

**50th SESSION OF THE
COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN (CSW)**

**United Nations, New York
27 February – 10 March 2006**

**Commonwealth Secretariat
Statement to the 50th Session**



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INTRODUCTION

Madam Chair, I bring greetings from the Commonwealth Secretary General, Hon Don McKinnon, and congratulate the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) on this historic 50th Session.

Madam Chair, the Commonwealth is a voluntary association of 53 member countries, representing nearly one third of UN member countries from 5 regions of the world. We recognise the importance of the 50th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women and welcome the opportunity to participate in the deliberations.

The Commonwealth is well positioned to contribute to the achievement of gender equality and women's rights around the world. The Commonwealth Secretariat works closely with heads of government, key government ministries, national women's machineries, civil society organisations, international and regional agencies, and other stakeholders in the advancement of gender equality.

Madam Chair, on 26th February 2006 we held a Commonwealth Consultation which included Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs, Heads of National Women's Machineries and other partners, and reaffirmed our commitment to implementing the Commonwealth Plan of Action (PoA) for Gender Equality 2005-2015. The Plan of Action was presented to the Beijing+10 Review in March 2005 and endorsed by Commonwealth Heads of Government at their summit in November 2005. It represents the Commonwealth's contribution to advancing gender equality and women's rights in the present decade.

The Consultation also reiterated Commonwealth support for the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action and Beijing+10 Declaration, and the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.

The Commonwealth Consultation re-emphasised the importance of achieving the Millennium Development Goals, which serve as a means of advancing women's rights and gender equality, and also as indicators of progress made. Concern was expressed that key international targets on eliminating gender disparities in education and increasing the access of affected persons to HIV/AIDS treatment, were missed by millions in 2005. There is a need for urgent action to implement internationally agreed commitments to advance the rights and status of women and girls.

Madam Chair, the full text of the Statement from the Consultation of Commonwealth National Women's Machineries to the 50th Session of the CSW is attached for your consideration.

COMMONWEALTH PLAN OF ACTION FOR GENDER EQUALITY 2005-2015

Madam Chair, the Commonwealth recognises that the realisation of women's rights and achievement of gender equality are essential for the attainment of the Commonwealth's overarching goals of development, democracy and human rights. We welcome the report of the Secretary-General outlining the following substantive themes for the CSW work plan:

1. Elimination of discrimination against the girl child;
2. Financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women; and
3. Sharing of responsibilities for home and family, including care giving in the context of HIV/AIDS.

These themes address priorities of the 53 Commonwealth countries and are consistent with the four critical areas for Commonwealth action in the PoA, which are:

- i. Gender, Democracy, Peace and Conflict;
- ii. Gender, Human Rights and Law;
- iii. Gender, Poverty Eradication and Economic Empowerment; and
- iv. Gender and HIV/AIDS.

We recognise that millions of women and girls do not benefit equally from development programmes and that the MDGs and other globally agreed gender equality targets are seriously off track.

This is of particular concern for the Commonwealth since while the 53 member countries comprise 30% of the world's population, they bear a disproportionate share of global poverty and ill health. As an illustration, 60% of global HIV/AIDS cases and 60% of maternal deaths occur in the Commonwealth. The picture is similar in education, since the majority of children out of school live in Commonwealth countries – and the majority of these are girls.

We need to act now to ensure that additional resources for development due to come on stream from debt relief and increased Overseas Development Assistance, actually reach the poorest. In particular, we need to ensure that all development resources reach disadvantaged women and girls. Now is the time to forge ahead and advance the rights of women and girls and achieve gender equality. In the Commonwealth, we have finished talking, our Plan for 2005 – 2015 is in place and we are focusing on action.

The Commonwealth will continue to deepen its gender mainstreaming approach, particularly in addressing persistent and emerging challenges such as women's political representation; women's participation in peace processes; gender-based violence; gender-responsive budgets and debt management; trade policy, entrepreneurship and export promotion; trafficking of women and girls; and HIV/AIDS.

As we move forward with our Plan of Action, the Commonwealth Secretariat will harmonise monitoring of PoA implementation with international frameworks and instruments such as CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action and the MDGs, to avoid duplication of effort and reduce the burden of reporting on member governments.

CONCLUSION

Madam Chair, the Commonwealth urges Governments to build on international commitments and strengthen partnerships to effectively implement the finalised work programme of the Commission on the Status of Women 2007 – 2011. We call for co-ordinated action between all stakeholders.

For our part, Madam Chair, the Commonwealth will build on its shared vision for the next decade contained in the PoA – that vision sees women and men as equal partners in our common future. As member governments and partners from civil society forge ahead with goals to realise that vision, the Commonwealth Secretariat renews its commitment to advance women's rights and achieve gender equality for attaining global peace and prosperity.

Finally, Madam Chair, we wish the CSW a very happy 50th birthday and extend our best wishes to CSW for the next 50 years. But we also look forward to a time when women and men, girls and boys will live in a world where peace, women's rights and gender equality are universal, non-controversial and accepted as non-negotiable. At that time, the CSW will be able to celebrate its own closure, secure in the knowledge that its job has been done.



Consultation of Commonwealth National Women's Machineries on the eve of the 50th Session of the CSW

Helmsley Hotel, 212 East 42nd Street, New York
Sunday 26 February 2006

**Statement by the Commonwealth Consultation of
National Women's Machineries to the
50th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women**
United Nations Headquarters, New York
27 February – 10 March 2006

This consultation, held on 26 February 2006 in New York, on the eve of the 50th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), was attended by 44 member countries including 16 Women's Affairs Ministers; as well as representatives of civil society organisations; and international, Commonwealth and regional agencies.

The Commonwealth represents developing and developed countries, and covers five regions. We affirm the importance of the 50th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), and welcome this opportunity to articulate related developments in the Commonwealth.

We reaffirm our commitment to implementing the Commonwealth Plan of Action (PoA) for Gender Equality 2005-2015, which was presented to the Beijing+10 Review in March 2005 and endorsed by Commonwealth Heads of Government at their summit in November 2005. The PoA focuses on four critical areas for Commonwealth action, namely:

- Gender, democracy, peace and conflict;
- Gender, human rights and law;
- Gender, poverty eradication and economic empowerment; and
- Gender and HIV/AIDS.

We equally support and recognise synergies among CEDAW, BPfA, the Beijing+10 Declaration, the Millennium Development Goals, and UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in advancing the achievement of women's rights and gender equality.

We acknowledge the significance of the two major global meetings after the Beijing+10 Review, namely, the Millennium Summit Review in September 2005, and the 6th Ministerial Meeting of the WTO in December 2005. These two meetings re-established the goals and objectives of narrowing the gap between rich and poor nations in order to achieve a more just and equitable world order for women and men, girls and boys. We

also recognise that key international targets for eliminating gender disparities in education and increasing coverage for HIV/AIDS treatment, were missed in 2005.

At this consultation, the Commonwealth Secretariat reported on its gender mainstreaming approach through the PoA's critical areas for action, including:

- increases in women's representation in political decision-making and peace processes;
- new initiatives in the areas of gender, culture and law; and gender, youth and indigenous peoples;
- advances in gender-responsive budgets; and gender, trade policy, enterprise and export promotion; and
- effective gender mainstreaming in HIV/AIDS interventions.

The Secretariat is also undertaking a gender audit of its governance, planning, budget, human resource management, and programme delivery.

The consultation received a report of the Commonwealth Gender PoA Monitoring Group which was set up by Women's Affairs Ministers at their Beijing+10 meeting in 2005. The consultation accepted their recommendation of the need for harmonisation of the PoA monitoring and reporting, with that of international frameworks and instruments on gender equality.

A key feature of the consultation was a panel discussion on women in decision-making at all levels. Panellists, who comprised Ministers, heads of national women's machineries, a Commonwealth association and a civil society organisation, spoke on women in decision-making in parliament, local government, the public sector and civil society.

This consultation called attention to the fact that millions of women and girls are not benefiting equally from development programmes. It also highlighted the need for gender-responsive budgets, gender audits, indicators and other measures to ensure greater accountability for the implementation of gender equality commitments. The meeting further recognised that adequate financial, human and technological resources and increased donor support are essential for effective implementation of the PoA.

In order to implement our international commitments, we recognise the need for strengthened partnerships at all levels – among governments, civil society and other partners. As Commonwealth countries, we are committed to contributing towards the effective implementation of the work programme of the Commission on the Status of Women.

Finally, the Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality 2005-2015 articulates the vision that advancing gender equality will contribute to development, democracy and peace. This is consistent with the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document which reaffirms that "gender equality and the promotion and protection of the full enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all are essential to advance development and peace and security". We will continue to work collectively to achieve these aspirations.