

**Fourth Meeting of the Commonwealth Consultative Group on Environment
24 June 1997, United Nations, New York¹**

SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS

Agenda Item 1: Opening of Meeting

The Commonwealth Deputy Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, Sir Humphrey Maud, opened the meeting with some introductory remarks (see Annex I).

In his introductory remarks, the Chairman, Senator the Hon Robert Hill, Australia's Minister for the Environment, said that before proposing the adoption of the meeting's agenda, he thought it would be helpful if he provided some background information on the Commonwealth Secretariat's work on environmentally sustainable development, particularly for the benefit of those attending a meeting of the CCGE for the first time. He noted that the Secretariat implemented a specific work programme on environment and meetings of the Group, which were held every year, were relevant to that element of the Secretariat's work which was concerned with consensus building and policy development on environment. While Commonwealth Heads of Government set the broad agenda, CCGE meetings provided governments with an opportunity to provide more detailed guidance for the Secretariat's work on environment. The second element of that work focused on the provision of technical assistance and training to strengthen capacities for environmental management in developing member countries. Specific information on the Secretariat's activities was given in the paper CCGE(97)Inf. The third element involved support for the development of the Iwokrama Rain Forest Programme in Guyana, which would be discussed by the Group under agenda item 4.

Senator Hill observed that whereas previous meetings of the Group had focused on a specific subject, the present meeting was being asked (under agenda item 3), to consider a wide range of issues which were on the agenda of the Special Session of the UN General Assembly. The Secretariat's paper CCGE(97)1 provided a framework to guide the Group's discussions, and it was possible that these could help to develop consensus on some of the more difficult issues which were being addressed by the Special Session.

Agenda Item 2: Adoption of the Agenda

The Meeting adopted the provisional agenda without revision.

Agenda Item 3: Progress since Rio, issues and priorities for further action by the Commonwealth, at and after the UN Special Session

The Chairman drew the Group's attention to the Secretariat's paper CCGE(97)1, which identified priorities for consideration in three inter-related areas: the implementation of agreements and conventions; the integration of economic and

¹ A list of participants in the Meeting is at Annex II.

environmental policies; and financing environmentally sustainable development. The Group's discussions on the implementation of agreements and conventions covered several subjects, including climate change and sea-level rise, forests and biodiversity, desertification, freshwater, oceans and fisheries, and the 1994 Barbados Programme of Action for the sustainable development of small island developing states (SIDS). Several representatives mentioned the need to increase awareness of the importance of the various conventions on environment, and to assist countries with their implementation.

There was general agreement that climate change and sea-level rise were critical issues requiring urgent global response and that there should be an effective outcome at the Kyoto Conference of Parties to the Convention on Climate Change in December 1997. The representatives of small islands and low-lying countries drew attention to their particular vulnerability to climate change and sea-level rise and welcomed Britain's initiative to seek legally binding targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions at the Kyoto Conference. They pointed out that some countries were already experiencing unusual weather patterns including greater frequency of hurricanes and tropical storms. They expressed concern that, whereas the Global Environment Facility provided funding to meet the incremental costs of projects in developing countries which helped to reduce global warming, there was no comparable mechanism to fund projects such as the construction of sea defences, which protected countries from its consequences.

Different approaches were proposed to strengthen the commitments of industrial countries to reduce their emissions of greenhouse gases under the Convention on Climate Change. Some emphasised the need to adopt legally binding and uniform targets to reduce emissions. Others stressed the importance of clarifying the implications of different targets and the need for an agreement to be achievable, fair and realistic. Some representatives felt it was important to ensure that the outcome of the Kyoto Conference did not impose constraints on the growth prospects of developing countries.

The Group considered that it was vital to assist countries affected by climate change and sea-level rise, and that Commonwealth consultations and the sharing of information on the implications of different approaches to mitigate climate change could contribute to consensus in the run-up to the Kyoto Conference. It was also suggested that it would be useful for Commonwealth countries to share their experience in trying to integrate environmental considerations in transport and energy sector policies, recognising that these sectors were major sources of greenhouse gas emissions.

On biodiversity, the priorities for further action mentioned in the Secretariat's paper (CCGE(97)1) commanded broad support. The Group's discussions on forests revealed the urgency attached by many Commonwealth countries to further action to promote the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests, through implementation of the recommendations of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF).

Different views were expressed on the value of a legally binding convention on forests. Some representatives felt that the overall state of forests worldwide justified the need for a convention which should set effective and appropriate standards for sustainable forest management. Others, while not disputing the need for greater international co-operation, including technical assistance for forestry, were sceptical about whether an international convention was necessarily the best way of promoting sustainable forest management. They noted that several countries had already adopted voluntary measures and that this was ultimately a matter falling within national jurisdictions requiring the development of domestic consensus, over time, among different stakeholders. Concerns were also expressed by some representatives that protracted negotiations on a convention on forests might divert energy from the full implementation of the IPF's recommendations. The Group recognised the need for continuing dialogue on this issue.

On desertification, it was suggested that the Commonwealth could play a useful role in increasing awareness of the dimensions of the problem as well as the importance of the 1994 Convention on Desertification. There was general agreement that the conservation and sustainable management of freshwater resources should command a high priority and that it would be useful for member countries to share their experience in this area. The importance of strengthening capacities to improve the management of oceans, coastal zones and fisheries, especially in small island developing states, was emphasised, and the Secretariat's ongoing work to assist member countries in managing their Exclusive Economic Zones and protecting fisheries against illegal fishing by distant water fishing nations, was welcomed by the Group.

Several representatives expressed disappointment at the lack of progress in implementing the 1994 Barbados Programme of Action for the sustainable development of SIDS. It was pointed out that although the Programme symbolised global recognition of the special problems faced by SIDS, adequate resources had not been forthcoming to support its implementation. The importance of facilitating the transfer of environmentally sound technologies and related know-how to SIDS, based on a thorough assessments of their needs, was emphasised by some speakers. The Group agreed that the Commonwealth was well placed to give a high priority to the needs of small states and welcomed the Secretariat's substantial ongoing programmes and projects to assist them, including the preparation of a new expert group report on the vulnerability of small states, for consideration by the Commonwealth Ministerial Group on Small States at the Edinburgh Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in October 1997.

The Group's discussions revealed that most countries recognised the importance of strengthening the integration of their economic and environmental policies, as well as the need to promote greater resource flows from all sources to assist the implementation of Agenda 21 in poorer countries. Greater support was urged for the efforts of developing countries to address poverty issues which had a direct impact on environmental sustainability.

Agenda Item 4: The Iwokrama International Rain Forest Programme in Guyana

The Chairman noted that the Iwokrama Programme was in many ways an exemplar of how Commonwealth co-operation could achieve practical results. The Programme encompassed an impressive range of integrated objectives, namely, conservation of biological diversity, sustainable use of forest resources for human benefit, and the promotion of scientific knowledge and education to improve forest management. He invited Sir Humphrey Maud to introduce the item for discussion by the Group.

Sir Humphrey Maud observed that, as the Secretariat's paper (CCGE(97)2) indicated, the Iwokrama Programme was a unique endeavour to put sustainable development into practice. Five years after Rio, the Commonwealth could be justifiably proud of this concrete contribution towards implementing the Rio Forest Principles as well as the Conventions on Biodiversity and Climate Change. He pointed out that the Iwokrama International Centre for Rain Forest Conservation and Development had become an autonomous international institution governed by a distinguished international Board of Trustees, and headed by a new Director-General, Mr David Cassells (whom he introduced to the meeting). An impressive track record of activities had been built up and following meticulous planning and preparation, Iwokrama was poised to take-off, provided adequate resources could be mobilised to fuel the launching of its new phase of operations.

Sir Humphrey said that copies of Iwokrama's Business Plan and other relevant documents would be distributed to Commonwealth governments after the CCGE's meeting. He noted that requirements for funding Iwokrama's basic institutional development and infrastructure were relatively modest in relation to comparable international programmes. In the first five years, i.e. over the period 1998 to 2002, the total net cash requirement donors were being asked to finance was only US\$ 13 million. Thereafter, income generated from sustainable utilisation of the Iwokrama Forest was projected to increase rapidly, so that by the year 2007, substantial self-sufficiency would be achieved with respect to basic operational costs. Sir Humphrey stressed that the Business Plan's estimates of funding requirements represented the bare minimum the Iwokrama Centre needed to become a stable, viable enterprise. If the target of \$13 million could not be met, it would not be able to deliver its core programmes in fulfilment of the mission it had been given.

A meeting of Iwokrama's Donor Support Group, co-chaired by the World Bank and the Commonwealth Secretariat, and hosted by the European Commission's Directorate-General VIII, was scheduled to be convened in Brussels in early October, rather than September, as this has been found to be more convenient for all the parties concerned. On the basis of the Business Plan, firm commitments from Commonwealth and non-Commonwealth donors would be sought at the meeting. Sir Humphrey noted that there were positive indications of growing interest in the Iwokrama Programme. At the recent meeting of the ITTO's Council in Bolivia, Japan, Switzerland, the United States and the Republic of Korea had pledged about \$781,000 for the Programme. This was a good beginning but there was a long way to go yet.

Since it would provide global benefits, Iwokrama deserved support from the international community as the reciprocal of Guyana's generous contribution of almost a million acres of its forest estate.

Sir Humphrey pointed out that the Commonwealth, which had blessed the Iwokrama Programme from the very outset, needed to take the lead in mobilising the resources it required. This would help to leverage additional support from non-Commonwealth donors, including foundations, the private sector and even private individuals, in addition to governments, multilateral financial institutions and the European Union. For this reason, the Secretariat's paper suggested that the Commonwealth set itself a target of raising a core of seed capital amounting to \$4 to 5 million. Sir Humphrey explained that, although the Secretariat did not intend to convert the CCGE's meeting into a pledging conference, it would be particularly helpful if governments who had already decided to provide support for Iwokrama could confirm this, and those considering their contributions could declare their intention to offer support. In the run-up to the Donor Support Group meeting, Mr Cassells and the Secretary-General proposed to be in touch directly with Commonwealth donor agencies to discuss the details of the support sought from them for the Iwokrama Programme.

The representative of Guyana observed that assistance from the Commonwealth Secretariat had been very valuable, providing a major boost for the Iwokrama Programme's implementation. He emphasised that the Programme enjoyed the total support of his country's Government and people. He noted that since the Programme had originated as an initiative launched by Commonwealth Heads of Government, and its legal foundation rested on an agreement signed by the Government of Guyana and the Commonwealth Secretariat, it was vital to secure the broadest possible support for Iwokrama within the Commonwealth. While it was encouraging to see new donors coming on board, overall resources for Iwokrama were still modest and there were concerns that Guyana's contribution of a large area of its rain forest for global benefit was not being reciprocated fully by the international community. He therefore hoped that the Commonwealth would take the lead in mobilising adequate resources for the Programme.

The Group welcomed the progress made by the Iwokrama Programme which represented a major contribution towards the implementation of the Rio agreements on forests, biodiversity and climate change. It agreed to use its best endeavours to provide tangible support for the Programme and hoped that at the forthcoming meeting of Iwokrama's Donor Support Group, the donor community would pledge adequate resources to enable the Programme to realise its rich potential for global benefit. Some representatives indicated that their governments, which were already contributing to the Programme, would consider providing additional support.

Agenda Item 5: Any Other Business

The Chairman observed that while the summary record of the Group's discussions would serve as a detailed report to the Edinburgh CHOGM, the agenda item was intended to enable the Group to make a specific recommendation to the CHOGM on its future role in carrying forward the Rio agenda.

Several representatives noted that meetings of the CCGE provided a congenial high-level forum for governments to exchange views and share their experiences. The CCGE could also contribute to consensus building and build partnerships among member countries to deal more effectively with environmental problems. It was also noted that the CCGE played a useful role in providing guidance for the Commonwealth Secretariat's work on environmentally sustainable development.

The Group agreed to recommend to the Edinburgh CHOGM that the CCGE should continue to meet every year since it provided a valuable forum for the Commonwealth to contribute collectively to the full implementation of the Rio agreements and commitments and effective follow-up of the outcome of the 19th Special Session of the UN General Assembly. Governments were invited to write to the Commonwealth Secretariat with any suggestions they might have for improving the format and timing of CCGE meetings. It was also agreed that a Summary Statement by the Chair on the conclusions of the Group's meeting would be prepared and distributed in New York during the Special Session (the Summary Statement is at Annex III).

A vote of thanks was given to the Chair.

**Introductory Remarks by Sir Humphrey Maud, Commonwealth
Deputy Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, to the
Commonwealth Consultative Group on Environment,
24 June 1997 , United Nations, New York**

Ministers, Ambassadors, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Welcome to this Commonwealth Meeting and thank you for your forbearance in forgoing lunch in order to attend it. I would like to extend a particularly warm welcome to colleagues who are participating in the CCGE for the first time. This year, we have departed from our customary practice of meeting in the wings of the CSD, since the Special Session of the General Assembly is a crucial event where a collective Commonwealth voice must be heard. The Secretary-General has asked me to convey to all of you his best wishes for this Meeting's success.

I would like to express my particular appreciation to Australia's Minister for the Environment, the Honourable Senator Robert Hill, for agreeing to take the chair this year. Since we have only two hours, rather than the customary three, to conduct our business, I will make some very brief remarks - with your permission, Senator - before I hand over to you.

The objectives of the UN Special Session have naturally determined the provisional agenda of the Meeting. Item 3 will enable you to take stock of how far we have come since Rio as well as chart a course for further action, with a particular emphasis on the contribution the Commonwealth can make. Since 1992, a number of important steps have been taken to speed up the transition to environmentally sustainable development within the framework of the Rio agreements, as well as those concluded subsequently. However, the pace of implementation has been slower than expected, while environmental degradation in various forms continues to pose major threats in several member countries. The Secretariat's background paper (CCGE(97)1) is intended to stimulate you to address major issues and priorities in three key areas which are inter-related: the implementation of international conventions and agreements; the integration of economic and environmental policies; and financing environmentally sustainable development. The Executive Summary summarises priority areas for action, for your consideration.

The provisional agenda also includes an item on the Iwokrama Programme in Guyana. Five years after Rio, Iwokrama is a vivid example of how joint Commonwealth action - in partnership with other collaborators - can give concrete meaning to sustainable development. At its previous meetings, the Group has welcomed this flagship project, which uniquely combines conservation with sustainable use of forest resources, as a way of making a distinctive Commonwealth contribution to strengthening co-operation on forests. Much progress has been made since you last met, and the paramount requirement now is to mobilise the resources which the Iwokrama International Centre needs for its basic institutional development and its

infrastructure. I will say more on this subject when the Group takes up item 4.

The last item is rather more substantive than its title suggests. I hope that it will be possible for you to confirm the usefulness of continuing the CCGE's work, as well as make concrete recommendations to the October meeting of Commonwealth Heads of Government in Edinburgh, on the Group's future role in carrying forward the Rio agenda. Also, as I noted earlier, it is important for the Commonwealth's collective voice to be heard at the Special Session. The circulation of a brief and non-controversial summary statement by the Chair at the conclusion of the meeting would serve this purpose.

Finally, successive meetings of the CCGE have shown that informality and plain speaking make for fruitful discussion. I have no doubt that you will wish to maintain this tradition.

It is with pleasure that I now give the floor to your Chairman, Senator Robert Hill.

**Fourth Meeting of the Commonwealth Consultative Group on Environment
24 June 1997, United Nations, New York**

List of Participants

Australia

Senator the Hon Robert Hill (Chairman)
Minister for the Environment

Mr R Beale
Secretary, Department of Environment

Bahamas

Ms Lynn P Holowesko
Ambassador for the Environment and Vice-Chair of Delegation

Botswana

Mr G L Tlogelang
Adviser

Britain

The Rt Hon John Prescott MP
Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the
Regions

Ms Dinah Nichols
Director-General
Environment Protection Group
Department of Environment, Transport and Regions

Brunei Darussalam

Noor Qamar Haji Sulaiman
Second Secretary
Permanent Mission of Brunei Darussalam to the United Nations, New York

Cameroon

Mr Jean Simplicie Ndjemba Endezoumou
Chief of Delegation, Charge de Mission, Presidency of the Republic

Mr Mbassi Menye
Co-ordinator for Agenda 21

Ministry of the Environment and Forestry

Canada

The Hon John A Fraser
Ambassador for the Environment

Ms Shirley Lewchuk
Senior Policy Adviser
Office of the Ambassador for the Environment

Cyprus

Mr Nicos Georgiades
Director for Environment

Mr James Droushiutis
Deputy Permanent Representative
Permanent Mission of Cyprus to the United Nations, New York

Ghana

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Minister for Environment, Science and Technology

Mr Edwin Barnes
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Guyana

Mr Navin Chandarpal
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Mr George Talbot
Second Secretary
Permanent Mission of Guyana to the United Nations, New York

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Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations, New York

Jamaica

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Natural Resources Conservation Authority

Malawi

The Hon Mr F V Mayinga Mkandawire MP
Minister of Research and Environmental Affairs

Mr R P Kabwaza
Director of Environmental Affairs

Maldives

Mr Abdul Rasheed Hussain
Minister of Planning, Human Resources and Environment

Mr Mohamed Khaleel
Deputy Director, Environmental Affairs
Ministry of Planning, Human Resources and Environment

Malta

Ms Joanna Darmanin
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Ms Simone Borg
Legal Adviser
Delegation of Malta

Mauritius

Mr Prayag Raj Hemansing
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Department of Environment

Mozambique

Mr Emidio Jose Sebastiao
Assistant to the Minister for Co-ordination of Environmental Affairs

New Zealand

Mr Simon Upton
Minister for the Environment

Ms Denise Church
Chief Executive Officer
Ministry for the Environment

Samoa

Mr Neroni Slade
Ambassador and Permanent Representative
Permanent Mission of Western Samoa to the United Nations, New York

Singapore

The Hon Mr Chow Tong Yeo
Minister for the Environment and Health

Mr Gee Pan Tan
Permanent Secretary
Ministry of the Environment

Trinidad and Tobago

Ms Roslyn Khan Cummings
First Secretary
Permanent Mission of Trinidad and Tobago to the United Nations, New York

Commonwealth Secretariat

The Hon Sir Humphrey Maud KCMG
Deputy Secretary-General (Economic and Social Affairs)

Mr Rumman Faruqi
Director (and Meeting Secretary)
Economic Affairs Division

Mr Chandrashekhar Krishnan
Chief Programme Officer (Sustainable Development)
Environment Unit, Economic Affairs Division

Mr Nichol Gabriel
Manager, Joint Office for Commonwealth Permanent Missions to the United Nations,
New York

CHAIR'S SUMMARY STATEMENT

Commonwealth Environment Ministers met on 24 June in New York during the 19th Special Session of the UN General Assembly, to review progress in the implementation of the Rio agreements and discuss priorities for further action. The meeting was chaired by Senator the Hon Robert Hill, Australia's Minister for the Environment. Ministers addressed issues in three major areas: implementation of conventions/agreements; integration of economic and environmental policies; and financing environmentally sustainable development. Ministers underscored the need to accelerate the transition to environmentally sustainable development worldwide, within the framework of the Rio agreements, through, inter alia:

- full and effective implementation of existing conventions/agreements, including their strengthening where needed;
- the integration of economic and environmental policies; and
- promoting greater resource flows from all sources to assist the implementation of Agenda 21 in poorer countries.

Ministers urged greater support for the efforts of developing countries to address poverty issues which had a direct impact on environmental sustainability. They supported the objective of reducing by half, by the year 2015, the proportion of people living in absolute poverty.

Ministers agreed that climate change and sea-level rise were critical issues requiring urgent global response. They emphasised the need for an effective outcome at the Kyoto Conference of Parties to the Convention on Climate Change. They noted that different approaches had been proposed, with some emphasising the adoption of legally binding targets for uniform reduction of emissions of greenhouse gases of industrial countries, while others emphasised the need for an agreement to be achievable, fair and realistic. The importance of ensuring that the outcome of the Kyoto meeting did not impose constraints on the growth prospects of developing countries was also emphasised. Ministers believed that Commonwealth consultations and the sharing of information on the implications of different approaches to mitigate climate change could contribute to consensus in the run-up to Kyoto. They also believed that exchange of experience in integrating environmental considerations in transport and energy sector policies would be useful.

On forests, Ministers recognised the urgency of further action to promote the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests. They noted that many countries had made voluntary commitments on conservation and sustainable forest management, and urged the international community to assist developing countries to implement such commitments. While differing views were expressed on the value of a convention on forests, Ministers stressed the importance of implementing the recommendations of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Forests,

and the need for continuing dialogue with a view to identifying possible elements for arrangements and mechanisms or a legally binding instrument on forests.

Recognising the particular vulnerabilities and special problems of small island developing states, Ministers expressed disappointment that little progress had been made in the implementation of the 1994 Barbados Programme of Action on the sustainable development of these countries. They called on the international community to give greater recognition to the concerns of small island developing states. They agreed that the Commonwealth, more than half of whose members are small states, was well placed to give a high priority to the needs of these countries.

Ministers welcomed the role of the Commonwealth in promoting sustainable development through practical programmes and projects. They believed that Commonwealth co-operation could be particularly useful in areas such as raising awareness of the importance of the Convention on Desertification; the transfer of environmentally sound technologies and related know-how; assisting countries to implement international conventions on environment; management of Exclusive Economic Zones and the possibility of a Commonwealth fisheries protection agreement; and coastal zone management.

Ministers welcomed the Commonwealth's role in supporting the Iwokrama International Rain Forest Programme in Guyana, which represented a major contribution towards the implementation of the Rio agreements on forests, biodiversity and climate change. They considered that the Programme's unique approach of combining conservation with sustainable use of forest resources generously contributed by Guyana, could serve as a model for other countries. Ministers agreed to use their best endeavours to provide tangible support for the Programme, and hoped that at the forthcoming meeting of Iwokrama's Donor Support Group, the donor community would pledge adequate resources to enable the Programme to realise its rich potential for global benefit.

Ministers looked forward to constructive dialogue at the UN Special Session, and hoped that this would result in determined action by the international community to fulfill the Rio agreements and commitments. They agreed that meetings of Commonwealth Environment Ministers provided a valuable forum to contribute to this process.

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