

**Eleventh Meeting of the Commonwealth Consultative Group on Environment (CCGE)
19 April 2005, New York**

Summary Statement by the Chair

Commonwealth Ministers and Senior Officials met on 19 April 2005 as the eleventh session of the Commonwealth Consultative Group on Environment (CCGE). The meeting was convened to coincide with the Thirteenth Session of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD-13) held at UN Headquarters in New York. It was chaired by the Hon Elizabeth Thompson-McDowald, M.P., the Barbados Minister of Housing, Lands and Environment.

Ministers had a wide ranging discussion on challenges, policy approaches and mechanisms to support a fully integrated approach, across government departments, and between central government, local government and other groups, in the areas of water, sanitation and human settlements. The Chair of CSD-13, H. E. Ambassador John Ashe of Antigua and Barbuda, presented some outstanding issues that were before the Commission and stated his wish to see CSD-13 agree a clear statement of practical policy options on water, sanitation and human settlements, and discuss the Millennium Development Goals ahead of the review of progress that will take place later in the year.

Many delegations outlined policy approaches and strategies that their governments were implementing to address priority concerns. They also shared their experiences with different mechanisms to promote an integrated approach. This included a discussion of the role of poverty reduction strategies, national sustainable development strategies, national sustainable development committees and approaches outside central government, such as the Federation of Canadian Municipalities which was effectively promoting environmental perspectives.

A number of African delegations highlighted the issue of poverty as the greatest challenge that they face in addressing water, sanitation and human settlement concerns. The challenge requires action to: reduce poverty; upgrade informal settlements in a situation of rapid urbanisation; facilitate greater access to water and sanitation; and develop new water supplies. It necessitates greater investment in basic infrastructure; as well as the restoration, conservation and, in some cases, the expansion of often badly degraded water catchment areas, for example by planting trees and building up forest resources. In this context, strategies are needed to address the debt concerns of developing countries, especially the Least Developed Countries, including debt swaps, debt relief and debt cancellation. Ministers also emphasised the need for an ecosystem-based approach and integrated water resources management to underpin and inform approaches, both within countries and across national borders. Ministers highlighted the important role of science, and the need to harmonise the relationship between water and agriculture. A closer integration of all agencies would go some way towards achieving this aim.

Ministers called for approaches that strengthen the inter-agency approach on water within the United Nations system, and effective co-ordination of the many UN agencies that are working on water, including international waters. One delegate called for a practical response to support developing countries in their efforts to create integrated water resources management policy frameworks at the national level. Another delegate called for equal status to be accorded to water, sanitation and human settlements, and for the human settlements target to be set in line with those for water and sanitation. There was support amongst a number of delegations for a World Sanitation Day, to facilitate a clear focus on this concern each year.

Developing countries called for concrete support in their efforts to build capacity and engage in the transfer of appropriate technologies in the water, sanitation and human settlement sectors. One delegate raised concerns about the approach that international financial institutions were taking with respect to development of the water sector, saying that work needs to be done to examine how the attainment of the MDGs was being affected by the conditions established through multilateral funding agencies, particularly with respect to cost recovery in the water sector. Ministers highlighted the need to involve young people from an early age on all the issues, including through education, and to build an appreciation of the concerns, and engagement by, all necessary groups to ensure integrated and sustainable solutions. Ministers highlighted how different strategies and approaches were being used to ensure an inclusive process involving people and different groups. They noted that recognition and understanding of the concept of sustainable development was problematic but essential to building integrated solutions.

In their discussion on follow-up to the Mauritius International Meeting on the sustainable development of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) (January 2005), Ministers heard a presentation by the Vice-Chair of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), H. E. Ambassador Enele Sapoaga of Tuvalu. He said that the key concern of SIDS going in to the Mauritius meeting had been the lack of action on the Barbados Programme of Action (BPOA) on the sustainable development of SIDS. The Mauritius process had clearly expressed SIDS' concerns and produced a Mauritius Strategy that provided a good basis for practical and achievable action. The UN Commission on Sustainable Development should continue as the forum for reviewing implementation of the Mauritius Strategy and the BPOA as well as new and emerging challenges to the sustainable development of SIDS. The Ambassador also called for action on SIDS concerns, not only by CSD-13, but in other international forums and processes. He sought close collaboration between AOSIS and the Commonwealth in implementation of the Mauritius Strategy. Ministers supported the role of the CSD in reviewing implementation of the Mauritius Strategy and BPOA. One delegate noted the resonance that the effects of climate change on SIDS has for Inuit and other northern communities, saying that these common concerns provided important communication and outreach mechanisms in the discussion of vulnerabilities. Another delegate highlighted the significant role that regional bodies have to play in implementing the outcomes from Mauritius. A number of African delegations expressed their full support for the Mauritius Strategy and hoped that the assistance that is being provided to SIDS through the Strategy would also be extended to African countries and developing countries with coastal areas. A SIDS representative recognised that while the primary responsibility for implementation lies at the national level, SIDS experience serious capacity constraints. SIDS sought support from all their partners to address national capacity deficiencies and ensure that effective linkages are made between the Mauritius Strategy, the MDGs and national sustainable development strategies.

Ministers noted a request by the representative of Guyana for support in efforts to mobilise funding for the Iwokrama International Rain Forest Programme, which is threatened by a lack of funding for essential activities. The Programme was established through an agreement between the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Government of Guyana. Ministers welcomed the launch of the Plain Language Guide to the World Summit on Sustainable Development, an outcome of discussions by the CCGE following the Johannesburg Summit in 2002, and they asked the Commonwealth Secretariat to liaise with governments on convening the next meeting and identifying a Chair for the next session.

New York – 21 April 2005