



**Report of the
Commonwealth 7WAMM Preparatory Meeting of
Heads of National Women's Machineries (NWMs)**

1-2 March 2003, New York

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Introduction	1
Commonwealth 7WAMM Preparatory Meeting	2
Regional Caucuses	3
Critical Issues for Commonwealth Action	5
Summary of Decisions Taken	6
Learning/Sharing Session: Gender Mainstreaming, Poverty Eradication and MDGs	9
Learning/Sharing Session: Using the GMS Toolkit for Change Management	9
Conclusions	9

ANNEXES

1. Commonwealth Gender Reference Group	12
2. Opening Statement by Angela King	14
3. Opening Statement by Nancy Spence	19
4. Commonwealth Secretary-General's Message for International Women's Day	22
5. NGO Participation in 7WAMM	24
6. Recommendations from the Parallel Civil Society Meeting	27
7. Commonwealth-NGO Collaboration	28
8. 6WAMM Mandates Table	35
9. Agenda of Commonwealth 7WAMM Preparatory Meeting	40
10. Participants' List	42
11. Gender Section Publications List	50

INTRODUCTION

Consultation and sharing of experiences lie at the heart of the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth Gender/Women's Affairs Ministers Meeting (WAMM) is an integral part of the Commonwealth's consultative and consensus-building to advance gender equality in the Commonwealth. The triennial Commonwealth Gender/Women's Ministers Meeting, held in regionally rotating venues, allows the critical sharing of relevant experiences and progress at national, regional levels and pan-Commonwealth, discussion of emerging challenges, setting targets, defining new strategies, and building partnerships to move forward. Commonwealth action is presently guided by the principles and mechanism set out in the 1995 Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development and its Update (2000-2005).¹

A Commonwealth 7WAMM Preparatory Meeting of Heads of National Women's Machineries (NWMs) was held in New York, from 1 to 2 March 2003. The Meeting preceded the 47th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women. The main objective of the meeting was to begin the planning of the Seventh Gender/Women's Affairs Ministers Meeting (7WAMM). A total of 56 delegates, including three Ministers, participated in the 7WAMM Preparatory Meeting. Thirty-three (33) governments attended the meeting, with 17 countries represented by their New York Missions. (See list of participants at Annex 10.) A Commonwealth Gender Reference Group was approved by governments. (See Annex 1)

The Preparatory Meeting was held fifteen months ahead of the Seventh Gender/Women's Affairs Ministers Meeting. 7WAMM which is being held in Fiji on 30 May-2 June 2004, will precede the UN Conference on the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (Beijing+10) in 2005. 7WAMM will thus provide a strategic opportunity for Commonwealth Governments, the Secretariat and civil society to take stock of progress relating to the advancement of gender equality and equity since 1995 and make recommendations to advance the agenda in the next decade 2005-2015.

The Commonwealth's vision of equality between women and men is based on the association's fundamental values of democracy and good governance, human rights and the rule of law, and people-centred sustainable development. The last Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Coolom, Australia in March 2002 called for further efforts by governments and the Secretariat to put gender mainstreaming at the centre of all policy and programme initiatives notably in 4 priority areas: HIV/AIDS; gender and macro-economic policies including issues of trade and globalisation; women's human rights including violence against women; and participation in conflict resolution, peace-building and decision-making.

¹ Please see a summary at Annex 8. Copies of the 1995 Commonwealth PoA on Gender and Development and its Update (2000-2005) are available on our website: www.thecommonwealth.org/gender/vision

COMMONWEALTH 7WAMM PREPARATORY MEETING

Ms Angela King, United Nations Assistant Secretary-General and Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, made an opening statement at the meeting. She lauded the work of the Commonwealth Secretariat in this area and expressed the wish for enhanced collaboration for the Beijing+10 Review in 2005 and the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Ms King stated, "The Commonwealth has made many contributions to bringing about improvements in the current international political, economic and social climate, including its strong stand on gender issues and support of the United Nations gender equality goals." She recognised that members of the Commonwealth, as the largest inter-governmental, inter-regional group within the UN system, have been playing an active role in the UN and particularly in the Commission on the Status of Women and the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). She specifically pointed out the Commonwealth's leading work in developing the Gender Management Systems approach to gender mainstreaming (GMS) and gender responsive budget. (Please see her Opening Statement in full at Annex 2)

Ms Nancy Spence, Director of the Social Transformation Programmes Division (STPD) of the Commonwealth Secretariat, informed the meeting that gender equality remains a "particular challenge" for the Commonwealth. She expanded on the Secretariat's Gender Programme which centres on the empowerment of women in the Commonwealth by eliminating discrimination, promoting equal opportunities for women, and recognising that gender equality is essential to poverty eradication and sustainable development. Ms Spence called on the meeting to work towards reinforcing the coalition of efforts, as a multi-stakeholder approach can provide for a cost-effective, knowledge-based framework for advocacy and action, training and capacity building. (Please see her Opening Statement in full at Annex 3)

The meeting recognised that countries benefit from adopting a co-ordinated approach to gender equality, socio-economic and political processes, to ensure enhanced outcomes. Delegates agreed that more analysis, co-ordination, and integration of efforts are required. It was recommended that there should be more effective monitoring and reporting of the implementation of National Gender/Women's Policies and Plans. In addition, more concerted action should be taken by all governments in partnership with other stakeholders, to advance gender equality, since it was noted that in the decade since the 1995 Beijing Conference, numerous persistent and emerging challenges still exist.

Poverty eradication was seen as critical. Delegates recognised that most of the Millennium Development Goals can only be achieved by addressing, amongst other key factors, women's disproportionate burden of poverty, and their unequal access to education and health services, natural resources including land, and means of livelihood. In order to make real headway in the fight against poverty, women must be at the centre of our strategy.

The meeting also provided the opportunity to launch the Commonwealth Secretariat's latest publication: *Gender Mainstreaming in Poverty Eradication: A Handbook for Policy-Makers and*

*Other Stakeholders*². The author, Dr Naila Kabeer, eminent scholar and Professorial Fellow at the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex, made a presentation at the meeting. She discussed the transformatory potential of increasing women's access to education and literacy; to paid work, particularly waged employment; and to political representation. She pointed out that where women do gain control of income, they are more likely to use it for expenditure on basic family needs and schooling of children. She argued that Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers need to have a stronger gender-sensitive perspective.

REGIONAL CAUCUSES

Regional Caucuses were held to review the challenges, programmes of action and partnerships in the Commonwealth regions: Africa/Europe, Asia, Caribbean/Canada, and Pacific. Regional specificities were explored, and common issues and challenges requiring co-ordination of strategy and efforts within and across the regions were discussed. There was recognition of the need to understand the causes of the lack of progress in attaining the national and regional targets as set out, for example, in the Dakar African and the Pacific Action Plans, in order to move forward. Participants agreed that gender issues must be mainstreamed in regional development policies and programmes.

Issues of democracy, governance and peace; human rights including violence against women and trafficking in women and children; access to education, public education and media were recognised as 'pulse' points for Commonwealth action for gender equality and development. Gender-responsive budgets, and trade and globalisation continue to be seen as important areas for Commonwealth advocacy and action. Action was called for in the areas of poverty eradication and the MDGs, and social and economic empowerment; and the 'girl child'. Cross-cutting issues relating to race, ethnicity, class, culture, religion, identity and indigenous people were put on the table for Commonwealth advocacy and action. The environment was also seen as an integral part of gender and sustainable development.

Recommendations for future action focused on issues of implementation and co-ordination rather than setting new targets - since Commonwealth targets of 30 per cent of women in decision-making and conflict resolution are yet to be attained. They covered areas such as policy development, evidence-based advocacy, applications and dissemination of practical gender analysis tools, gender-sensitive indicators and evaluation tools.

Gender mainstreaming was viewed as a long-term means to achieving gender equality and equity. There should be a focus on practical and cost-effective applications that impact on gender relations and equity, as well as sustainable development for women and men. It was recommended that the Commonwealth Secretariat and partners further develop global gender methodologies such as gender-responsive budgeting and revenue tools, do-it-yourself toolkits, and the issue-based integrated approach to priority areas such as conflict transformation/sustainable peace; trade and globalisation; and HIV/AIDS. Capacity building and institutional strengthening in gender mainstreaming must form an integral part of those strategies.

² Naila Kabeer (2003). *Gender Mainstreaming in Poverty Eradication: A Handbook for Policy-Makers and Other Stakeholders*. London: Commonwealth Secretariat. ISBN 0-85092-752-8.

The meeting underlined the need for political commitment and mobilisation of resources. It was necessary to go beyond the present boundaries and create dynamic synergies and partnerships : within governments; between governments and civil society; with international development agencies; within regions and between regions across the Commonwealth and globally. Long-term sustainability strategies should be developed.

Table 1: Critical Issues for Commonwealth Action below presents a summary of the critical issues agreed for pan-Commonwealth action by the meeting based on the reports of the regional caucuses. It was agreed that these issues will feed into the 7WAMM agenda and the development of the new Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development (2005-2015).

Table 1: Critical Issues for Commonwealth Action

Democracy, Peace and Good Governance	Economic and Social Empowerment	Human Rights and the Rule of Law	Implementation Issues
Leadership and Decision-making	Poverty Eradication; Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); and Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs)	CEDAW core areas, e.g. through legal and constitutional reform	<i>CAPACITY BUILDING</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity building at all levels – NWMs, governments, civil society, and regions
Building Sustainable Peace; Conflict Transformation	Trade and Globalisation	Violence Against Women and Children; Trafficking of Women and Children	<i>RESEARCH, ANALYSIS, REPORTING</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender mainstreaming: Policies, Tools, and Strategies • Research and Evidence-based Advocacy; Sex-disaggregated data collection and analysis; • Monitoring and reporting on international commitments
	Gender-responsive budgets; and More equitable distribution of national wealth	HIV/AIDS	<i>REGIONAL CO-ORDINATION</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnerships between NWMs, civil society and international agencies; • Co-ordinated regional approach to strengthening NWMs; • Engendering regional development programmes, e.g., CARICOM, ECOWAS, NEPAD, SADC
	Education including public education and access to information; Bridging the gender digital divide	The Girl Child	<i>INFORMATION SHARING</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information & Communication Technologies (ICTs), Media & Public Education; • Sharing of country experiences and knowledge networks
	Environment		<i>FUNDING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase resources and political support to NWMs; • Funding and technical assistance by regional and international agencies
Cross-cutting issues of Race, Ethnicity, Class, Culture, Religion, Identity, and Indigenous People			
<i>These issues will feed into planning for 7WAMM and the development of the new Commonwealth PoA (2005-2015)</i>			

SUMMARY OF DECISIONS TAKEN

The meeting recognised that a co-ordination mechanism between the Commonwealth Gender/Women's Affairs Ministers Meetings was required since Ministerial Meetings take place once every three/four years. The Preparatory Meeting recommended that Heads of National Women's Machineries should be held annually in the wings of CSW in New York, to enable Commonwealth governments, international partners and civil society to share experiences and strategies as well as keep abreast of new global developments and gender approaches and tools. It was agreed that the next meeting should take place in the wings of CSW in February/March 2004, to facilitate the final planning of 7WAMM.

Ms Alefina Vuki, Fiji's Director for Women in the Ministry of Women, Culture and Social Welfare, encouraged all member countries to attend 7WAMM, which will be hosted by the Government of the Fiji Islands.

The main decisions adopted for 7WAMM, to be held on 30 May to 2 June 2004 in Nadi, Fiji Islands, were as follows:

1. 7WAMM Planning:

Delegates agreed on the themes and format for 7WAMM to be held in the Fiji Islands in May/June 2004. It was reiterated that the proposed February/March 2004 Commonwealth Preparatory Meeting for Heads of NWMs will be a very critical planning forum as it will precede the 7WAMM to be held from 30 May- 2 June 2004. The meeting agreed on the following:

(a) 7WAMM Agenda

The 7WAMM agenda would focus on those agreed priorities set out in Table 1 above.

(b) 7WAMM Format

- Less formality and more dialogue, including a roundtable dialogue between governments and civil society and a Ministerial Retreat;
- Workshops and thematic working groups;
- Regional and sub-regional caucuses;
- Field trip to learn about the gender issues in the Fiji Is;
- Civil society participation led by the Commonwealth Foundation;
- Wider dissemination of 7WAMM process and outcomes across the Commonwealth making use of information communications technologies (ICTs).
- An *Outcome Declaration* to advance the new Commonwealth Plan of Action (PoA) which will be the Commonwealth's contribution to the Beijing+10 review process.

2. Focus Areas for Commonwealth Action

Focus areas for Commonwealth action were discussed and agreed on. (Please see discussion and Table 1 above).

3. Commonwealth Gender Reference Group (CGRG)

A Commonwealth Gender Reference Group was established, made up of Ministers, senior officials and civil society representatives from all Commonwealth regions and sub-regions of the Commonwealth (See Annex 1: CGRG Terms of Reference). It was proposed that India should be represented on this Group to maintain continuity between 6WAMM held in Delhi in 2000 and the forthcoming 7WAMM in 2004. There is a need to maximise the use of new information and communication technologies (ICTs).

The Commonwealth Gender Reference Group will comprise the following:

- **Africa:** Uganda (East), South Africa (Southern), The Gambia (West);
- **Asia:** India (as host country of 6WAMM), Malaysia, Sri Lanka (to be confirmed);
- **Caribbean/Canada:** Canada, Jamaica, St Kitts and Nevis;
- **Europe:** Malta (to be confirmed), United Kingdom (to be confirmed);
- **Pacific:** Fiji Islands, Kiribati, New Zealand (to be confirmed)
- **Civil Society:** Commonwealth Foundation and one civil society representative from each region (Africa, Asia, Caribbean/Canada, Europe, Pacific).

The Commonwealth Secretariat was mandated to follow up with NWMs of nominated countries not present at the New York Meeting, to confirm their representation on the Commonwealth Gender Reference Group. The Secretariat will develop Terms of Reference for the Commonwealth Gender Reference Group in order to ensure that the necessary consultative process takes place. The Commonwealth Foundation will also advise the Secretariat regarding the civil society regional representatives and planned civil society-government consultations during May/June 2003. It is also expected that regional development partners will feed into the consultative process.

4. New Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development (PoA)

The meeting agreed that the Secretariat should prepare a new Commonwealth Plan of Action as a strategic policy and programming framework for advancing gender equality and equity in the Commonwealth for the next 10 year period, 2005-2015. The new PoA will form the Commonwealth's contribution to the UN Beijing+10 review process. The Secretariat will develop a questionnaire for governments and partners. The Secretariat will liaise with the UN on the reporting process on MDGs to avoid duplication.

5. Monitoring/Reporting on the PoA and the Commonwealth Reference Book

There was consensus that the Secretariat should publish a Commonwealth Gender/Women's Ministers Reference Book for 7WAMM. The Reference Book will take into account emerging issues like MDGs and poverty eradication. A report to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) is also required. The next CHOGM will take place in Abuja, Nigeria in December 2003. Each member government will be requested to submit a country report on progress in advancing their gender equality policy and programme to be used for the CHOGM Report of December 2003 as well as the Commonwealth Gender/Women's Ministers Reference Book.

It was agreed that the Commonwealth Secretariat will synchronise the reporting process for the PoA with those of the UN as far as possible. However, since the Commonwealth processes and deadlines (CHOGM, December 2003; and 7WAMM, May/June 2004) precede the UN Beijing +10 timelines, it was agreed that one questionnaire will go out to NWMs as a guide for the reporting. Countries may submit CEDAW national reports, as well as other recent reports, e.g., the UN MDGs reports, to facilitate government reporting. Governments with recent reports should submit those with some modifications and not duplicate the reporting process. The same questionnaire responses will be used by the Secretariat to prepare the CHOGM Report 2003, and the Gender/Women's Ministers Reference Book.

The Commonwealth Gender/Women's Ministers Reference Book will act as a comprehensive one-stop reference on gender equality and mainstreaming in the 54 countries of the Commonwealth. It will also include regional highlights on the implementation of the Commonwealth PoA on Gender and Development, analyse progress on gender equality since Beijing +5. The Reference Book will form part of the Commonwealth's contribution to the Beijing+10 Global Review. It was agreed that country reports of a suitable length will be included in the Reference Book. It was also agreed that Commonwealth Governments will request the United Nations to produce another report on the Status of the World's Women for Beijing+10.

6. Participation of Civil Society

The Commonwealth Foundation made a presentation at the meeting, and also organised a parallel civil society consultation at the UN on 3 March 2003, to facilitate a dialogue with civil society in advancing the Commonwealth's gender agenda. (Please see the Commonwealth Foundation Report at Annex 5).

The meeting agreed that the Commonwealth should strengthen the links between governments, and women's organisations and civil society as agents of 'change', at the national and regional levels. The Commonwealth Foundation was mandated to spearhead such an approach at the forthcoming 7WAMM in May/June 2004, working in close collaboration with its regional civil society networks. Civil society will thus be involved in the planning process for 7WAMM and the development of the new PoA (2005-2015). It was also agreed that 7WAMM government delegations should include NGOs. It was agreed that a steering committee comprising the Commonwealth Foundation and selected regional women's NGO networks will co-ordinate the NGO parallel forum and civil society-government dialogue at 7WAMM.

LEARNING/SHARING SESSION: GENDER MAINSTREAMING, POVERTY ERADICATION AND MDGs

The Commonwealth Secretariat took the opportunity of the 7WAMM Preparatory Meeting to share some leading work being undertaken in the areas of Gender, Poverty Eradication and the Millennium Development Goals. The Commonwealth Secretariat/ CIDA/ IDRC book launch on *Gender Mainstreaming in Poverty Eradication and the Millennium Development Goals – A Handbook for Policy-Makers and Other Stakeholders* by Dr Naila Kabeer was well received by representatives of Commonwealth and other Governments, NGOs, United Nations, World Bank, and other key partners.

There was also a display of Secretariat publications (please see full list at Annex 11). The Commonwealth Secretary-General's Message for International Women's Day (please see Annex 7), and the Link-In Newsletter February 2003 Issue, were widely disseminated at the 7WAMM Preparatory Meeting and the 47th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

LEARNING/SHARING SESSION: USING THE GMS TOOLKIT FOR CHANGE MANAGEMENT

In response to the mandate from Commonwealth Gender/Women's Ministers at 6WAMM (New Delhi, 2000), to continue the development of user-friendly materials adaptable to the needs of member countries, the Commonwealth Secretariat and Commonwealth of Learning (COL) undertook to develop a GMS Toolkit to include a Training Manual, Distance Learning Materials, booklet on Change Management and CD-Rom.

The Secretariat and COL used the opportunity of the 7WAMM Preparatory Meeting to hold a Learning/Sharing Session. A team from COL, the Commonwealth inter-governmental organisation based in Vancouver, held a session on "Using the GMS Toolkit for Change Management in the Public Sector", and 'field-tested' a module of the GMS Toolkit. The Secretariat in collaboration with COL are in the process of developing the GMS Toolkit for publication. Inputs from the field-testing session will feed into the final product.

CONCLUSIONS

The Commonwealth 7WAMM Preparatory Meeting of Heads of National Women's Machineries and/or their representatives, allowed for forward planning for 7WAMM by member countries and Commonwealth Secretariat. It enabled critical evaluation and feedback from the member countries and facilitated a richness of exchange and dialogue on priority development issues and challenges in the Commonwealth. The consultation was most useful in providing a forum to take stock of Commonwealth progress as well as define new areas of focus to increase results on the ground and contribute to advancing the global gender equality agenda.

It was agreed that an annual Commonwealth consultative process of Heads of NWMs which precedes the United Nations Session on the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), allows for cost-effective dialogue and cross-fertilisation between governments in the Commonwealth and United Nations systems, and other key partners including civil society. Such annual consultations

will allow for pertinent feedback to high-level Commonwealth decision-making fora, such as the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings (CHOGMs) and Ministerial Meetings (e.g., Commonwealth Finance Ministers' Meetings held each year prior to the World Bank/IMF consultations), as well as the United Nations Global Conferences and Programmes e.g. Beijing+10 national, regional and global preparatory processes.

The Commonwealth Heads of NWMs affirmed the importance of promoting gender equality and empowering women for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Gender equality was seen not only as a goal in its own right, but recognised for its importance in reducing poverty and hunger, ensuring education for all, promoting maternal health and reducing child mortality, combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, and ensuring environmental sustainability. Country experiences demonstrate clearly that providing women/girls and men/boys with equal access to resources, opportunities and representation increases productivity, accelerates economic growth, makes poverty eradication more achievable, and improves the well-being of children, women and men. The meeting recognised the need to accelerate implementation at the national level of key international conventions and treaties, including the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) which provides the necessary framework for socio-economic and political empowerment of women, based on human rights, equality, governance, peace and sustainable development principles.

It was agreed that gender equality across the Commonwealth will strengthen the process of achieving development based on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) including the right to food, water, shelter, access to affordable health and education, and security. The work of Commonwealth Governments, NMWs, the Secretariat and partners at all levels, was agreed to be critical to contribute to the vision of gender equality, peace and development.

ANNEXES

- ANNEX 1 COMMONWEALTH GENDER REFERENCE GROUP**
- ANNEX 2 OPENING STATEMENT BY ANGELA KING**
- ANNEX 3 OPENING STATEMENT BY NANCY SPENCE**
- ANNEX 4 COMMONWEALTH SECRETARY-GENERAL'S
MESSAGE FOR INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY**
- ANNEX 5 NGO PARTICIPATION IN 7WAMM**
- ANNEX 6 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE PARALLEL
CIVIL SOCIETY MEETING**
- ANNEX 7 COMMONWEALTH-NGO COLLABORATION**
- ANNEX 8 6WAMM MANDATES TABLE**
- ANNEX 9 AGENDA OF COMMONWEALTH 7WAMM
PREPARATORY MEETING**
- ANNEX 10 PARTICIPANTS LIST**
- ANNEX 11 GENDER SECTION PUBLICATIONS LIST**

COMMONWEALTH GENDER REFERENCE GROUP

Background

The Commonwealth 7WAMM Preparatory Meeting of Heads of National Women's Machineries held in New York from 1-2 March 2003, established a Commonwealth Gender Reference Group with representatives from all Commonwealth regions to prepare for the 7th Commonwealth Gender/Women's Affairs Ministers Meeting (7WAMM) being held in the Fiji Islands on 30 May – 2 June 2004.

The Commonwealth Gender Reference Group emerged from the need for coordination in planning 7WAMM and developing a new Commonwealth Plan of Action. Member governments and civil society partners must be at the centre of the Commonwealth's consultative process.

Such a strategic and cost-effective consultative mechanism will maximise the use of the electronic communications technologies including e-list-serves and websites.

The following countries were nominated by those present or their representatives:

- **Africa:** Uganda (East), South Africa (Southern), The Gambia (West);
- **Asia:** India (as host country of 6WAMM, to be confirmed), Malaysia, Sri Lanka (to be confirmed);
- **Caribbean/Canada:** Canada, Jamaica, St Kitts and Nevis;
- **Europe:** Malta (to be confirmed), United Kingdom (to be confirmed);
- **Pacific:** Fiji Islands, Kiribati, New Zealand (to be confirmed)
- **Civil Society:** Commonwealth Foundation and one civil society representative from each region (Africa, Asia, Caribbean/Canada, Europe, Pacific).

Terms of Reference for the Commonwealth Gender Reference Group

Each region will be represented by two/three countries Heads of the National Women's Machineries. The regional representatives will make strategic recommendations to the Commonwealth Secretariat based on feedback from member governments and key partners in their respective regions. The Commonwealth Foundation will coordinate the regional civil society inputs into the consultative process. Regional agencies such as ECOWAS, CARICOM, NEPAD, Pacific Forum, SAARC will be consulted.

Members of the Commonwealth Gender Reference Group will be selected on a rotational basis at Gender/Women's Affairs Ministers Meetings.

The Commonwealth Gender Reference Group will be co-ordinated by the Commonwealth Secretariat. The Reference Group will play a consultative role in the following activities:

- Formulation of the 7WAMM agenda and format;

- Preparation of the Commonwealth Gender/Women's Ministers Reference Book, which will be drafted by Commonwealth Secretariat staff and consultant based on questionnaire responses;
- Development of the *new* Commonwealth Plan of Action (2005-2015).

All exchanges will be by electronic means. It may be necessary for the members of the Commonwealth Gender Reference Group to meet in the wings of the 48th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women in February/March 2004 in New York.

Immediate Follow-Up

NWMs of nominated countries not present at the New York Meeting will need to confirm their representation of their respective regions. The Commonwealth Foundation will also advise regarding the civil society regional representatives and planned civil society-government consultations during May/June of 2003.

OPENING STATEMENT

**Ms. Angela E.V. King, Assistant Secretary-General and
Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, United Nations**

Honourable Ministers, Excellencies, Representatives of National Machineries, Colleagues and Friends:

Greetings from the United Nations, especially the women of the United Nations.

I am deeply honoured to have this opportunity to be with you today and to participate in the Preparatory Meeting of National Women's Machineries to plan the Seventh Meeting of Commonwealth Ministers Responsible for Gender/Women's Affairs (WAMM). At the outset, I would like to thank the organisers for their kind invitation and warm hospitality, particularly Nancy Spence, Director of the Social Transformation Programmes Division and her colleagues. I am also happy to see many of you who came to New York to also attend the Commission on the Status of Women at its 47th Session for the next two weeks.

Consistent with its fundamental principles and objectives, the Commonwealth has made many contributions to bringing about improvements in the current international political, economic and social climate, including its strong stand on gender issues and support of the United Nations gender equality goals. Both, the Fifth and Sixth Meetings of Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs held in Port of Spain and New Delhi in 1996 and 2000 respectively, were significant contributions to Beijing+5. Over the years, Members of the Commonwealth, as the largest inter-governmental, inter-regional group, have been playing an active role in the United Nations and particularly in the Commission on the Status of Women and in the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The Commonwealth has led the way on gender mainstreaming (GMS) and gender budgeting methodologies at the national level. Building on your work, the United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality is doing gender budgeting at the international level. It is, therefore, most fitting that your meeting is examining the ways in which the Commonwealth can contribute to the review and appraisal of Beijing+10.

Before discussing the link between Beijing+10 and the Seventh Meeting of Commonwealth Ministers Responsible for Gender/Women's Affairs on which I have been asked to speak today, I would like to cover the current international development framework in terms of the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), then briefly touch on the inter-governmental process of the review of the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits and to speak about your possible agenda for 7WAMM.

The conferences and summits of the 1990s and the follow-up special sessions, saw a collective effort of Governments, civil society and the United Nations bodies to shape their common goals and objectives in development. These efforts culminated in the historic Millennium Summit 2000

where Heads of State and Government adopted the Millennium Declaration. The Declaration was an attempt to move towards implementation by States. It was also intended to galvanize disparate and sometimes competing development agenda in an effort to produce a powerful political tool to hold governments and international institutions accountable. To do so, its main goals and targets were later refined as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Among the eight MDGs, only Goal 3 specifically calls for the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women. However, gender being a cross-cutting issue, is essential for the attainment of all MDGs. In fact, there are specific links between the MDGs and the 12 critical areas of the Beijing Platform for Action and the 2000 Beijing +5 Outcome Document. For example, Goal 1 calling for eradication of extreme poverty and hunger is linked to Critical Areas on women and poverty, and women and economy. Goal 2 calling for the achievement of universal primary education is covered in the Critical Areas dealing with education and training of women and the girl child. Goal 3 relates to all critical areas. Goal 4 relates to the Critical Area on the girl child. Goals 5 and 6 correspond to the Critical Area on women and health. Goal 7 relates to the Critical Area dealing with women and environment and Goal 8 covers all critical areas of the Platform.

The Secretary-General is playing a leading role in building up political support for the implementation of MDGs. Through his agenda for further change to strengthen the United Nations adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 57/300, he aims at aligning United Nations activities with the priorities defined in the Millennium Declaration and by the global conferences of the 1990s.

The bulk of the work around the MDGs is actually taking place at the country level, including civil society dialogue, local campaigns and the production of MDG country progress reports, (Millennium reports). These reports serve to monitor the implementation of national targets related to the MDGs. Each country will set its own targets, which will not be imposed. More than 20 countries have already prepared their reports, analysing the country's development context, going through the main goals to identify major challenges faced, what policies and programmes are being put in place to create a supportive environment and what are the priorities for development assistance. It is critical that gender equality becomes an integral part of each country's Millennium reporting for each MDG.

Your own recent focus on Gender Mainstreaming in Poverty Eradication and the MDGs is most timely and I am sure Naila Kabeer's groundbreaking book will be widely read and be a valuable tool for policy-makers.

As we approach the 10-year assessment of achievements under the Beijing Platform for Action, we see that some progress has been made in certain areas: education, health and non-discriminatory legislation, the recognition of women's human rights and their essential role in economic and social development and in peace building, has vastly increased as has public acknowledgement that where women achieve equality, the society as a whole benefits.

Despite this progress, other phenomena - the spread of HIV/AIDS and the intersection of famine and drought in Southern Africa, for example, and the spread of conflict situations in the Middle

East, in Africa and elsewhere - present new, more serious challenges than before. A few such challenges are:

- (a) Poverty is increasing at an alarming rate. Women and children are the majority of those in poverty.
- (b) The realization of the MDGs related to women's and girls' education has been elusive.
- (c) Violence against women is on the rise: in surveys around the world, 10-69 per cent of women report being physically assaulted by a male partner as evidenced from the 2002 report of WHO "World Report on Violence and Health"; we know as a fact that most violence against women goes unreported.
- (d) Women and children continue to be prime victims of armed conflict as shown in the 2002 Secretary-General's study on women, peace and security prepared in accordance with Security Council resolution 1325.
- (e) The HIV/AIDS pandemic reached catastrophic proportions threatening whole nations especially in Southern Africa with extinction. The number of infected reached 42 million; of these, 38.6 million are adults - 19.4 million men and 19.2 million women. Women are the most affected by this deadly disease: they make up 58% of HIV-positive adults in Sub-Saharan Africa, 55% in North Africa and the Middle East, and 50% in the Caribbean. In the most recent publication by the United Nations Population Division, the demographic forecast for 2050 was scaled down to 8.9 billion from 9.3 billion estimated two years ago to account for HIV/AIDS deaths and declining birth rates.

These and many other challenges led Member States to the conclusion that an integrated and coordinated implementation and follow up to the major United Nations conferences and summits is needed to review and appraise them.

I turn now to the process itself. The General Assembly, at its 57th session last year, established an open-ended working group to produce concrete recommendations on an integrated and coordinated follow-up of the United Nations conferences and summits, in the economic, social and related fields (57/270). The Working Group is to report to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in July 2003, and decisions are expected from the General Assembly this fall.

The Group intends to make more extensive use of the General Assembly's plenary, second and third committees meetings. In particular, it is felt that the identification of common themes of conferences might facilitate a thematic approach to the reviews in the General Assembly and ECOSOC, supplementing the review of individual conferences in the functional commissions such as the Commissions on the Status of Women, on Population and Development and so on. Working in a mutually reinforcing way, the General Assembly, ECOSOC and its functional commissions, it is hoped, would capture some of the special characteristics of the conferences while avoiding a tendency to backtrack on commitments. Nevertheless it is important that where gender equality issues are concerned, we ensure that neither the theme itself nor its cross-cutting aspects are lost or submerged.

As far as a mandate for a 10-year review is concerned, this lies in the Platform and in the Political Declaration of Beijing+5, where Member States decided to “assess regularly further implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action with a view to bringing together all parties involved in 2005 to assess progress and consider new initiatives, as appropriate, ten years after the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action”.

So what is planned? A 10-year review, propelled by the Commission on the Status of Women and its Bureau, which will probably serve as a Preparatory Committee, requires each Member State to assess progress based on national plans for action on the advancement of women prepared after 1995. The Commonwealth’s updated Plan of Action “Advancing the Commonwealth Agenda into the New Millennium (2000-2005)”, is a most welcome model as it refines the focus of the 1995 Plan and addresses persisting and emerging gender equality issues. We also need assessments of progress by national and international NGOs.

I turn now to considering themes for 7WAMM’s agenda. Actually, all the critical areas of the Beijing Platform are important but greater emphasis could be placed on poverty eradication and economic empowerment of women, women’s participation in decision-making (women account for only 14 per cent in national parliaments globally); women’s human rights, violence against women including trafficking in women; health and HIV/AIDS, education, the media and information communication technologies (ICTs), and women and peace building.

Second, we also expect to have a regional perspective by organising a series of regional and thematic meetings, expert group meetings and a review of national reports, on the implementation of national plans and programmes of action at the regional level. New and emerging problems will be identified, as well as pervasive challenges that impede the empowerment and advancement of women.

Beijing+10 should focus on progress made on implementation strategies, mechanisms and best practices. Gender mainstreaming, as a tool for achieving gender equality, should also be reviewed.

The Commonwealth can make a significant contribution to Beijing+10 in the following six strategies:

- (1) Caucusing with members of the Working Group through its Commonwealth Members on how the integrated and coordinated implementation of United Nations conferences and summits could better integrate gender and be linked with the MDGs.
- (2) Calling on its members to examine their national plans and programmes for action with a view to intensifying their implementation; having seminars throughout the Commonwealth countries on gaps in implementation and making outcomes available to the United Nations.
- (3) Identifying new and emerging issues concerning the advancement of women and gender mainstreaming in countries of the Commonwealth.
- (4) Ensuring that all Ministries and Departments have integrated gender equality issues in their plans and targets.

- (5) Calling on its members to cooperate with the United Nations in the context of the review and appraisal.
- (6) Playing an active role in all aspects relating to the Beijing +10 to review progress.

We must not lose time to start our preparations for the review and appraisal. Beijing+10 offers us a unique opportunity to shape the fate of women over the years to come. Millions of women place confidence in us as they have in the past. Let us not disappoint them. I am confident that, through our joint efforts, we will be able to make great progress during Beijing+10 to achieve our common goal, the equality of women and men.

I hope to see you in the next two weeks at the Round Table on national institutions and the panels. There are over 100 side events including the Commonwealth's launch of Naila Kabeer's book, *Gender Mainstreaming in Poverty Eradication and the Millennium Development Goals*. I hope that you will participate actively in these events. I wish you well in your deliberations.

Thank you, Madame Moderator.

OPENING STATEMENT

**Ms. Nancy Spence, Director, Social Transformation Programmes Division,
Commonwealth Secretariat**

Heads of Commonwealth National Women Machineries and Representatives of UN Missions ,
Delegates from regional and international organisations, and Representatives of civil society:

A warm welcome to all of you to New York!
We sincerely appreciate your efforts to travel all this way!

This 7WAMM Preparatory Meeting of Heads of National Women's Machineries is an important part of the Commonwealth consultative process, to allow for critical feedback and evaluation from member countries on the Commonwealth's global programme on gender equality, development and peace. Following the 6th Commonwealth Meeting of Gender/Women's Ministers in New Delhi in 2000, we agreed that consultations ahead of the next 7th Ministerial Meeting, planned for 30 May- 2 June 2004 in the Fiji Islands, would be more effective. Therefore this consultation precedes by 14 months the 7th Gender/Women's Ministers Meeting.

Our meeting, preceding the 47th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, here in New York, provides an opportunity for Commonwealth Governments and the Secretariat, in collaboration with our partners, to assess progress and identify new challenges. This meeting will also allow for fruitful deliberations that will shape our Commonwealth programme of action for the next 10 years, in sync with the preparations for Beijing+10 in 2005. We are at present guided by the 1995 Commonwealth Plan of Action (PoA) on Gender and Development, and its Update (2000 to 2005).

Gender equality remains a "particular challenge" for the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth's vision for women and men is based on the fundamental values of democracy and good governance, human rights, the rule of law, and people-centred sustainable development. The last Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Coolom, Australia in March 2002 called for further efforts to be made by governments and the Secretariat to put gender mainstreaming at the centre of all policy and programme initiatives notably in 4 priority areas: HIV/AIDS; gender and macro-economic policies including trade and globalisation; women's human rights including violence against women; and participation in conflict resolution, peace-building and decision-making processes.

The Commonwealth Secretary-General's Reports on the implementation of the Plan of Action are based on feedback from countries. These reports provide baseline information for measuring and evaluating progress, illustrate how the collective lessons and experiences can serve as models of 'good practice' for many Commonwealth countries, and suggest ways of advancing the goals of gender equality, development and peace. You may wish to review how we can improve the process without adding undue pressure on the countries.

This morning, the regional caucuses will discuss the critical national and regional priorities, the strategies adopted and their progress, the effectiveness of partnerships, and make inputs into the process developing a new PoA, and the 7WAMM agenda and format. In the afternoon, the Commonwealth Foundation and the Commonwealth Women's NGO Network will speak to the civil society dimension, and the interactions of Commonwealth organisations and networks. On the 2nd day in our sharing session, together with the COL and consultants Dr Williams and Ms Athill, the Gender Management System (GMS), a multi-stakeholder tool to gender mainstreaming, will be presented and hopefully made easier for you to appreciate its application.

I call on this meeting to seek to enhance this coalition of efforts. A multi-stakeholder approach can provide for a cost-effective, knowledge-based framework for advocacy and action, training and capacity building - to ensure that productive capacity and resources, wealth and power are equitably distributed between women and men, across groups of people, and within communities and regions.

To this end, the thrust of the Commonwealth Secretariat's Gender programme seeks to assist the empowerment of women in the Commonwealth by eliminating discrimination, promoting equal opportunities for women, and recognising that gender equality is essential to poverty eradication and sustainable development. Our latest publication, *Gender Mainstreaming in Poverty Eradication and the Millennium Development Goals: A Handbook for Policy-Makers and Other Stakeholders* by Dr Naila Kabeer, eminent scholar and IDS Fellow, illustrates clearly that most of the Millennium Development Goals can only be achieved by addressing, amongst other key factors, the disproportionate burden of poverty, the lack of access to education and health services, natural resources including land, the lack of productive opportunities borne by women and control over their livelihoods. Dr Kabeer has been kind enough to hold a session for Commonwealth NWMs and other partners. The book will be launched on March 4 2003 at the UN and you are all invited to attend.

I call on each one of you to critically look at the refocusing and re-alignment of our national, regional and Commonwealth global programmes. We must adopt a concerted and common approach to gender equality and socio-economic development processes, a broadening of the commitment by all stakeholders, and a higher level of expected outcomes. We appreciate that this will entail a high degree of analysis, co-ordination, and integration of effort. Emphasis on stringent monitoring and reporting of the implementation of National Women/Gender Policies and Plans, proactive evaluation of success or identification of challenges of implementation are to be strengthened.

I hope that we will agree on a process to shape the new directions required across the Commonwealth to advance gender mainstreaming, work to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and sustain the gains accrued to date. The Commonwealth Secretariat stands ready to facilitate, support and provide the catalytic ingredients to make this happen. We will continue to ensure synergies and sustainability in those areas with the comparative advantages for the Commonwealth. Our vision for the next decade is to collaborate more effectively in order to attain our goals of gender equality, peace and development for our people, women and men, young people and old. It is important that the official and non-official Commonwealth work closely to achieve the same long-term goals and not work in opposition to the attainment of the objectives of sustainable development, peace, equality and equity.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY STATEMENT

The Rt. Hon. Don MacKinnon, Commonwealth Secretary-General

04/03/03 - 'Women are central in the fight against poverty'

Publication date: 3/4/2003

"If we want to make real headway in the fight against poverty, women must be at the heart of our strategy," says Commonwealth Secretary-General, Don MacKinnon. (03/17)

In his message to mark International Women's Day on 8 March 2003, Commonwealth Secretary-General, Don MacKinnon said:

Women earn one-tenth of the world's income, own less than one-tenth of the world's property and hold 1 per cent of chief executive positions worldwide. The number of rural women living in poverty has nearly doubled in the past 20 years, and women make up over 70 per cent of the world's 3 billion poor who live on less than 2 dollars a day. If we want to make real headway in the fight against poverty, women must be at the heart of our strategy.

As we celebrate International Women's Day, we should recognise that the empowerment of women is key to addressing the development issues we are facing today.

Women's empowerment has been shown to play a critical factor in controlling the spread of the HIV/AIDS global pandemic. Women's education contributes the most to reducing child mortality, malnutrition and population growth, and increasing women's ability to change their lives.

Over the last few years, a great deal has been achieved. Women's representation in parliaments has increased and now reaches, on average, 15 per cent globally. Political participation of women ensures that gender is put on the agenda and action taken.

We at the Commonwealth Secretariat are trying to achieve this. Working in partnership with the Government of Sierra Leone and civil society groups, last year, we held a conference in the capital, Freetown, to discuss the role that women can play in parliament. At this conference all of Sierra Leone's main political parties agreed that women would form at least 30% of the candidates they presented to the electorate. In the elections, which were held three months later, the number of elected women parliamentarians increased from 8.8% to 14.3%. Women are also making invaluable contributions towards post-conflict reconstruction efforts in Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, and other countries recovering from the trauma of war. Such initiatives must continue to be implemented and sustained. But despite these achievements, serious gaps remain between women and men, affecting the development of the societies in which they live and work.

In many countries, women are not getting their fair share in the development process, and in others they are becoming poorer in absolute terms. Efforts to promote productivity of the poor are still largely targeted at men while women are expected to carry on contributing to household livelihoods and caring for the family with little or no support for their efforts. Gender inequality still remains the most pervasive form of inequality, and is most severe among the poor. Thus the Millennium Declaration signed by 189 world governments, with a focus on poverty, shelter and hunger, makes an explicit commitment to gender equality. Gender equality is essential to building long-term, sustainable and equitable development. Increasing women's access to education and literacy, paid work, particularly waged employment and political representation can bring real change to the lives of communities throughout the Commonwealth.

I urge all Commonwealth governments to increase their efforts and provide a solid foundation for the advancement of gender equality in this century. If we are serious about achieving the Millennium Development Goals, we must make sure our commitment to the empowerment of women and gender equality is translated into reality.

Note to editors:

The Commonwealth Secretariat's new publication by Dr Naila Kabeer, Gender Mainstreaming in Poverty Eradication and the Millennium Development Goals: A Handbook for Policy-Makers and Other Stakeholders, was launched at the United Nations in New York on 4 March 2003 to celebrate International Women's Day and to coincide with the Commonwealth 7WAMM Preparatory Meeting of Heads of National Women's Machineries.

NGO PARTICIPATION IN 7WAMM

Ms Rudo Chitiga, Deputy Director, Commonwealth Foundation

The Commonwealth Foundation is grateful to the Commonwealth Secretariat's Social Transformation Programmes Division for the invitation to make a contribution to this agenda item.

The Commonwealth Foundation is the inter-governmental body of the Commonwealth with responsibility for promoting and strengthening the contribution of civil society towards the achievement of Commonwealth goals of poverty reduction, sustainable development and good governance. The Foundation implements this mandate in the following ways:

- Providing grants for capacity building, networking, regional cooperation and consensus building among NGOs.
- Managing special programmes that seek to develop lessons learned and methods to facilitate greater citizen's participation in governance.
- Providing annual grants to Commonwealth professional associations.
- Facilitating specific programmes that seek to build partnerships between civil society and governments as well as to ensure that the voices of civil society are heard in the Commonwealth's official processes.

I will not repeat here the now-accepted wisdom about the role of civil society organisations in development and the need to engage with them. The Commonwealth has experimented with a variety of ways to work with civil society organisations for the past 10 years. The Commonwealth has followed the lead of the UN in doing this. However it is safe to say that the Commonwealth still lags behind the UN in its policies and programmes to engage with civil society. The High Level Review Report adopted by Commonwealth Heads of Government at their meeting in Cooloom in March 2002 recognised this lag and recommended that immediate steps be taken to develop systems that bring closer the official Commonwealth and civil society.

To this end the Secretariat and the Foundation have organised consultations with civil society to identify ways in which closer collaboration could be achieved. Proposals for accreditation of civil society organisations have been presented to the Board of Governors of the Secretariat and a Working Party has been set up at the Foundation to explore ways in which civil society could play a greater role in the Foundation.

Ministerial meetings are a key focal point for civil society government collaboration. They are strategic in that they inform Commonwealth priorities and develop programmes for implementation by the Secretariat. Participation by civil society in this process is therefore key to achieving meaningful collaboration between civil society and Commonwealth Governments on one hand and between civil society and Commonwealth Secretariat divisions on the other.

Allow me to describe the current state of play with regards to ministerial meetings. Currently the Commonwealth holds ministerial meetings in the areas of Law, Education, Youth, Finance, Health, Gender/Women's Affairs, Environment, and more recently Foreign Affairs (held in the

wings of UNGASS). With the exception of the Foreign Affairs meeting which only started in 2002, all the other meetings have had some form of civil society participation.

At this point I should highlight that there is distinction in the Commonwealth between Commonwealth Associations, those organisations with the Commonwealth as part of their name, and NGOs (national, regional or international) operating in Commonwealth member countries. Commonwealth Associations have traditionally enjoyed access to the official Commonwealth and attend the majority of the ministerial meetings (Education, Environment, Finance, Health, Law, Youth, Women/Gender). Although the degree of participation varies according to the meeting the best example is the Health Ministers Meeting where the NGOs contribute to the development of the agenda, produce some of the papers if required and assist in developing recommendations as well as implementing them.

The Foundation has worked to raise the visibility and legitimacy of NGOs from Commonwealth countries. Increasingly Secretariat divisions are working with them. The Youth and Gender Sections have traditionally worked with NGOs based in Commonwealth countries. The Youth Affairs Ministers meeting is so far the most advanced in bringing together governments and NGOs. NGOs are an integral part of the official meeting and youth organisations are consulted and make input into their country's position before the meetings.

Perhaps the most advanced case of civil society participation can be found in the Commonwealth Finance Ministers Meeting of 2002, which was held in the United Kingdom. The Foundation was requested to facilitate a process of civil society consultations that would result in a civil society voice at the ministerial meeting on the theme of the conference, which was the Monterrey consensus, and the delivery of the Millennium Development Goals. Regional consultations were held throughout the Commonwealth at which civil society organisations and government representations discussed the theme from a regional perspective and came up with recommendations to Finance Ministers.

These recommendations were synthesised at the Pan-Commonwealth meeting, which was held in London two months before the Finance Ministers Meeting. The meeting came up with a Civil Society Statement on Financing for Development. Many of the recommendations from this statement found their way into the Commonwealth Plan of Action on Financing for Development, which was adopted by ministers.

By holding the meeting two months in advance it gave time for the civil society organisations to go back and influence their national finance ministers before they came to the meeting. At the meeting of Finance Ministers a representative from civil society presented the statement to ministers who commended the participation of civil society and requested that it becomes a regular feature of the agenda of all future Finance Ministers Meetings. Civil society participation in this case is now mainstreamed.

The 7th Gender/Women's Affairs Ministers Meeting

NGOs have traditionally participated in WAMMs in a variety of ways. The representative of the Commonwealth Women's Network will outline them.

This Preparatory Meeting, by taking place 14 months before the 7WAMM, provides adequate time for civil society organisations to prepare for 7WAMM at national, regional and pan-Commonwealth levels. The Foundation also appreciates the lead time to consult and facilitate civil society preparations. Often civil society organisations complain that they are not given adequate time to prepare for participation in government meetings. This time there won't be any excuse. The Foundation will kick-start the process by consulting civil society organisations who are here in New York for the CSW. A meeting will be held on 3rd March to brief them on the outcomes of this meeting and to get their views about their participation. Preliminary consultations with key stakeholders have revealed the following:

- NGOs would like to be consulted in identifying the priority areas for the Plan of Action.
- NGOs hope to be included as part of their government delegations to 7WAMM.
- They hope that governments will be actively encouraged to consult with NGOs in their preparations for 7WAMM.
- NGOs are exploring the possibility of a parallel forum in which government representatives will participate.
- They hope that participation in joint roundtables and meetings will be part of the official programme rather than an evening event.
- CSOs also hope to be included in the pan-Commonwealth reference group on 7WAMM.
- CSOs working on gender issues are the most well organised group in civil society. They have longstanding networks with a track record for mobilising members to make inputs. These networks are currently fine-tuning their systems in preparation for Beijing+10. 7WAMM is a strategic milestone as well as a natural fit to the Beijing+10 process as it comes one year before.
- Civil society organisations also hope for an ongoing relationship with the Secretariat divisions charged with implementing the recommendations. The Gender Section has a track record of working with civil society organisations in all its programmes. This should facilitate the process. We hope the preparatory meeting will set the standard on how civil society should work with the Commonwealth.

**RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE PARALLEL CIVIL SOCIETY MEETING
held on 3 March 2003 at the UN Headquarters, New York**

1. CF will prepare minutes of the meeting and email to participants who would be asked to circulate them to their constituencies. Governments will also receive copies of the minutes.
2. The Commonwealth Foundation will recommend to the Commonwealth Secretariat civil society representatives for the Reference Group.
3. The Commonwealth Foundation will identify key CSO networks to form a coalition to prepare for 7WAMM.
4. The Commonwealth Secretariat will ask Reference Group countries to involve CSOs in their country processes and suggest ways for doing this. CSOs in these countries could also develop their own processes.
5. The Commonwealth Secretariat, Commonwealth Foundation and CSOs will develop innovative and creative mechanisms for involving CSOs in 7WAMM and follow-up activities. These will include: ways of ensuring documents are sent out in an open and timely manner; process for developing parallel event at the time of 7WAMM; ways of ensuring as many voices as possible are heard from the country level.
6. The Commonwealth Foundation will undertake research on funds available for NGO participation.
7. The Commonwealth Secretariat will develop a schedule of all important Commonwealth meetings where a gender/ 7WAMM component could be integrated. Where possible, Reference Group members should be involved.
8. The Commonwealth Foundation will animate a list-serve of CSOs working on the preparations for 7WAMM.

COMMONWEALTH-NGO COLLABORATION IN IMPLEMENTING THE 1995 COMMONWEALTH PLAN OF ACTION AND ITS 2000-2005 UPDATE

Introduction

The work of the Commonwealth in advancing gender equality rests on its policy framework and strategy as laid out in the 1995 Commonwealth Plan of Action (PoA) on Gender and Development and its Update (2000-2005). The Commonwealth's vision for women and men is based on its fundamental values of democracy and good governance, human rights and the rule of law, and people-centred sustainable development. In 1999, the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) noted that gender equality was a "particular challenge" and "urged member governments to take action for the promotion and advancement of women by strengthening their national machineries to implement gender mainstreaming for the acceleration of women's empowerment in political, economic and social activities in the 21st century". The most recent Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Coolumb, Australia in March 2002 called for further efforts to be made by governments and the Secretariat to put gender mainstreaming at the centre of all policy and programme initiatives. The gender interventions should be applied in the key areas of HIV/AIDS, gender and macro-economic policies, women's human rights, participation in conflict resolution, peace-building and decision-making processes.

A comprehensive review was undertaken in 2001 on progress made in advancing gender equality within the Commonwealth, which incorporates achievements since 1995. The *Secretary-General's Report on the Implementation of the Plan of Action* (2001) provides baseline information for measuring and evaluating progress, and suggests areas for future action. It focuses on priority concerns for the Commonwealth and illustrates how the lessons and experiences can serve as models of 'good practice'.

The 2001 report makes a strong case for strengthening partnerships. These include Commonwealth organisations and networks, for example, the Commonwealth Foundation's work with NGOs and professional organisations; and the Commonwealth of Learning's (COL) innovative approaches to distance education. In particular, collaboration with NGOs, wider civil society partners and the private sector, has been seen to add value to the work of the National Women Machineries (NWMs), for example, in areas of advocacy, legislative reform, training and capacity building, economic empowerment and credit initiatives, programmes with marginalised communities, etc. Civil society acts as a critical voice in ensuring that resources, wealth and power are equitably distributed between women and men, within communities, and across social groups and regions.

This paper provides a summary of achievements of Commonwealth National Women's Machineries (NWMs) and the Secretariat in implementing the Plan of Action (PoA). It also looks at recent developments in the Secretariat's overall programmes, as well as the new opportunities and challenges in seeking to advance gender mainstreaming, attain the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and sustain the gender equality gains accrued to date.

The Secretariat's Gender Equality/ Mainstreaming Programme

Gender mainstreaming and its applications to key development issues and sectors lie at the heart of the work of the Commonwealth. The Secretariat's Gender programme seeks to assist the empowerment of women in the Commonwealth by eliminating discrimination and promoting equal opportunities for women, men and young people to be educated and to realise their potentials and aspirations. Gender equality is recognised as being essential to poverty eradication. Most of the Millennium Development Goals can only be achieved by addressing, amongst other key factors, women's disproportionate burden of poverty, their unequal access to education and health services, natural resources including land, and productive opportunities.

The Commonwealth works to promote gender equality through partnerships among governments, NGOs, the wider civil society, the private sector, and other development agencies. Its commitment to gender equality recognises the construction of male as well as female identities, and the impact of changing gender roles and relations on men and masculinity. The multi-sectoral Gender Management System (GMS) approach has been applied to key sectors and development issues such as gender-responsive national budgets, violence against women, HIV/AIDS, and post-conflict reconstruction. This entails opening doors of communication with different stakeholders, and a co-ordination and integration of effort to achieve the desired outcomes.

The Secretariat is committed to improved outcomes and impacts of its activities as well as ensuring the sustainability of these activities. Greater attention will be paid to global indicators, e.g., the Millennium Development Goals, especially in areas where the Commonwealth has a comparative advantage. Collaboration between member countries within regions, across the regions, and with development partners, as well as with other Secretariat Divisions and Commonwealth organisations, is being promoted to maximise efforts and impacts.

The merger of the Gender, Education and Health Sections into the Social Transformation Programmes Division, and in close collaboration with the Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP), has enabled the Secretariat to address key areas such as higher school enrolment for girls, quality health care for all, and combating HIV/AIDS - linked to the global objective of poverty eradication and sustainable development.

Secretariat's Partnerships with NGOs and Civil Society in Implementing the PoA

Gender Section's collaboration with NGOs, Commonwealth organisations and the wider civil society

The Gender Section has built partnerships to expand and deepen its programmes to:

- Ensure that the country/sector/issue analyses reflect both governmental and non-governmental perspectives;
- Broaden the outreach and impacts of the programme; and
- Enhance sustainability.

Nonetheless, greater scope exists for collaboration with NGOs and the wider civil society, and regional/international development agencies.

The Gender Section undertakes a range of partnerships with governments, other Secretariat divisions and external agencies. External partners which provide both co-funding as well as in-kind contributions: Asian Development Bank, BRIDGE/IDS, British Council, CARICOM, CIDA, Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Commonwealth of Learning, Commonwealth Foundation, DFID, IDRC, Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, SADC Secretariat, Secretariat of the Pacific Community, UNDP, UN/ECLAC, UN/ESCAP, UNIFEM, World Bank, etc., as well as NGOs at the national and regional levels.

Examples of Secretariat partnerships include:

Sierra Leone National Consultation on Women and Men in Partnership for Post-Conflict Reconstruction (May 2001) and the resulting publication, was a collaborative venture between the Gender Section and the Sierra Leone Government, British Council, UNDP and UNICEF. The consultation brought together 250 people, many of whom represented Sierra Leonean NGOs and CBOs, the university, media, etc. They included some of the keynote speakers, organisations provided background papers on the gender impacts of the conflict for circulation at the consultation, and participated actively in the 8 working groups and the formulation of recommendations and a national action plan.

The West African/Sierra Leone Women in Parliament Workshop (February 2002) was a collaborative activity between the Gender Section, Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, British Council, and National Democratic Institute. The workshop involved the participation of leaders of a spectrum of political parties and the press, who were able to televise the event and publish articles in the local newspapers. The local NGO, the 50/50 Group, was centrally involved in the workshop planning and facilitation. One of the results of this activity among others, was an increase of 8 to 14 per cent, of women elected to parliament in the May 2002 national elections.

Since the 1995 PoA, regional **GMS Workshops** have been held (for National Women's Machineries); regional symposia have been held on **Gender, Politics and Conflict/Peace** (for parliamentarians); and **Engendering Local Government** (for local aximizati). Regional **Judicial Colloquia** (for senior judges and magistrates), and regional workshops on an Integrated Approach to Violence Against Women (for NWMs, other sector ministries, the judiciary, police, etc.). Various pan-Commonwealth workshops and reference groups have been held on **Gender-Responsive Budgets**.

All of these initiatives and others at the national level have included representatives of national, regional and international NGOs; universities; media and international/regional IGOs. Examples of NGOs and other civil agencies from the various regions which have participated in these activities include:

- **Africa:** ACCORD (South Africa), African Training and Research Centre for Women (Ethiopia), Alliance of Solidarity for Family (Seychelles), Botswana Network of AIDS Organisations, Campaign for Good Governance (Sierra Leone), Civil Society Movement (Sierra Leone), Community Agency for Social Enquiry (South Africa), Co-ordinating Assembly of NGOs (Swaziland), FEMNET (Kenya), Federation of African Women Educationalists (Sierra Leone), Forum for Women in Democracy (Uganda), Legal Assistance Centre (Namibia), Lesotho Council of NGOs, Mauritius Council of Social

