

Commonwealth Secretary-General Kamalesh Sharma Botswana departure statement

31 July 2012

Gaborone, Botswana

My visit to Botswana has laid the foundation for a continuing mutually beneficial relationship, which is already substantial, between the Commonwealth and Botswana.

The national watchwords of Botswana are democracy, development, and dignity. These mirror those of the Commonwealth. We are committed to working in support of Botswana's national priorities with renewed vigour.

This was my first official visit to Botswana — a visit that comes more than a year later than planned, owing to the Iceland volcanic ash clouds that stalled the planned visit in April last year.

During this visit, I had the honour of calling on HE Lt General Seretse Khama Ian Khama. I also met Hon Mokgweetsi Masisi, Minister for Presidential Affairs, as well as His Lordship Mr Maruping Dibotelo, and Mr Gabriel Seeletso, Secretary of the Independent Electoral Commission. I also met Commonwealth High Commissioners resident in Botswana.

I was delighted also to meet former presidents HE Sir Ketumile Masire and HE Mr Festus Mogae, who have been longstanding and active supporters of the Commonwealth. They have served the Commonwealth in various ways, with great dedication and wisdom. HE Sir Ketumile Masire chaired our Commonwealth election observer group to Uganda in 2006, while HE Mr Festus Mogae led our Commonwealth election observers to Nigeria last year. The Commonwealth remains deeply grateful to both of them, and I was most appreciative of the opportunity to meet them.

I already had the pleasure of meeting Botswana's Minister of Youth, Sport and Culture, Hon Shaw Kgathi, in London during the Commonwealth Sports Ministers Meeting before my departure.

In all the meetings, I am grateful to all for generously offering their time and sharing their valuable insights. I have a greater appreciation of how the Commonwealth can strengthen and deepen its co-operation and partnership with Botswana.

Our discussions covered many areas of the Commonwealth as a trusted and collaborative partner in advancing our core priorities of democracy, development and respect for diversity.

Commonwealth Reform

I briefed the Honourable President and others in my meetings on current Commonwealth priorities, especially our agenda of reform and renewal. Our goal is to ensure that the Commonwealth remains responsive to the needs of its citizens and more impactful in its activities.

At the last Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Australia in October 2011 – at which Botswana was represented by the Honourable President – the leaders agreed to a number of recommendations by the Eminent Persons Group to reform and renew the 54 member Commonwealth.

The essence of these reforms is to sharpen the impact, strengthen the networks, and raise the profile of the Commonwealth; and to achieve greater practical commitment to our shared 2009 *Affirmation of Commonwealth Values and Principles*, which builds on the Harare Principles and other earlier Commonwealth declarations. The *Affirmation* includes a strong commitment to our shared values as well as to our principles embracing inclusiveness and transparency.

We are on track with the Commonwealth's reform agenda, as has been encouraged by Botswana. The networks and collaboration between the wide range of Commonwealth organisations and governments are being strengthened; a web-based platform has been created - Commonwealth Connects - to enable Commonwealth networks to develop and work together in future interactively and through sharing knowledge and best practices.

One example is the stronger mandate given to the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) - the guardian of our fundamental political values including democracy, the rule of law and human rights - to engage more constructively on the Commonwealth's priority values. Botswana is distinguished for its strong adherence to these values and principles.

Commonwealth Technical Partnership

I would like to recognise, with appreciation, the contribution Botswana has made and continues to make practically and financially in support of fellow members of the Commonwealth family, such as the support which the Botswana Police College has provided over many years to train police officers from Sierra Leone.

This is an example of co-operation between Commonwealth member states which we wish to expand.

The Commonwealth has a special responsibility to protect and promote the needs of small states. We are convening a conference on small states on 17-18 September 2012 in London to address their challenges of economic resilience and growth. We have commissioned a research paper on the transformation of Botswana to a 'green economy' for the conference. Botswana's contribution of its experience will be shared with all members.

Botswana also benefits from a number of Commonwealth programmes delivered through the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC).

Some of these areas include capacity-building in the judiciary; assistance to manage public debt through our Commonwealth debt management software; legislation and

advice to support the development of the natural resources industry, especially the development of natural gas as a national asset; multi-grade teaching; assistance for agriculture marketing and the development of a Tertiary Education Funding Framework. The Commonwealth has provided training to 370 public servants from Botswana, in the last five years.

There are also two trade policy experts in the Ministry of Trade, providing analysis of trade policy to enable the country to develop sound policies, as well as to participate effectively in international and regional trade negotiations.

New Areas of Commonwealth Assistance and Support

Botswana has already committed itself internationally to establishing a National Human Rights Commission, compliant with international norms.

We agreed that the Commonwealth would partner Botswana to establish this National Human Rights Commission, according to its needs. The Commonwealth is also ready to explore ways in which to support Botswana to meet its reporting obligations on international human rights conventions.

The Commonwealth is ready to provide additional support to assist Botswana in the development of its natural resources, such as through the development of model legislation and regulations. Further support to the judicial sector has been agreed upon.

Youth Empowerment

My visit also provided the opportunity to hold meetings with chief executive officers and representatives of the banking sector in Botswana.

Young people are predominant in the populations of most Commonwealth countries, including Botswana. To respond positively and practically to the needs of young people, we must ensure that opportunities are provided for them to have access to finance and technical support to enable them to develop as professionals and as entrepreneurs.

I appreciated the willingness of those with whom I spoke, to participate in a growing pan-Commonwealth network of banks to exchange information online about their experiences and successes in supporting young people to start up and consolidate new businesses.

Last year, the Commonwealth Secretariat trained 64 Youth Entrepreneurship Officers from Botswana in business development. The University of Botswana has been a longstanding partner with the Commonwealth Youth Programme in delivering our Diploma in Youth Development, and we will be exploring in future how this can be given fresh impetus.

I want to thank His Excellency the President for the warm hospitality extended to myself and the delegation accompanying me.

I was particularly pleased to be accompanied on my visit by Deputy Secretary-General Mmasekgoa Masire-Mwamba.

I wish all success to 'Team Botswana' currently in London for the 2012 Olympic Games.

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Contact:

Julius Mucunguzi
Communications Officer
Commonwealth Secretariat
Tel: +44 (0)7894 593517
Email: j.mucunguzi@commonwealth.int