

**Second Meeting of the Commonwealth Consultative Group on Environment
26 April 1995, United Nations, New York¹**

Summary of Proceedings

Agenda Item 1: Opening of Meeting

The Commonwealth Deputy Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, The Hon Sir Humphrey Maud KCMG, opened the meeting with some introductory remarks (see Annex 1).

In his introductory remarks, the Chairman, The Rt Hon John Gummer MP, Britain's Secretary of State for the Environment, observed that one of the particular contributions of the Commonwealth to international discussions was its ability to discuss issues in an informal, efficient and spontaneous manner. Emphasising the need to carry forward the spirit of Rio de Janeiro, he noted that while it was easy to create a positive spirit in international discussions, experience had shown that it was difficult subsequently to turn that spirit into reality because of a tendency to get bogged down in details. He stressed that governments needed to keep the spirit of Rio constantly in their minds recognising the enormous responsibility they had for creating a world for future generations which was better than the one they had inherited. It was important that governments understood each other and in particular that countries in the North understood the viewpoints of countries in the South. Mr Gummer said he was pleased that members of the Commonwealth were able to co-operate with each other on several initiatives. India had worked with Britain on forestry matters, as had Canada and Malaysia. Initiatives such as these, and informal meetings of Environment Ministers such as those at Magog, Agra, and Bocket Hall, were a practical expression of the spirit of Rio, and helped to achieve a considerable degree of understanding between countries.

Agenda Item 2: Adoption of the Agenda

The Meeting adopted the draft agenda without revision.

Agenda Item 3: Review of progress in strengthening international co-operation for sustainable development

Several representatives identified issues which were of particular concern to their countries and suggested ways in which the Commonwealth could contribute to strengthening international co-operation on those issues.

The Meeting noted that while the Berlin Conference of Parties to the Framework Convention on Climate Change had agreed to start a process of negotiations to strengthen the commitments of industrialised countries to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to advance the implementation of the existing commitments of developing countries, the Conference's outcome had fallen short of the expectations of some countries, particularly the small island states. Some

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

representatives of Commonwealth small island states expressed concern about their countries' acute vulnerability to sea-level rise and underscored the urgency of achieving substantial reductions in emissions of greenhouse gases, as called for in the Protocol proposed by the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS). It was noted that the efforts of AOSIS had been very helpful and the need to maintain pressure on the major sources of greenhouse gas emissions was stressed. It was suggested that the Commonwealth could: mobilise support for strengthening commitments of industrialised countries to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (pursuant to the Berlin Mandate) and raise pressure on the major polluters; and build up international assistance to protect small island states against sea-level rise as well as adapt to the effects of climate change.

Some representatives referred to the steps their countries had taken to make development environmentally sustainable. One representative pointed out that her country had adopted an integrated approach involving action on several fronts: reducing poverty and unemployment and liberalising the economy; legislation for pollution control; measures to phase out chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) and implement the Conventions on climate change and biological diversity; strict enforcement of a forestry master plan; environmental impact assessments (EIAs); incentives to promote the use of environmentally sound technologies; and environmental education. Major constraints to her country's efforts to achieve environmentally sound development included limited financial resources, inadequate capacity to undertake EIAs, and poor access to state-of-the-art environmentally sound technologies. Another representative referred to the links between poverty, structural adjustment and the environment and drew attention to how poverty aggravated environmental degradation, including damage to forest resources.

The Group noted that some countries lacked basic capacities (institutional, legislative, human) for environmental management which were taken for granted in other countries. The Commonwealth could play a valuable role in assisting these countries through the sharing of experience and expertise. The benefits of sharing experience and information on national sustainable development planning, and of strengthening co-operation for the sharing and transfer of environmentally sound technologies (particularly in the energy sector), were also stressed. It was suggested that the Commonwealth should:

- Promote consultations at pan-Commonwealth and regional levels on environmental management and institutional and policy development.
- Use existing networks to exchange experience and information on the development of national plans/strategies for sustainable development.
- Strengthen capacities to undertake environmental impact assessments and explore the use of economic instruments in environmental management.
- Help countries to access state of the art environmentally sound technologies (ESTs) and facilitate transfer/sharing of ESTs among power utilities (e.g. through twinning arrangements).

- Support Canada's initiative to establish a trust fund, under the World Bank's auspices, to facilitate transfer of ESTs to developing countries; and support Canada's proposal to make it into a Commonwealth trust fund.
- Identify ways and means of mobilising additional financial resources to support sustainable development.

Representatives of Commonwealth small island developing states emphasised the need for effective follow-up to the 1994 Barbados Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. They attached particular importance to the implementation of the Small Island Developing States Information Network (SIDSNET) and the Small Island Developing States Technical Assistance Programme (SIDSTAP). The Meeting noted that the experience of the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation, in providing assistance to small states and in promoting technical co-operation among developing countries, would be particularly helpful in relation to SIDS/TAP. Currently, almost half of the Secretariat's total assistance to member countries was directed to small states. At its meeting in London on 1 May, the Commonwealth Consultative Group on Small States would be reviewing follow-up to the Barbados Conference. Concern was expressed about the severe human resource constraints which made it difficult for many small member states to compile national reports on their implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action as well as the UNCED agreements and international Conventions. It was suggested that the Commonwealth should:

- Continue to contribute to the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action and, in particular, assist the implementation of the SIDSNET and SIDSTAP initiatives, working in co-operation with the United Nations Development Programme.
- Help small states in meeting various post-UNCED commitments and national reporting requirements (e.g. in relation to CSD and Barbados follow-up, the Conventions on Climate Change and Biological Diversity etc).
- Hold informal consultations on how to stream-line national reporting requirements with a view to reducing the burden they placed, particularly on developing countries with limited human resource capacities.

It was pointed out that the Commonwealth's capacity to influence the CSD's deliberations could be increased if Commonwealth initiatives were fed early into the Commission's inter-sessional preparations. It was important to bear this in mind in looking ahead to the 1996 CSD review of the implementation of Chapter 17 of Agenda 21 (which dealt with oceans, seas and coastal areas), which was of interest to several Commonwealth countries. The Meeting noted that Britain proposed to hold an international workshop on oceans-related issues during the course of 1995.

Agenda Item 4:

The Sustainable Management of Forest Resources

The Group's discussions covered several issues including national and international initiatives for sustainable forest management (SFM), the Iwokrama Rain Forest Programme in Guyana, and ways of strengthening Commonwealth co-operation on forestry matters. There was general agreement that the Commonwealth was well placed to play a lead role in setting the tone for future international discussions on forestry matters. Appreciation was expressed for the spirit of mutual trust and co-operation which had facilitated the joint initiatives undertaken by Britain and India, and Canada and Malaysia, and for Guyana's generosity in setting aside almost a million acres of its rain forest for the Iwokrama Programme. The following main points and proposals emerged from the Group's discussions:

- Initiatives such as those undertaken by Britain and India, and Canada and Malaysia, as well as the Iwokrama Programme, suggested that the Commonwealth enjoyed comparative advantage in this field, enabling it to strengthen international dialogue and co-operation on forestry matters. Given the diversity of forestry interests represented in the association, the Commonwealth could play a very important role in consensus building between developed and developing countries.
- There should be a stronger Commonwealth dimension to the Iwokrama Programme (an information brochure on the Programme was circulated at the Meeting). Following the finalisation of a Medium Term Plan (1995-2000) and the establishment of a donor support group, it was hoped that Commonwealth governments/institutions with expertise in the areas covered by the Programme, would contribute to its implementation, by providing funding and personnel, and sharing expertise and information. The Iwokrama Programme could be a catalyst for developing wider Commonwealth networks on forestry.
- Consideration should be given to establishing a consortium of Commonwealth institutions to support SFM. The Commonwealth could pool its expertise and experience in SFM and help to improve co-ordination of international assistance for forestry projects. It could also help to increase awareness of the importance of SFM.
- Canada's Model Forests Programme could stimulate the development of a Commonwealth model forests programme. Canada's work on criteria and indicators for SFM (a document on this was circulated at the Meeting) would be of interest to other Commonwealth countries and provide a basis for further work on the subject.
- There is a particular need to secure greater integration of the industrial sector in SFM.
- Local communities should be fully involved in the design and implementation of SFM projects; additional financial resources and technical assistance to

support SFM mobilised; and exchange of experience with SFM on a South-South basis encouraged.

- Closer links should be established between the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Commonwealth Forestry Association and the Commonwealth Forestry Conference (CFC). The recommendations of the 1993 Malaysia CFC had unfortunately not received adequate attention at the 1993 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM). There was a need to make more effective use of the CFC and ensure that the outcomes of the 1997 Harare CFC received attention.
- It would be helpful to develop inventories of forestry expertise, particularly at regional levels, which could be tapped by member countries.
- Consideration should be given to identifying niche areas where the Commonwealth could contribute collectively to the work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests established by the CSD. Meetings of Commonwealth countries could be convened in the wings of the Panel's meetings in order to co-ordinate Commonwealth positions and initiatives.

Agenda Item 5: Any other business

The Chairman expressed the hope that the Commonwealth, adopting a selective approach to the wide-ranging international environmental agenda, would be able to increase its collective influence on the deliberations of the CSD as well as other international fora. The Meeting agreed that the Commonwealth was a particularly useful forum for informal and frank dialogue on environmental issues and that it would be beneficial to continue to have Commonwealth consultative meetings. These should be convened in the wings of the CSD, as well as other major international meetings (e.g. UNEP's Governing Council) as appropriate, bearing in mind that the Secretariat's resource constraints will require a degree of selectivity. The Meeting also agreed that all interested Commonwealth governments would be welcome to participate in future meetings of the Consultative Group.

It was suggested that since the background paper CCGE(95)4 provided useful information on the Secretariat's work on environmentally sustainable development, it should be widely disseminated among the relevant functional ministries in Commonwealth countries.

A vote of thanks was given to the Chairman.

Introductory Remarks by The Hon Sir Humphrey Maud KCMG, Commonwealth Deputy Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, to the Commonwealth Consultative Group on Environment, 26 April 1995, United Nations, New York

Ladies and Gentlemen.

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to this Commonwealth meeting. The Secretary-General has asked me to convey to you his best wishes for its success. As you know, he hopes that your discussions here will enable us to make a collective Commonwealth contribution towards keeping the spirit of Rio de Janeiro alive and putting the results of UNCED into effect.

I would like to express my particular appreciation to Britain's Secretary of State for the Environment, the Rt Hon John Gummer. He has travelled literally at supersonic speed this morning from London to chair this important meeting. With his permission, I will make a few brief introductory remarks before asking him to assume the function of Chairman.

Since the Group met in 1993, much has happened on the international sustainable development agenda.

- The Conventions on Climate Change and Biological Diversity have entered into force.
- The international community has agreed a new Convention to combat desertification and drought.
- The Global Environment Facility has been restructured and replenished.
- Detailed discussions have been taking place on how to put into effect the Rio commitments on financing environmentally sustainable development and transferring environmentally sound technologies.
- A Programme of Action to promote the sustainable development of small island developing states has been agreed.
- New issues such as the linkages between trade and the environment are attracting increasing attention. A brain-storming group of some leading environmental experts which met in Marlborough House last week suggested that we should be giving a much higher priority to integrating economic and environmental policies, and exploring the use of economic instruments to foster environmentally sustainable development.

I hope that under item 3 of your draft agenda, you will be able to review these and other major developments and identify any specific Commonwealth concerns in relation to them.

The fourth item on the draft agenda recognises the crucial importance of forests to the socio-economic and environmental well-being of many Commonwealth countries. Some of those present here have been actively involved in important initiatives in the run-up to the CSD. While good progress has been made on forestry issues since Rio, there continue to be many subjects which are contentious - for instance, trade in forest products; compensating countries for the global environmental benefits they provide by conserving forests; and the issue of an international convention on forests. We may be hearing more from our Chairman on this later this morning. The need for more dialogue and consensus building is widely recognised. So is the need for practical action on the ground. As the Secretariat's background paper (CCGE(95)2) points out, there are several factors which give the Commonwealth a distinct comparative advantage in promoting co-operation for the sustainable management of all types of forests. The association can give stronger direction and leadership to international efforts, building on the mechanisms already in place and drawing on the wealth of knowledge and expertise available in many member countries.

The Iwokrama Rain Forest Programme in Guyana - with its twin objectives of conservation and sustainable use of forest resources and biodiversity - is an excellent example of how the Commonwealth can promote effective partnerships for co-operation where it counts most - which is on the ground. Experts from Britain, India, Canada and the United States, working as partners with Guyanese experts and institutions, local Amerindian communities, and other international and national agencies, are helping to implement this unique Programme. There are many areas where Commonwealth institutions and programmes could contribute to the Iwokrama Programme's research, training and other activities. Commonwealth Heads of Government have stressed the importance of a continuing Commonwealth role in the Programme's evolution. We hope that a message of strong support for this flagship activity will emerge from today's meeting as well as ideas on how it should be linked to similar initiatives in other Commonwealth countries. The conclusions of your discussions will be of particular interest to the Secretary-General, who as you may know, has agreed to be a member of the World Commission on Forests and Sustainable Development.

In addition to supporting the Iwokrama Programme, the Secretariat's work on environmentally sustainable development also aims to promote consensus-building and policy development, as well as capacity building in member countries through policy advice, technical assistance and training. The Secretariat's work is focused on areas where it has comparative advantage and can have maximum impact. One of the background papers (CCGE(95)4) you would have received for this meeting provides details of our work. I hope you will be very frank in indicating any areas you believe should be given more emphasis by the Secretariat.

You will recall that when he wrote on 1 March about this meeting, the Secretary-General proposed that you might look at the criteria for the Consultative

Group's membership. The Secretariat has provided a Note (CCGE(95)3) suggesting some options for your consideration. I hope that you will be able to reach a common view on this subject, which we will be able to use as the basis for issuing invitations for future meetings. We would welcome any other ideas on how to strengthen the effectiveness of this Group's future meetings.

May I conclude with the observation that Commonwealth meetings tend to be distinct from other international meetings. They work best in an informal atmosphere where dialogue flows freely, we avoid written interventions and we talk eyeball to eyeball. With this in mind, may I suggest that you should try to:

- identify specific areas where the Commonwealth can play a useful role in promoting co-operation and agreement and make proposals for the consideration of the CHOGM in New Zealand; and
- give the Secretariat some guidance on how its work on environmentally sustainable development can best serve the needs of member countries.

It gives me great pleasure to now give the floor to your Chairman, the Rt Hon John Gummer.

Thank you very much.

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List of Participants

Antigua and Barbuda

The Hon Bernard S Percival
Minister for the Environment

Australia

Senator John Faulkner
Minister for the Environment

● **Bahamas**

Mr Lynn P Holowesko
Ambassador for the Environment

Bangladesh

Mr Reaz Rahman
Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations, New York

Barbados

Ms Theresa Marshall
Chargé D'Affaires, Permanent Mission to the United Nations, New York

Britain

● The Rt Hon John Gummer MP (Chairman)
Secretary of State for the Environment

Canada

Mr Clifford Lincoln
Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of the Environment

Ghana

Dr Christine Amoako-Nuama
Minister for Environment, Science and Technology

Guyana

Mr Navin Chandarpal
Adviser to the President for Science, Technology, Energy, Natural Resources and
the Environment

India

Mr Keshav Desiraju
Director, Ministry of Environment and Forests

Maldives

Mr Ahmed Zaki
Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations, New York

Malaysia

Dr Othman Y Abdullah
Secretary-General, Ministry of Primary Industries

Malta

Mr Victor Pace
First Secretary, Permanent Mission to the United Nations, New York

Pakistan

Mr Omar Kureishi
Member, Environment Protection Council of Pakistan

Samoa

Tuiloma Neroni Slade
Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations, New York

Singapore

Mr Crispian Tan
First Secretary, Permanent Mission to the United Nations, New York

Sri Lanka

The Hon Mrs Srimani Athulathmudali
Minister of Transport, Environment and Women's Affairs

Tanzania

Mr Ulli K Mwambulukutu
Chargé D'Affaires (ai), Permanent Mission to the United Nations, New York