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COMMONWEALTH CONSULTATIVE GROUP ON ENVIRONMENT

**Second Meeting
New York, 26 April 1995**

**STRENGTHENING INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION
FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT - SELECTED
MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS**

Note by the Commonwealth Secretariat

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1. This Note is intended to assist the Consultative Group's discussions on item 1 of the draft Agenda. The 1993 Cyprus Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), inter alia, welcomed the progress being made towards the early entry into force of the Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity, and looked forward to a successful conclusion to the negotiations on a Convention to Combat Drought and Desertification as well as on the restructuring and replenishment of the Global Environment Facility. The CHOGM also stressed the need for all the Rio commitments to be translated urgently into action. This Note flags certain issues relevant to major developments for the Group's consideration.

The Framework Convention on Climate Change (to be updated in the light of Berlin outcomes)

2. The Convention entered into force on 21 March 1994. Its ultimate objective is to stabilise concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous human interference with the world's climate. As of February 1995, it had been ratified by 121 states and the European Union (EU). Of these, 118 states and the EU had deposited their instruments of ratification in time to participate in the first Conference of the Parties in Berlin in March/April 1995.¹

- How can the decisions of the Berlin Conference be taken forward expeditiously, particularly in regard to the strengthening of commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in a fair and equitable manner?
- How can consensus be developed on the controversial issue of 'joint implementation' of commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions?²
- How can international assistance be strengthened to assist small island states and countries with low-lying areas to implement suitable adaptation strategies to cope with climate change and sea-level rise?

¹ This Note was completed before the full outcomes of the Berlin Conference were known.

² Joint implementation could allow one country to fulfil part of its commitment to mitigate climate change by making financial or technological transfers to limit emissions in another country.

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The Convention on Biological Diversity

3. The Convention entered into force on 29 December 1993. As of March 1995 there had been 114 ratifications including the EU. The first Conference of the Parties (the Bahamas, November/December 1995) adopted several decisions to facilitate the Convention's implementation and agreed a Medium-Term Work Programme (1995-1997).

- How can international co-operation be strengthened to assist developing countries in undertaking inventories of their biological resources and implementing national strategies for their conservation and sustainable use?
- How can progress be accelerated on the issue of sharing, in a fair and equitable way, the results of research and development and the benefits arising from the commercial utilisation of genetic resources, on mutually agreed terms?
- An open-ended ad hoc working group of experts has been established to consider "the need for and modalities of a biosafety protocol" to address procedures for the handling and use of living modified organisms resulting from biotechnology. As this is an issue of concern to many countries, how can work in this area be expedited?

The Convention to Combat Desertification and Drought

4. The Convention was opened for signature on 14 October 1994. As of January 1995, 105 countries had signed it. The Intergovernmental Committee on Desertification has initiated preparations for the first Conference of Parties which will be convened within a year of the Convention's entry into force.

- How can international awareness of the Convention's importance be increased in order to facilitate its early entry into force?
- Of the Convention's four Regional Implementation Annexes, the one for the African region is the most elaborate, reflecting the priority accorded to this region under the Convention. How can impetus be given to the implementation of the provisions of the INCD's June 1994 resolution on urgent action for the African region?
- How can work be accelerated in the areas of increasing public awareness of desertification issues, and promoting capacity building and technology transfer for the implementation of national and regional long-term plans to combat desertification and drought?

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Financing environmentally sustainable development

5. The Commission on Sustainable Development's (CSD) Ad Hoc Inter-sessional Working Group on Finance has had detailed discussions on the international policy environment and financial flows; policies to mobilise national financial resources; innovative international mechanisms; and a matrix of policy options and instruments for increasing financial resources.

- How can the effectiveness of Official Development Assistance (ODA) be increased, and ODA used to leverage additional domestic and external financial resources, particularly foreign direct investment? How can impetus be given to the mobilisation of private finance for sustainable development?
- How can further work be promoted on the ways and means of using economic instruments (based on implementing the polluter-pays-principle) to achieve environmental objectives and mobilise additional finance for sustainable development? Would further studies of specific country experiences and the sharing of information on this experience be helpful?
- In March 1994 agreement was reached on the restructuring and replenishment of the Global Environment Facility. A replenishment of \$2 bn. was pledged for the next three-year phase. Are any further steps necessary to increase the effectiveness of assistance provided by the Facility, particularly in relation to the Conventions on Climate Change and Biological Diversity?

Transfer of Environmentally Sound Technologies (ESTs)

6. The CSD's Ad Hoc Inter-sessional Working Group on Sectoral Issues has had detailed discussions on general aspects as well as the requirements and modalities for the transfer of ESTs in specific sectors.

- In the case of ESTs in the public domain, how can access to information on these technologies and on their suitability for specific user-needs be improved?
- How can partnerships between the private and public sectors be promoted for the development and transfer of ESTs?
- In the case of costly, patented ESTs, how can mechanisms be developed which will facilitate their transfer, on concessional terms, to countries which cannot afford them, due regard being given to intellectual property rights?

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Trade and the Environment

7. The interaction between trade and environmental policies is an issue that is gaining increasing attention. In addition to the CSD, the main fora addressing these linkages are UNCTAD's Working Group on Environment, Development and Trade; and the World Trade Organisation's Committee on Trade and the Environment.

- It is widely accepted that trade and environmental policies need to be harmonised in the pursuit of environmentally sustainable development. But there continue to be serious differences on how this should be achieved. How can consensus building be promoted in this area?
- How can transparency and international co-operation be strengthened in regard to eco-labelling and certain packaging and recycling requirements in order to avoid potentially adverse effects on the export prospects of developing countries?
- How can developing countries be assisted in assessing the environmental impacts of trade policies and develop appropriate policy responses?

The 1994 Barbados Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States

8. The Global Conference successfully adopted a comprehensive Programme of Action for the sustainable development of small island developing states (SIDS). The Conference, and the preparatory process which preceded it, did much to increase international awareness of how a number of problems have a unique impact on the sustainable development of SIDS, as well as on other small states, many of which face similar problems.

- How can the implementation of the Programme of Action be expedited and support mobilised for the development of the SIDS Information Network (SIDS/NET) and the SIDS Technical Assistance Programme (SIDS/TAP)?
- How can better co-ordination between multilateral and bilateral donors be achieved in order to increase the effectiveness of assistance to small states?
- How can regional and sub-regional programmes be strengthened to assist in the implementation of the Programme of Action?

The Commission on Sustainable Development

9. The CSD is increasingly being seen as the "guardian" of sustainable development.

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At its 1993 meeting, the Commonwealth Consultative Group agreed that there was a need to give the Commission's role and work a high political profile on the international agenda.

- Are there any areas where the effectiveness of the CSD could be improved?
- Should there be greater opportunities for more informal dialogue during the high-level segment?