

bership, the Commonwealth might have to suspend members that abuse these norms – as it began to do by suspending Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Pakistan in the 1990s and by monitoring The Gambia's progress closely.

The Commonwealth's biggest strength today comes from the fact that it is a highly diverse group of countries and peoples from every continent and at every stage of development which share common values – and which do agree on the really big questions.

A Commonwealth of values

The Commonwealth in the 1990s found that it was able to evolve into an organisation which could state its values clearly and begin to act on them. The values that Commonwealth countries share are not unique to them – in fact they form the basis of an emerging global consensus – but the Commonwealth does not contain the countries which have stopped other international organisations from pursuing this agenda more vigorously.

The Commonwealth has affirmed the importance of democracy and has gone further than other international bodies in suspending members when they break with democracy. And it is committed to **developing civil society**, as an essential tool to safeguard democracy and to deliver the 'people-centred development' which is the theme of CHOGM. The Commonwealth makes much of its people-to-people links. It does not contain governments like those of China and Burma, which oppose the idea of fundamental human rights.

Commonwealth countries all believe in trying to seize the opportunities of globalisation for themselves and their peoples – it does not contain any of those few