

29 February 2012

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Speech to UN Human Rights Council – High Level Segment

Geneva, Switzerland

Madame President, Madame Pillay, distinguished delegates; I am honoured once again to address this Council on behalf of the Commonwealth.

Our 54 member states encompass great differences in size, endowment and development, and the range of diversity bound to be present in a family of nations which embraces a third of humanity across the globe. We have shown, for more than sixty years, that it is possible to unite around a commitment to shared values including those of democracy, the rule of law, sustainable development and shared growth, human rights and inclusiveness in global aspirations.

The pursuit of shared values by the Commonwealth since its *Singapore Declaration* of 1971, consolidated and raised in the *Affirmation of Commonwealth Values and Principles* in 2009, has meant a sedimentation of the culture of democracy in our member states over decades. And that in turn has aided many regions of the Commonwealth in the goal-setting of their own regional and national values. It is not an accident that, in a recent ranking of a reputable good governance index in Africa, in the first eight countries seven should be from the Commonwealth.

The Commonwealth is a leader in adding to global value through this collective striving for human rights. The *Affirmation* introduced a shared commitment on human rights “...for all without discrimination on any grounds”.

Fully one fifth of the members of this Human Rights Council are also Commonwealth members, and their presence can continue to be a force for a stronger, more unified voice based on our shared values.

Human rights challenges confront our members, as they do all peoples and governments. Our Commonwealth approach is not to chide or rebuke, but to agree to shared goals despite our variety and to provide support in achieving these in partnership – our determination is to see ambition and aspiration translated into practical outcomes.

Decisions at the most recent meeting of Commonwealth Heads of Government last October will help us to be even more engaged and supportive, particularly through the raised mandate of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group. This is a representative body of nine Foreign Ministers created with the objective of advancing adherence to Commonwealth values, and to engage where these are seriously or persistently violated in areas such as democratic constitutionalism, fair and credible elections and a level playing field for them, independence of the judiciary, space for the media and civil society, systematic denial of political space, and the systematic violation of human rights.

Commonwealth leaders raised the level of expectations they have of themselves by authorising that group to become more proactively and positively engaged.

Madame President, another of the Commonwealth's unique strengths is that we are an association of people and not just of governments. It is a source of strength and greater opportunity. We draw on a multiplicity of networks and resources, always seeking to make the best use of various means available to advance towards our goals in conjunction with any of our myriad Commonwealth professional associations, or civil society at large. We encourage and support greater cooperation amongst different actors as partners in deepening and strengthening our work to advance the three 'Ds' that guide the Commonwealth: democracy, development and diversity.

An example of this was the Commonwealth Commission on Respect and Understanding, set up to look into the causes of conflict, violence and extremism. Its report, *Civil Paths to Peace*, should be required reading for any student of the problem of group-based violence and its impact on communities. It advocates solutions based on individuals' multiple identities, marking a departure from cultural or so-called 'civilisational' explanations of conflict and terrorism – and focuses particularly on women and youth and the crucial areas of education and the media.

Madame President, there continues to be a range of pressing human rights issues on which the Commonwealth is contributing to global efforts:

- We are working on climate change and human rights, with a focus on small states, including through assessments of the adequacy of existing legislation applicable to access to vital natural resources and populations displaced due to climate change.
- Early and forced marriage is an issue to which our Commonwealth Law Ministers have brought focus. They reiterated their support for CEDAW and agreed to consider practical actions to support the rights of women and to share good practice. This must be understood and addressed whilst eliminating all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls.
- Discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation is an area of concern on which we have given the perspective of Commonwealth values in various fora, including in this Council. Our position continues to be that we oppose discrimination or stigmatisation on any grounds, including those of sexual orientation. It is for member states to address incompatibilities between Commonwealth values and mostly inherited national laws in these areas.
- In the area of disability rights protection our focus remains on inclusive education and sustainable employment. We are currently putting together a compilation of best practice in the Commonwealth.
- On the aspects of accountability and oversight of police conduct our work with law enforcement agencies will continue and be reinforced. Our goal

is to work towards the elimination of police brutality and to address the culture of impunity. Similarly, our work with prisons training institutions is aimed at improved custodial care and management.

- Our support to our member countries on this Council's Universal Periodic Review process has continued. Regional workshops on UPR follow-up and implementation in the Caribbean, Africa and Pacific are taking place this month and next. Since 2008 these capacity-building initiatives have included government, civil society and representatives of national human rights institutions, and now parliamentarians. Our goal is to assist in the implementation of both UPR and human rights treaty body recommendations across the Commonwealth.

Our Small States Office here in Geneva, which opened last year, is increasingly being used by member states that might not otherwise have a presence at meetings such as this one. We encourage our small state members to continue to take advantage of this office in order to engage with the Council, the human rights treaty bodies and other international human rights mechanisms proactively. The office will have an adviser on human rights.

Madame President, these are just a few of our programmatic initiatives. And this is our consistent vision: the vulnerable, the strong, the large, the small, all sharing the same ground and moving towards a collective destination; each gaining from the mutual trust and respect accorded one to another in

advancing the cause of their citizens in their everyday lives. The Commonwealth remains committed to its values, including human rights, to their practical expression, and to working together where possible with the United Nations to achieve them.