries in support of the people of the Solomon Islands. RAMSI, as it is known, is the strongest symbol of the fact that this region must stand together – one problem is everyone's, one success is everyone's. RAMSI is not perfect, as we well know. But it has our full support as a potent symbol of a region's commitment unto itself.

The Pacific has received over NZ\$20 million of assistance from the Commonwealth in the last five years. From expert advice in different aspects of government, to defining maritime borders, to designing and marketing local handicrafts and training women entrepreneurs, to training youth development workers from our regional youth programme hub in Honiara....

Our new Commonwealth Pacific Governance Programme is in the final design stages. It will support the Pacific Plan to achieve better public access to information, stronger election institutions, stronger anti-corruption and transparency institutions, and workable ways to improve access to land for development.

Under our Commonwealth trade programme, we continue to provide technical help so that countries can negotiate trade deals.

Our Commonwealth human rights programme is training Police and helping Pacific governments to ratify the key UN-backed treaties that protect and promote fundamental political, economic, social and cultural rights.

My point is that a stable, secure and prosperous Pacific is good for New Zealand. You can help achieve that, but you can't do it alone. No country can. We in the Commonwealth can help, and we are contributing towards New Zealand achieving its goals in the region.

The power comes from the network. I am sure that many here not only belong to Rotary, you also belong to church groups, sports clubs, or professional groups. You contribute to all but you also benefit. It is the same in a wider global sense. Your country belongs to international organisations, like the Commonwealth, where you perceive benefit for your community both tangibly and intangibly and to whom you are prepared to contribute.

So, Ladies and Gentlemen, New Zealand is part of the Commonwealth's DNA. And the Commonwealth's DNA has been modified over the years as it has grown and adjusted to changing times. That adaptability has been one reason for us remaining relevant. The fact that we represent and deliver practical results in support of shared values and principles is another. Each of the 53 member countries contribute in different ways, and each one benefits in a variety of ways – many not often seen or easily calculated for the bottom line.

Like any good club or association, such as this Rotary Club, the Commonwealth continues to face the challenge of attracting members, sustaining interest, adapting and remaining relevant. But, like the Orewa Rotary Club, we wouldn't be here today unless we did exactly that.

Thank you for your time.

ENDS