

Closing Statement by the Deputy Secretary-General, Mmasekgoa Masire-  
Mwamba

Meeting of Law Ministers and Senior Officials

Sydney, Australia, 11 - 14 July 2011

Attorney General, Hon. McClelland,  
Minister of Home Affairs and Justice, Hon. O'Connor (if he is here),  
Hon. Ministers and Attorneys General,  
Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have now come to the close of our four-day of intensive and interesting deliberations which started on Monday with the meeting of Senior Officials.

- I am pleased to note that we have in front of us a very good record of achievement which we should all be proud of, and ready take forward. Collectively, you have worked incredibly hard to shape the Commonwealth agenda on the rule of law.
- Hon. Ministers, Attorneys General and Delegates, under the theme of fostering a 'Just and Secure Commonwealth', you have discussed a wide range of legal policy issues of great importance ranging from legislative drafting, human rights, climate change to the revision of the Harare Scheme, among others.
- I note that in light of a fast evolving world giving rise to new challenges new issues have been dealt with, including climate change, forced and servile marriages, and conventional weapons, to name only a few.

- Collectively, you explored how best to respond to these challenging issues in today's fast changing social, economic and legal environment.
- More importantly, it was encouraging to note that once again your enlightened awareness of the special needs of small jurisdictions with limited legal resources that we in the Commonwealth give priority to.
- What is more remarkable in all this is that you did not only discuss these issues in the abstract or academically but have brought to bear your significant experience from your own jurisdictions to help to resolve issues in a collectively matter within the theme of the meeting.

Allow me, however, to pick out one or two issues which I followed with keen interest.

The first one is on climate change and its impact on human security and survival.

- The threat to security and existence of Commonwealth citizens particularly in small jurisdictions continues to grow by the day.
- It is therefore fitting that this meeting, and rightly so, recognised that there is a greater role for Law Ministers in tackling climate change, among other things, through consideration of a new legal architecture with regard to displaced migrant populations, cooperation between member states as well as assessment of the adequacy of legal frameworks applicable to displaced persons
- The other issue relates to the strategic direction which you have given to the future direction of our rule of law work in the Secretariat.

- The refocusing and reprioritization of our work, as recommended by the Expert Group on the Rule of Law, and endorsed by yourselves is a very positive and welcome development indeed.
- This will not only enable us to better respond to the needs of member states but will also sharpen the impact of the law. In this regard, I thank the Expert Group under the leadership of Michael Kirby for their contribution.
- I have no doubt that the Secretariat's Legal Division will have plenty to do, several milestones to reach and concrete achievements to make and to report to you in Gaborone, Botswana in 2014.
- Hon Ministers and Attorneys General, you have set the standards, you have clearly drawn the roadmap and you have eloquently expressed your expectations.
- The ball is now in the camp of the Secretariat to deliver. You have also given the required impetus and encouragement for our staff to start working in earnest on this new mandate and provide you with tangible outcomes you expect.
- I will end here but not without, on behalf of all the delegations and the Secretariat, thanking our hosts and the Attorney General's office and the Government of Australia, for the very generous hospitality they have offered us and the magnificent logistical arrangements put in place to ensure the success of this triennial meeting. Honourable Attorney General, we are indeed grateful and we thank you for your wise and good political guidance that has led to the success of this meeting.
- I must also thank Ministers and Attorneys General and all the delegates for your participation, guidance and continued support to our work on the rule of law.

- Finally, let me also express my appreciation and recognition to Akbar and his team in the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Division, for the exceptional work they and their experts have carried out in ensuring that this meeting is successful.
- I wish you all safe travels as you return back to your respective countries