



Commonwealth Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs

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

WAMM(04)(O)3

CSO Participation in 7WAMM and Future WAMMs Gender Section, Commonwealth Secretariat

Background Context of Commonwealth Government - Civil Society Partnership

At their Meeting in Coolum in 2002, Heads of Government adopted the High Level Group Report, which set out a number of concrete steps to build a strong and dynamic Commonwealth for the 21st century.

2. With regard to building and strengthening government-civil society partnerships, the High Level Group called on:

the many intergovernmental, professional and civil society bodies which help us to implement our Commonwealth values, to join with us in building closer Commonwealth 'family' links, and strengthening consultation and collaboration. We are convinced of the need for stronger links and better two-way communication and coordination between the official and non-governmental Commonwealth, and among Commonwealth NGOs. This will give Commonwealth activities greater impact, ensuring that every programme produces lasting benefit (Coolum Declaration, 2002).

3. The Commonwealth Foundation is the inter-governmental body mandated by Commonwealth governments to support the work of civil society. The Foundation, working in collaboration with Secretariat Divisions, has facilitated CSO preparations for, and participation in, Ministerial meetings.

4. The Education, Gender and Health Sections of the Secretariat's Social Transformation Programmes Division (STPD), have led the way in collaborating with CSOs. The Gender Section has built strong partnerships with the Commonwealth Foundation and CSOs at the national, regional, pan-Commonwealth and international levels. All Gender Section projects and activities include CSO participation as partner organisations, resource persons and participants. This has been a very positive strategy for supporting member governments in implementing the 1995 PoA and its 2000 Update, as well as in developing the new 2005-2015 PoA.

CSO Participation in Commonwealth Ministerial Meetings

5. There has been a gradual trend towards greater civil society participation in Commonwealth Heads of Government and Ministerial Meetings.

6. However, CSO accreditation to specific Ministerial Meetings depends on the level of existing partnerships between the relevant Secretariat Division and civil society organisations. Annex 1 illustrates how a number of Commonwealth Ministerial Meetings have addressed civil society participation.

CSO Participation in Previous Women's Affairs Ministers Meetings (WAMMs)

7. WAMMs are held triennially. In the past, accredited CSOs have been invited to observe plenary sessions, and participate fully in thematic discussion / working groups. In 5WAMM (Port of Spain, 1996) and 6WAMM (New Delhi, 2000), the Commonwealth Women's NGO Network presented the recommendations of the parallel NGO Forum in the final plenary sessions.

8. *Criteria for accreditation:* CSOs must be known to the Secretariat's Gender Section or to the Commonwealth Foundation. In previous WAMMs, the Commonwealth Women's NGO Network was responsible for co-ordinating the parallel NGO Forum.

CSO Participation in 7WAMM

9. 7WAMM has marked an advance in CSO representation and participation in four key ways:

- (a) Consultations were held with CSOs in the development of the new Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality 2005-2015;
- (b) Consultations were held with CSOs in the process of conceptualising 7WAMM;
- (c) There has been an expanded CSO accreditation to 7WAMM; and
- (d) The 7WAMM Partners' Forum includes a range of civil society events and activities.

Annex 2 outlines the activities undertaken in these four areas.

Commonwealth Foundation Request for Greater Participation in 7WAMM

10. Based on extensive discussions between the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Foundation, the accredited CSOs (see Annex 2) have access to the following speaking opportunities in 7WAMM:

- **SOM:** Representatives of CSOs in the Gender Reference Group have been invited to attend the session of the Senior Officials Meeting (30th May) focused on the 2005-2015 Plan of Action.
- **7WAMM Plenaries:** CSOs included in government delegations are invited to speak in plenary at 7WAMM, at the invitation of the Government Head of Delegation.
- **7WAMM Thematic Discussion Groups:** CSOs are free to dialogue with Ministers, senior officials and representatives of international/ regional/ bilateral agencies.

- **7WAMM Plenary Government-Civil Society Dialogue:** Representatives of the various events/activities in the Partners' Forum including the civil society meeting will have an opportunity to dialogue with Ministers and senior officials on the PoA. This session seeks to build and strengthen government-civil society partnerships for enhanced implementation of the 2005-2015 PoA.

11. To gain maximum value from the presence of civil society, the Commonwealth Foundation has further requested that one in every six speakers in 7WAMM plenary sessions should be a CSO. Such speaking rights would enable CSO perspectives to be heard during the plenary discussions, which include sessions responding to the expert speakers, the feedback plenary session after the thematic discussion groups, and input into the final day's discussions on the PoA, 7WAMM Communique and Message to CHOGM.

12. This is in line with current thinking and practice by the UN at annual meetings of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW).

Proposal for SOM's Consideration

13. The Gender Section of the Commonwealth Secretariat puts forward for SOM's consideration, the proposal by the Commonwealth Foundation that one in every six speakers in 7WAMM plenary sessions should be a CSO.

14. If agreed by SOM, the Commonwealth Foundation proposes to manage the process of:

- Identifying CSO speakers for each plenary session; and
- Submitting a list (in speaking order) to the Chair for each plenary session.

CIVIL SOCIETY PARTICIPATION IN SPECIFIC COMMONWEALTH MINISTERIAL MEETINGS

Examples of civil society participation in Ministerial Meetings include the following:

Education Ministers Meetings (CCEMs): CCEMs are held triennially. Accredited CSOs may observe sessions and participate in Ministerial Committee Sessions and Round Tables. *Criteria for accreditation:* CSOs must have a working relationship with the Secretariat's Education Section or Ministry of Education in member countries. Currently, most accredited CSOs are pan-Commonwealth associations.

Law Ministers Meetings (LMMs): LMMs are held triennially. All sessions are closed except to a few organisations with which the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Division (LCAD) works closely, who are present by invitation. *Criteria for accreditation:* CSOs must have a working relationship with LCAD and either have a general ongoing interest in a number of areas of the legal work of the Division or have a contribution to make to a specific agenda item. Currently most of the accredited organisations are Commonwealth professional associations, but occasionally other civil society organisations have been included.

Finance Ministers Meetings (FMMs): FMMs are held annually. Most of the sessions are closed. Each meeting has a special theme which is addressed during one session. This session is open to participation by four or five CSOs. *Criteria for accreditation:* CSOs must have been involved in CSO consultations on the special theme hosted by the Commonwealth Foundation. A wide range of CSOs are involved in these consultations.

Health Ministers Meetings (pre-WHA): Pre-WHA meetings are held annually immediately prior to the World Health Assembly (WHA). Pre-WHAs include annual roundtables in which accredited CSOs participate. Accredited CSOs may observe all sessions. *Criteria for accreditation:* CSOs must fulfil an important role in international or Commonwealth-wide cooperation in some aspects of health, and must have a working relationship with the Secretariat's Health Section. Currently most accredited CSOs are Commonwealth associations. Other civil society organisations are invited to specific meetings if they can contribute to discussions and action on the topic(s) being addressed.

CSO PARTICIPATION IN 7WAMM

A meeting of Commonwealth Secretariat Divisions responsible for organising Heads of Government Meetings (CHOGMs) and Ministerial Meetings (Education, Finance, Health, Law, Youth, and Women's Affairs) held on 22 April 2004 came to the following conclusions:

- All Ministerial Meetings are handled in a different way. No 'one size fits all'. Where Ministerial Meetings have a history of working with civil society, a strong case can be made for increased CSO participation;
- Each Ministerial Meeting should look at its own practice, estimate the changes that it would entail, consider the costs and benefits, and make its own decision as to how to proceed.

The following is a brief outline of the activities undertaken to date in the following areas: (a) consultations with CSOs in the development of the new Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality 2005-2015; (b) consultations with CSOs in the process of conceptualising 7WAMM; (c) expanded CSO accreditation to 7WAMM; and (d) civil society activities in the Partners' Forum; and (d) civil society events/activities in the Partners' Forum.

(a) Development of the new Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality 2005-2015

- 7WAMM Preparatory Meeting of Heads of National Women's Machineries, held in New York in March 2003, included the Commonwealth Foundation and a representative of the Commonwealth Women's NGO Network. The meeting brainstormed the new areas of focus for the PoA. It agreed that the Commonwealth should strengthen links between governments and civil society in developing the 2005-2015 PoA and in planning 7WAMM;
- Setting up of a Commonwealth Gender Reference Group to make inputs into the PoA, which included 2-3 Governments per region, one CSO per region, the Commonwealth Women's NGO Network, and regional intergovernmental and other partner agencies;
- Meeting held on 17 November 2003 with Secretariat Divisions, and Commonwealth IGOs and associations to invite their contributions to the development of the PoA;
- Expert Group Meeting on Gender and Human Rights held in February 2004, to which the Commonwealth Foundation, CMJA and human rights CSOs were invited to discuss areas of focus for the new PoA;
- Meeting held on 23 February 2004 with Secretariat Divisions, and Commonwealth IGOs and associations, to invite their critical feedback on the Draft PoA;
- 7WAMM Preparatory Meeting of Ministers and Heads of National Women's Machineries held in New York on 28-29 February 2004, to which Commonwealth IGOs and associations were invited to contribute to the final debate on the Draft PoA before being tabled at 7WAMM.

(b) Consultations in the process of conceptualising/ planning 7WAMM

- A dialogue with civil society was held at the UN in New York in March 2003, facilitated by the Commonwealth Foundation and the Secretariat;
- A meeting was held with a broad range of CSOs and donor agencies in Fiji Islands led by the Secretariat during a 7WAMM planning mission in June 2003;
- A meeting was held with a group of CSOs in the wings of CHOGM in Abuja, December 2003, facilitated by the Commonwealth Foundation and Secretariat;
- The Commonwealth Foundation and other Commonwealth associations and CSOs were invited to the 7WAMM Preparatory Meeting in New York on 28-29 February 2004, to contribute to the planning of 7WAMM;
- The CSO Steering Committee (CSO representatives on the Commonwealth Gender Reference Group) have contributed to the Commonwealth Ministers Reference Book, a draft of which will be circulated at 7WAMM, and which will be published in time for presentation at the Beijing+ 10 Global Review at the UN in 2005;
- CSO consultations have been held on the 2005-2015 PoA in member countries, e.g., in the Pacific region.

(c) Expanded CSO Accreditation to 7WAMM

The following categories and numbers of CSOs have been accredited to 7WAMM:

- All CSOs included in government delegations;
- 50 CSOs invited to the Civil Society Meeting in the Partners' Forum;
- 20 Commonwealth intergovernmental organisations and associations (1 representative each);
- 5 representatives of each of the following Commonwealth associations hosting workshops/events in the Partners' Forum (Commonwealth Parliamentary Association [CPA]; Commonwealth Magistrates and Judges Association/Commonwealth Lawyers Association [CMJA/CLA]; and Commonwealth Business Women's Network [CBWN]); and
- 20 international, regional and bilateral partner agencies (1 representative each).

(d) Civil Society Events/Activities in the Partners' Forum:

The 7WAMM Partners' Forum will take place mainly on the same compound as the Ministerial Meeting (the Sheraton Resort, Nadi, Fiji Islands), to facilitate the greatest dialogue and exchange between governments and civil society.

The Partners' Forum, being co-ordinated by the Commonwealth Foundation, includes the following events/activities:

- Civil Society Meeting (for CSOs);
- CPA Workshop (for parliamentarians);
- CMJA/CLA Workshop (for magistrates, judges and lawyers);
- CBWN Roundtable (for business women);
- Donors' Meeting (for international, regional and bilateral agencies);
- A Partners' Forum evening event; and
- A display of publications, videos, crafts.