



Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers Meeting

Seventh Meeting, Nadi, Fiji Islands, 30 May-2 June 2004

Commonwealth Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs Seventh Meeting, Nadi, Republic of the Fiji Islands, 31 May to 2 June 2004

Communiqué

In the Pacific for the first time

Commonwealth Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs (WAMM) met in Nadi, Fiji Islands, from 31 May to 2 June 2004. They reviewed past progress and developed a Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality 2005 to 2015. Forty three member countries attended the meeting, which was held in the Pacific for the first time.

2. The Hon Laisenia Qarase, Prime Minister of the Republic of the Fiji Islands, opened the meeting, at a traditional Fijian ceremony of welcome. The Rt Hon Don McKinnon, Commonwealth Secretary-General, emphasised the Commonwealth's support for advancing gender equality.

3. All delegations expressed appreciation for the generous Pacific hospitality and excellent arrangements for the meeting, which was chaired by Hon Adi Asenaca Caucau, the Minister for Women, Social Welfare and Poverty Alleviation, of the Republic of the Fiji Islands.

4. The Pacific Commonwealth members in particular, welcomed the holding of 7WAMM in their region, and called on the Commonwealth Secretariat to strengthen its activities to address the special needs and vulnerabilities of small island developing states.

From Words to Action

5. Ministers agreed on the Plan of Action which focuses on four critical areas:

- Gender, democracy, peace and conflict
- Gender, human rights and the law
- Gender, poverty eradication and economic empowerment
- Gender and HIV/AIDS.

6. Ministers recognised the diversity of women and that they experience gender inequalities in different ways.

7. It was agreed that sex-disaggregated data is urgently required to inform the development of policies and programmes that promote gender equality and monitor progress of this plan.

Gender, democracy, peace and conflict

8. Ministers affirmed that the principles of democracy require women's equal participation and representation for the achievement of gender equality and sustainable development. Ministers strongly affirmed the need for women to participate at all levels in peace-building, conflict prevention, mediation, resolution, post-conflict reconciliation and reconstruction initiatives.

Gender, human rights and the law

9. Ministers noted with concern continuing violations of human rights, especially those of women and girls, and strongly advocated that member countries fulfil their international human rights obligations. Given that gender-based violence is one of the most persistent forms of human rights violations, member countries are encouraged to promote the adoption of an integrated, zero-tolerance approach. The growing problem of trafficking in persons, particularly in women and children, was recognised and Ministers emphasised the need to work together at regional and international levels to eliminate this exploitation.

Gender, poverty eradication and economic empowerment

10. Ministers recognised that while globalisation and trade liberalisation offer opportunities for economic growth and poverty eradication, they pose particular challenges for gender equality. This requires specific policies and programmes to prevent the adverse effects on women.

11. As 70 per cent of those living in poverty are women, Ministers identified that it was critical to facilitate the process of women's economic empowerment, for which a multi-pronged approach is required. This includes macroeconomic processes, an enabling environment for women's employment, and increased access to productive resources such as land, property and financial services, and increasing and improving girls' educational opportunities.

Gender and HIV/AIDS

12. Ministers were concerned that HIV/AIDS is a pandemic in many Commonwealth countries and are committed to programmes preventing its spread and mitigating its impact. Sharing of good practice in this field is critical to developing effective strategies to halt and reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS.

13. Ministers recognised that HIV/AIDS imposes an unequal burden on women, who often have primary responsibility for care of the sick and dying and of orphans. Gender power imbalances can make it difficult for women and girls to negotiate safe sex or refuse unwanted sex, increasing their susceptibility to infection.

Partnerships will make it happen

14. Ministers welcomed the contribution that civil society organisations (CSOs) made to the development of the Plan of Action. For the first time ever at a Commonwealth Ministerial Meeting, Ministers provided the opportunity for CSOs to participate in the plenary sessions.

15. Ministers committed themselves to work in partnership with CSOs and acknowledged the need to strengthen the capacity of all partners. The success of these partnerships for gender equality and in implementing the Plan of Action will be measured by tangible improvements in the lives of women.

16. While the focus is on women, Ministers recognised that the attitudes and behaviours of men and boys will be a key factor in the achievement of positive outcomes for women.

17. Ministers welcomed the presentations and reports of civil society organisations organised by the Commonwealth Foundation and Commonwealth associations including the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, the Commonwealth Magistrates and Judges Association, the Commonwealth Lawyers Association, and the Commonwealth Business Women's Network, who met in parallel sessions.

Message to Commonwealth Heads of Government

18. Ministers agreed to submit the attached message to the next Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Malta in 2005.

Next Meeting

19. Ministers accepted the offer of Uganda to host the Eighth Meeting of the Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs in 2007.

Commonwealth Secretariat
Sheraton Fiji Resort
Denarau, Nadi
Fiji Islands

2 June 2004

DENARAU STATEMENT

RECALLING that gender equality is one of the fundamental principles of the Commonwealth Heads of Government (CHOGM) Harare Declaration of 1991;

FORTY-THREE Commonwealth countries attended this historic meeting in Denarau, Nadi, Fiji Islands, on 31 May to 2 June 2004, that approved the new Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality 2005-2015 (PoA);

BEING THE FIRST ever Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers Meeting to be held in the Pacific region, the Pacific Commonwealth members in particular, welcomed the holding of 7WAMM in their region, and called for the Commonwealth to strengthen its activities in addressing the special needs and vulnerabilities of small island developing states;

IN A LANDMARK DECISION, the Ministers agreed on civil society participation in 7WAMM and future WAMM meetings;

NOTING THE ACHIEVEMENTS of 53 member countries:

- Forty-five countries have developed national action plans on gender;
- Forty-nine have ratified CEDAW although only 14 have signed the Optional Protocol;
- Eleven have instituted constitutional or legislative reforms that address gender concerns such as land, property, citizenship, employment, family and spousal rights;
- Three countries have exceeded the 30 per cent target of women's representation in parliament;

REFLECTING UPON these achievements, Ministers agreed on the need to accelerate implementation of domestic plans and accession to international instruments and address emerging challenges related to gender, democracy, peace, conflict, human security, human rights and the law, globalisation, poverty eradication, economic empowerment and the HIV/AIDS pandemic;

RECOGNISING THE NEED for a long term perspective, Ministers adopted the PoA to advance their commitment to gender equality and equity. The PoA will guide Commonwealth action for the 2005-2015 decade with a mid-term review in 2010 and update as necessary;

Partnerships were stressed at all levels: between and within Commonwealth governments, civil society, parliamentarians, magistrates, judges, lawyers, the private sector and multi- and bilateral agencies. Partnerships with men and boys were felt to be critical, as are changing attitudes and behaviours, particularly around conflict, gender-based violence, education, health and HIV/AIDS;

HAVING IDENTIFIED four critical areas of focus, Ministers called upon governments and the Commonwealth Secretariat to take the necessary action for the effective implementation of the Plan of Action;

OF PARTICULAR CONCERN is the need for adequate financial, human and technical resources to implement the PoA. The Commonwealth Secretariat is encouraged to continue and strengthen its engagement with governments, CSOs, parliamentarians, Commonwealth associations, international financial institutions and donor partners, to ensure that where possible priority is given to allocating resources to support the implementation of the PoA at the national level;

HEADS OF GOVERNMENT ARE CALLED UPON TO ALLOCATE THE REQUIRED RESOURCES FOR THE FULL AND EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COMMONWEALTH PLAN OF ACTION FOR GENDER EQUALITY 2005–2015.