

**Fifth Meeting of the Commonwealth Consultative Group on Environment  
April 1998, United Nations, New York<sup>1</sup>**

**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, the Hon Molwyn Joseph, Antigua and Barbuda's Minister for Planning, Implementation and Environment, said that it was a great honour for him to be chairing the fifth meeting of the Commonwealth Consultative Group on Environment (CCGE). He noted that the Meeting's special theme was tremendously relevant to Antigua and Barbuda, given its long history of difficulties with freshwater and experience of chronic water shortages. He particularly hoped that the Meeting would enable participants to share their diverse experience in water resources management.

The Chairman endorsed Sir Humphrey Maud's suggestion that the Meeting's proceedings be kept as informal as possible with candid dialogue, and urged delegates to be brief in their interventions so as to give everyone who wished to, a chance to speak.

***Agenda Item 2: Adoption of the Agenda***

The Meeting adopted the provisional agenda set out in the Secretariat's Note CCGE(98)2(Admin) without revision.

***Agenda Item 3: The Sustainable Management and Use of Freshwater Resources:***

***Strategic Issues and an Agenda for Action***

The Chairman invited discussion on item 3, the special theme of the Meeting, encouraging participants to focus on the seven major areas for action identified in part II of the Secretariat's paper CCGE(98)1, namely: developing effective policy frameworks for freshwater management; institutional strengthening and capacity building; financing for water; water pricing; improving co-operation between riparian states; intergovernmental dialogue on freshwater; and Commonwealth co-operation.

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<sup>1</sup> A list of participants in the Meeting is at Annex II

Most participants welcomed the Secretariat's paper as a good basis for discussion and action. Some speakers noted that the policy approaches adopted in different parts of the Commonwealth inevitably varied depending upon national economic, social and environmental circumstances, and that there was much to be learned from sharing this diverse experience in water resources management. One representative observed that a major lesson his country had learned was the importance of gaining a better understanding of the functioning of freshwater ecosystems before undertaking major infrastructure projects such as the construction of dams. Another pointed out that the current water crisis in his country, which was having a pervasive adverse impact on the economy and society, had highlighted the need for major policy changes in order to integrate land-use planning with water resources management, protect watersheds and reduce industrial pollution of watercourses.

A third speaker observed that the inequities of the apartheid era had necessitated a complete recasting of his country's policy framework and legislation for freshwater management. Much greater emphasis was now being given to meeting basic human needs, increasing efficiency in water use and devolving responsibility for water management from the central government to catchment area authorities. Some speakers drew attention to the problems of coping with extreme situations of floods and droughts (aggravated by the effects of the el-Niño phenomenon). The importance of consulting all stake-holders in the development of national water policies was stressed by several others.

Representatives of small island developing states drew attention to the special vulnerabilities and constraints they experienced. These included the threat of saline water intruding into aquifers as a result of rising sea levels due to global warming; the absence of rivers (in some countries); reliance on a single aquifer or a limited number of watersheds; and pressures for land and forest resources which caused degradation of catchment areas.

Several participants considered it vital to strengthen institutions and improve national capacities for water management. Priority areas identified included improving knowledge of water resources and freshwater ecosystems through detailed assessments, inventories and studies; greater use of geographic information systems in water management; and the targeting of official development assistance (ODA) to support institutional strengthening and training in countries with weak capacities. One representative said his country would be happy to assist such countries through capacity building programmes and information-sharing.

On financing for water infrastructure and water pricing, general support was expressed for the need to mobilise greater resources for investment in the water sector, and to create appropriate incentives for

conservation as well as more efficient and productive use of freshwater. Several speakers pointed out that in countries with a high incidence of poverty, and where the private sector was reluctant to invest, the state continued to have an important role to play in the provision of water-related infrastructure and services. Furthermore, in situations where poor people were unable to pay for water and sanitation, carefully targeted and transparent subsidies would ensure their welfare was not undermined. Some participants noted that in their countries, it was essential to meet basic needs for “social water”, particularly since access to water and sanitation was unevenly distributed among their populations.

At the same time, several speakers recognised that since water was a finite resource, it was important to adopt policies, adapted to different national economic and social circumstances, which aimed to the extent possible to take account of the full costs of water management and use. Also, market-based economic instruments, based on the polluter pays and user pays principles, needed to be more widely used in this process.

Several participants referred to the difficulties of financing the large capital investments in the water sector needed in their countries and stressed the need for increasing external grant and concessional financing from bilateral and multilateral agencies. They also called for greater access to technologies and related know-how. Representatives of some small islands pointed to the high per capita costs of providing water and sanitation to small communities in geographically dispersed and distant atolls. The role of ODA in helping to develop an enabling environment for more effective water management policies was underlined by some speakers, and others highlighted the importance of incentives to draw the private sector into partnerships with the public sector, with a sharing of the risks associated with investments in the water sector. The forms such partnerships could take included contracting out specific services, management contracts, long-term concessions, and full privatisation of some services.

On co-operation among riparian states, some speakers noted that their water policies took account of obligations to downstream neighbours and stressed the importance of regional co-operation and harmonisation of policies. It was noted that agreements such as the 1995 SADC Shared Watercourse Systems Protocol provided good guidance for co-operation among the riparian states. Some speakers observed that the Commonwealth, drawing on the experience of its members in this field, could help promote consensus on the development of a shared vision for greater co-operation in the management of international and transboundary watercourses, including groundwater, in order to maximise mutual benefits for riparian states.

On the question of future intergovernmental dialogue on freshwater, several speakers noted that the CCGE was a particularly valuable forum to exchange views on major sustainable development issues and promote consensus on them in other fora. They expressed the hope that the Commonwealth would work collectively to achieve a positive outcome on freshwater issues at the sixth session of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development, and to promote effective international discussions and action thereafter, in order to accelerate the implementation of existing international commitments and agreements on freshwater.

Representatives of small states expressed appreciation for the support the Commonwealth was already providing to assist the implementation of the 1994 Barbados Programme Programme of Action for the sustainable development of small island states, which would be reviewed by a special session of the UN General Assembly in 1999. They expressed the hope that the Commonwealth would continue to ensure that the special concerns and needs of small states were addressed adequately in future international discussions on freshwater as well as other environmental issues.

The Meeting agreed that the Commonwealth's wide range of experience and expertise in different facets of water management should be harnessed to strengthen co-operation, and general support was expressed for the recommendations made on this subject in paragraphs 55-56 of the Secretariat's paper CCGE(98)1. Several areas for co-operation on freshwater issues were identified as being particularly promising, including exchange of experience, information and expertise, as well as demonstration projects, in key areas of water management; technical assistance and training to develop skills and institutional capacities, with particular attention given to the special needs of small states; the creation of a Commonwealth-wide water information network linking water experts and institutions; and the promotion of public/private partnerships to increase investment in water infrastructure and services.

In bringing the Meeting's deliberations on Agenda Item 3 to a close, the Chairman observed that the discussions had been very enlightening, helping to flesh out an agenda for action on freshwater. He said that unless he heard any objections, he would assume that the Meeting agreed that a Summary Statement of its conclusions on freshwater should be prepared and issued on the authority of the Chair, after the Meeting. (The text of this Summary Statement is at Annex III).

#### ***Agenda Item 4: Any Other Business***

The Chairman invited Sir Humphrey Maud to report on progress in implementing the Iwokrama International Rain Forest Programme in Guyana.

Sir Humphrey Maud observed that, as the Secretariat's paper, CCGE(98)2, suggested, the Iwokrama Programme was an exemplar of the Commonwealth's practical contribution to the implementation of the 1992 Rio agenda on forests, biodiversity and climate change. In his remarks to the CCGE the previous year, he had pointed out that after meticulous planning and widespread consultation with a number of Commonwealth countries, the Iwokrama Programme was poised to take-off, if adequate resources could be mobilised to fuel the launching of its new phase of operations. He had also underlined the importance of the Commonwealth taking the lead in mobilising these resources, and suggested it set itself a target of raising a core of seed capital amounting to \$4-5 million.

He was pleased to be able to report to the CCGE that the Iwokrama Programme had indeed achieved take-off, and major progress had been made in strengthening its financial base, management and governance.

Britain's pledge of the substantial contribution of \$5 million at the Edinburgh Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in 1997, had been instrumental in leveraging support from other sources. The Secretariat had organised a meeting of donors in Brussels in January 1998, which was chaired jointly by the Commonwealth Secretary-General, the Commissioner for Development at the European Commission, and the World Bank. Total financial pledges of support made or confirmed at the meeting amounted to approximately \$8.2 million. The main contributors included Britain, the European Commission, the International Tropical Timber Organisation, Australia, Canada's International Development Research Centre, Mauritius and the Maldives. Details of the specific commitments made by donors were provided at Annex 1 of the Secretariat's paper.

Sir Humphrey Maud pointed out that although the World Bank was unable to make a specific pledge in Brussels, it had expressed strong support for Iwokrama's objectives. He had been re-assured to learn in Washington ten days previously that the World Bank had achieved some success in identifying possible windows through which it could make a contribution. He observed that the Secretariat had therefore been successful in meeting more than half of the Iwokrama Programme's total funding requirement of \$13 million for the period 1998-2002. This was a major step towards making the Iwokrama International Centre, which managed the Programme, a stronger institution capable of accelerating the implementation of its major, highly relevant and ambitious projects. But some \$5 million were still needed to complete the first phase of the Programme's launch, and the lead given by the Commonwealth needed to be consolidated. Gaps in funding also had to be filled in important areas. The Iwokrama Centre needed to build its own Headquarters and to recruit additional senior staff to manage its operations.

Sir Humphrey Maud said that the management of the Centre had been greatly strengthened with the appointment, since July 1997, of Mr David Cassells as its Director-General. He was present at the CCGE's Meeting and would be briefing it about how the core funds mobilised thus far would be used to address a number of priorities in the fields of sustainable forest management, biodiversity conservation, human development, research and communications. Copies of the most recent Iwokrama Bulletin had been distributed to participants and the Iwokrama Centre's 1997 Annual Report, which was being finalised for publication, would be sent to governments later.

He informed the CCGE that, at its second meeting in Guyana in March 1998, the Centre's Board of Trustees had approved a detailed work programme for 1998 and adopted a number of decisions to strengthen programme implementation. Most significantly, the Board had decided to form a sub-committee which had a number of tasks. It would help to develop operational guidelines for the formation of partnerships between the Iwokrama Centre and the private sector - a crucial area if the Programme was to become self-financing in ten years. It would address the sharing of revenues, arising from the Iwokrama Centre's activities, between the Centre, local communities and the Government of Guyana. And it would ensure the protection of the intellectual property rights of indigenous communities, as well as their traditional knowledge, for which specific protocols were being developed.

Sir Humphrey Maud said that a firm foundation had therefore been laid to finance the expansion of the Iwokrama Centre's practical operations, with the support of a broader alliance of Commonwealth and other countries. It was particularly encouraging to see growing recognition among donors that Iwokrama was not a country project confined by the parameters of bilateral assistance, but an international programme that was addressing the critical need to manage the world's tropical forests sustainably. He very much hoped that as further concrete outputs were achieved, which benefited local communities, Guyana, the Commonwealth and the wider world, additional Commonwealth countries who had not already contributed to the Programme would feel able to reinforce support from existing collaborators, thereby establishing this unique enterprise on secure economic foundations and a fully pan-Commonwealth basis.

The Chairman invited the Representative of Guyana to make a statement.

The Representative of Guyana, Mr Navin Chandarpal, observed that the work of the Secretariat and the active interest of the Secretary-General and Sir Humphrey Maud had helped to boost recognition and support for the Iwokrama Programme in the Commonwealth. Since June 1997, when the

CCGE had last met, major progress had been made. The 1997 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Edinburgh had been a landmark event with Britain pledging \$5 million for the Programme and Heads of Government affirming their strong commitment to its objectives. The donors meeting in Brussels in January 1998 had been pivotal in securing additional commitments, including the generous contributions of Mauritius and the Maldives.

He felt that the outcome of the Brussels meeting had been particularly re-assuring since, following the adoption of the Iwokrama Act by Guyana's Parliament in 1996 - which established a sound legal foundation for Iwokrama - commitments from donors had not been forthcoming, and there had been serious concerns about how the Programme would be funded after the Global Environment Facility's initial \$3 million grant was exhausted in 1997. He also welcomed the contributions made by Mr David Cassells, the Director-General of the Iwokrama Centre, to motivating the Centre's staff, raising the profile of its activities, and developing good interaction with local Amerindian communities. The Government of Guyana now looked forward to the swift implementation of the Centre's various projects, and hoped that additional donors would come forward to fill the funding gap of \$5 million, which included financing for the construction of the Centre's Headquarters and improvements to the Field Station in the Iwokrama forest.

Mr Chandarpal emphasised that the Iwokrama Programme enjoyed the support of all political parties in Guyana and was well placed to succeed, providing major benefits at various levels. Guyana very much hoped that the enthusiasm for the Programme, which was evident in Edinburgh and Brussels, would be sustained, and that greater Commonwealth involvement would be secured in order to help it to achieve its noble objectives.

The Chairman observed that the Iwokrama Programme clearly was of major global significance deserving the widest possible international support. He therefore hoped that additional donors would come forward from the Commonwealth to contribute to the Programme.

The Representative of Canada said that his Government regretted it had been unable to participate in the donors meeting in Brussels because of the major ice-storm which had affected his country at that time. However, after the Brussels meeting, the Canadian International Development Agency had begun discussions with the Iwokrama Centre, and a technical mission was expected to visit Guyana later in the year to define the nature and extent of Canadian support. He said that although he was not in a position to mention any specific figure, all going well, Canada's contribution would be a significant one.

The Chairman invited Mr David Cassells, Director-General of the Iwokrama International Centre for Rain Forest Conservation and Development, to make a presentation.

Mr Cassells said he had found it particularly encouraging to see an expanding international partnership, fostered by the Commonwealth, to support the Iwokrama Centre's activities. This had been exemplified by the joint chairmanship of the Brussels donors meeting by the Commonwealth Secretariat, the European Commission and the World Bank. He was confident that Iwokrama would be able to attract support from additional donors as it proceeded to accelerate the implementation of its major projects. These included the development of protocols governing protection of intellectual property rights and benefits-sharing, which commanded a high priority.

After briefing participants about the Iwokrama forest's location, the Centre's governance and organisational structure, and some of the assumptions underlying the projections for income generation and funding requirements in its Business Plan, Mr Cassells outlined the immediate priorities the Centre would be addressing. These included: recruitment of a Director for Programme Implementation; the completion of protocols for the protection of intellectual property rights and benefits-sharing as well as guidelines for the formation of partnerships with the private sector; and forest inventories and zoning as well as the development of a forest management plan (with support from the ITTO), which would provide the basis for approaching commercial partners.

The Iwokrama Centre would also be expediting the development of a management plan for the road corridor passing through the Programme site; recruitment of project staff to implement sustainable human development projects funded by Britain; the launch of community conservation and information/outreach programmes; recruitment of staff for forest management (with support from the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation), and for projects to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity (funded by the European Commission); and the development of arrangements for collaboration with institutions in the Caribbean region.

The Representative of Britain said that his country's Department for International Development (DfID) was actively supporting the Iwokrama Programme, contributing \$5 million for its sustainable human development projects over the following three years. These would give emphasis to helping local communities to achieve sustainable livelihoods. The British Secretary of State for International Development, Ms Clare Short proposed to visit Guyana later that month to acquaint herself with Iwokrama's activities. He said that Britain was pleased that its contribution had stimulated support from other sources and had high expectations for the Iwokrama Programme's

success. He also paid tribute to the Government of Guyana for setting aside almost a million acres of its rain forest for the Iwokrama Programme and congratulated the Secretariat for its involvement in the Programme's development.

The Chairman said that he welcomed Britain's substantial contribution to the Iwokrama Programme and hoped that this would inspire other donors to contribute to it. He enquired whether anyone wished to raise any other matters.

The Representative of Britain observed that the sustainable management of oceans, which would be one of the main sectoral themes addressed by the 1999 session of the CSD, was an issue of considerable interest to many Commonwealth countries. It was also of particular interest to Britain's DfID which was funding several projects in developing countries which aimed to alleviate poverty and improve environmental conservation in poorer communities living in coastal zones. He informed the Meeting that Britain was partly funding a Ministerial-level meeting on oceans management in Cape Town in December 1998, in collaboration with a London-based international NGO, which would focus on sub-Saharan African inter-regional co-operation for the protection of marine and coastal environments. £70,000 had been set aside to provide advisory support for this event. He also mentioned that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office was funding a 3-day UK-Caribbean Workshop on Marine Biodiversity in October 1998, co-sponsored by the Government of Jamaica, which would be of interest to Commonwealth Caribbean countries.

The Chairman thanked the Representative of Britain for bringing these important forward-looking initiatives to the attention of the Meeting. He was confident that they would attract the interest of several Commonwealth countries.

The Representative of South Africa said he wished to inform the Meeting that an independent World Commission on Dams had been established, with support from the World Bank and the World Conservation Union (IUCN), to examine the complex and controversial issues concerning the impacts of dam construction on sustainable development. He noted that both the Chair and vice-Chair, as well as several members of the Commission, were from the Commonwealth, and expressed the hope that interested Commonwealth members would contribute actively to the work of the Commission, which would involve considerable research and examination of evidence from various countries and organisations.

The Chairman thanked participants for their contributions, and observed that these had contributed to a successful Meeting which had highlighted the complexities of freshwater management. He thanked the

Secretariat for the preparations it had undertaken for the Meeting and expressed particular appreciation for the guidance and support he had received from Sir Humphrey Maud. He noted that since there had been no objections to the proposal for a Summary Statement of the Chairman, which would capture the main conclusions of the CCGE's discussions on freshwater, this would be prepared and distributed after the Meeting.

A vote of thanks was given to the Chairman.

## **Annex I**

**Introductory Remarks by Sir Humphrey Maud, Commonwealth Deputy  
Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs  
to  
the Commonwealth Consultative Group on Environment, 28 April 1998,  
United Nations, New York**

Ministers, Ambassadors, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I welcome you all to this Commonwealth Meeting and would like to extend especially warm greetings to colleagues - notably the two distinguished Ministers from South Africa - who are participating in the work of the Consultative Group for the first time. We are fortunate to be meeting a day before the high-level segment of the CSD. Your discussions could generate some useful ideas and proposals which are beneficial to its deliberations. The Secretary-General has asked me to convey his best wishes for this Meeting's success.

I would like to express my particular appreciation to the Honourable Molwyn Joseph, Antigua and Barbuda's Minister for Planning, Implementation and Environment, for agreeing to steer our proceedings. As we have only three hours to conduct our business, I will make a few brief observations, with your permission Minister, before I hand over to you.

The main theme of today's Meeting, which we will take up under Provisional Agenda Item 3, is a dominant concern in almost all parts of the Commonwealth. Despite progress in improving some aspects of freshwater management since 1992, there remains a substantial "unfinished agenda" to be tackled by the intergovernmental process on freshwater, which is to be launched by the CSD. The Secretariat's background paper, CCGE(98)1, is intended to encourage you to focus on some strategic issues and to think in terms of a bold agenda for further action. In doing so, I hope you will consider how our association's wide range of experience and expertise in different facets of water resources management can be harnessed to strengthen co-operation for the benefit of all members. You may also wish to

discuss how the Commonwealth could enrich future intergovernmental dialogue on freshwater under the auspices of the CSD, to which a Commonwealth consensus could be presented by one of our members.

In order to enable the Commonwealth's collective voice to be heard in New York, I propose that we circulate a brief and non-controversial summary statement by the Chair after the Group's meeting, as we did last year.

Under Item 4 of the Provisional Agenda, you will be briefed about the progress made by the Iwokrama International Rain Forest Programme in Guyana. This pioneering Commonwealth initiative is dedicated to demonstrating how resources of tropical forests can be both conserved and sustainably used for human development. The lessons learned from this unique experiment in almost a million acres of forest will be of benefit to Guyana, the Commonwealth and the wider world. During the past year, the Commonwealth has taken the lead in mobilising substantial new seed capital which will permit an expansion of the Programme's activities. Its management and governance have also been strengthened. I will be saying more on these subjects later in our proceedings. I would only like to emphasise, for the moment, that the financial contributions to the Programme made by Mauritius and the Maldives, small island states threatened by sea-level rise, underscore the Iwokrama Programme's contribution towards reducing global warming.

After discussing the Iwokrama Programme, under any other business, members will have an opportunity to raise any other matters they feel are important, for discussion by the Group. I believe Britain may have some thoughts to share with us.

Finally, I have no doubt that in your deliberations today, you will wish to maintain the custom of informality, brevity and plain speaking, which has made successive meetings of the CCGE so useful and enjoyable.

It is with pleasure that I now give the floor to our Chairman, Minister Molwyn Joseph.

**Fifth Meeting of the Commonwealth Consultative Group on Environment  
28 April 1998, United Nations, New York**

**List of Participants**

***Antigua and Barbuda***

The Hon Molwyn Joseph (Chairman)  
Minister for Planning, Implementation  
and Environment

Mr Patrick Lewis  
Ambassador/Permanent Representative  
Permanent Mission of Antigua and Barbuda to the  
United Nations, New York

***Britain***

Mr Alistair Wray  
Water Resources Adviser  
Department for International Development

Mr David Townsend  
Environment, Science and Energy Department  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

***Brunei Darussalam***

Mr Naa'im Salleh  
Second Secretary  
Permanent Mission of Brunei Darussalam to the  
United Nations, New York

***Canada***

The Hon John A Fraser  
Ambassador for the Environment

Ms Shirley Lewchuk  
Special Advisor to the Ambassador

***Fiji***

Mr Sakiusa Rabuka  
Deputy Permanent Representative  
Permanent Mission of Fiji to the  
United Nations, New York

Mr Jone Drannimasi  
Second Secretary  
Permanent Mission of Fiji to the  
United Nations, New York

***Ghana***

The Hon J E Afful, MP  
Minister of Environment,  
Science and Technology

Mr E P D Barnes  
Director  
Ministry of Environment,  
Science & Technology

***Grenada***

Dr Robert E Millette  
Ambassador/Permanent Representative  
Permanent Mission of Grenada to the  
United Nations, New York

Dr Lamuel A Stanislaus  
Ambassador/Deputy Permanent Representative  
Permanent Mission of Grenada to the  
United Nations, New York

***Guyana***

Mr Navindranauth Chandarpal, MP  
Adviser to the President on Science,  
Technology and Environment

Mr George Talbot  
Permanent Mission of Guyana to the  
United Nations, New York

***Jamaica***

Ms M Patricia Durrant  
Ambassador/Permanent Representative  
Permanent Mission of Jamaica to the  
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***Malaysia***

Mr Shukri Ibrahim  
Minister Counsellor  
Permanent Mission of Malaysia to the  
United Nations, New York

***Maldives***

Mr Ahmed Rasheed  
First Secretary, Charge d' Affaires a.i.  
Permanent Mission of Maldives to the  
United Nations, New York

***Malta***

Mr Anton Tabone  
Permanent Mission of Malta to the  
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***Mozambique***

Mr Carlos Dos Santos  
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Permanent Mission of Mozambique to the  
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Ms Fernanda Gomes  
Adviser

***New Zealand***

Mr Michael Powles  
Ambassador/Permanent Representative  
Permanent Mission of New Zealand to the  
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Mr Roger Ball  
First Secretary  
Permanent Mission of New Zealand to the

United Nations, New York

***Pakistan***

The Hon Syed Ahmed Mahmud  
Minister for Environment

***Seychelles***

Mr Claude Morel  
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United Nations, New York

***Singapore***

Ms Karen Tan  
Charge D'Affaires  
Permanent Mission of Singapore to the  
United Nations, New York

Mr Fook Seng Kwok  
First Secretary  
Permanent Mission of Singapore to the  
United Nations, New York

***South Africa***

Professor Kader Asmal  
Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry

Dr Z P Jordan  
Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism

***Tanzania***

Mr Richard T Dogani  
Minister Counsellor  
Permanent Mission of Tanzania to the  
United Nations, New York

***Trinidad & Tobago***

Ms Roslyn Khan Cummings  
First Secretary

Permanent Mission of Trinidad & Tobago to the  
United Nations, New York

***Commonwealth Secretariat***

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

Dr Ken Lum  
Director  
Science and Technology Division

Mr Chandrashekar Krishnan  
Chief Programme Officer (and Meeting Secretary)  
Environment Unit, Economic Affairs Division

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

***Iwokrama International Centre for Rain Forest Conservation and  
Development***

Mr David Cassells  
Director-General

**Fifth Meeting of the Commonwealth Consultative Group on Environment  
April 1998, United Nations, New York**

***Summary Statement of the Chairman***

Commonwealth Environment Ministers met on 28 April in New York for the fifth meeting of the Commonwealth Consultative Group on Environment, convened in the wings of the high-level segment of the 1998 session of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD). The meeting, which was chaired by the Hon Molwyn Joseph, Antigua and Barbuda's Minister for Planning, Implementation and Environment, focused on the sustainable management and use of freshwater resources as a special theme.

Ministers agreed that there remained a substantial "unfinished agenda" to be addressed by the intergovernmental process on freshwater to be launched by the CSD. They considered that effective measures were needed at national and international levels to promote the sustainable use of freshwater, and proposed an agenda for further action comprising the following elements:

- Adopt policies for water management which are based on an integrated, balanced, participatory approach, recognising water as both a social and economic good, vital for meeting basic human needs, food security, poverty alleviation and the protection of vital ecosystems. Policies should also be based on catchment areas as the unit of management, aim to increase access to drinking water and sanitation, and to improve pollution prevention and control.
- Strengthen institutional arrangements and enhance capacities for water demand management, as well as develop effective legislative frameworks and mechanisms to improve regulation and enforcement.
- Increase official development assistance, concessional lending, and technology transfer for the water sector, complemented by greater efforts to mobilise additional domestic resources, especially investment from the private sector. Explore more vigorously the potential for forming public/private partnerships to increase investment in water infrastructure and services.
- Adopt water pricing policies, adapted to different national economic and social circumstances, which aim to the extent possible to take account of the full costs (economic, environmental and social) of water management and use, and make greater use of well designed market-based economic

instruments based on the polluter pays and user pays principles. Moreover, any water subsidies should reflect social needs and ability to pay, ensuring that the basic needs of the poor are met.

- Promote consensus on the development of a shared vision for greater co-operation in the management of international and transboundary watercourses, including groundwater, in order to maximise mutual benefits for riparian states.
- Mobilise greater support for the efforts of small states, who face serious vulnerabilities and constraints in relation to freshwater, to develop integrated, sustainable and long-term water management strategies, as recommended by the 1994 Barbados Programme of Action.

Ministers agreed that the Commonwealth's wide range of experience and expertise in different facets of water resources management should be harnessed to strengthen co-operation, building upon existing programmes and projects. They suggested the following areas in particular:

- exchange of experience, information and expertise, as well as demonstration projects, in key areas (e.g. best practices in implementing measures to increase water-use efficiency in major sectors and to prevent and control pollution);
- technical assistance and training to develop skills and institutional capacities for water demand management, with particular attention given to the special needs of small states;
- the creation of a Commonwealth-wide water information network linking water experts and institutions; and
- the promotion of public/private partnerships to increase investment in water infrastructure and services; bodies such as the Commonwealth Partnership for Technology Management and the Commonwealth Business Forum could be encouraged to develop such partnerships.

Drawing on the rich diversity of their experience, Ministers agreed to deploy in the CSD's high-level segment their consensus on practical measures they wished to see pursued. In particular, they called on all Commonwealth countries to promote a time-bound intergovernmental process to accelerate the implementation of existing international commitments and agreements on freshwater, with agreement on the means of implementing these commitments.

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