

have not always been cited or quoted when the relevant topic (such as debt relief) has been addressed by Executive Directors in the IMF or the World Bank or by delegates to UN meetings, e.g. addressing the interests of small states. This is not invariably the rule. Commonwealth Environment Ministers began to meet after the Rio Earth Summit and have managed to forge consensus on sensitive issues that eluded UN negotiators. That agreed at Edinburgh on climate change was much quoted in the passages at the subsequent Kyoto Conference. But this was the exception rather than the rule, and the warm embrace of solidarity which Commonwealth conferences engender seems to fall away when exposed to the chilly and combative atmosphere of typical UN meetings.

As I said earlier, the Commonwealth can rightly claim to be a global sub-set, and this is undoubtedly one of its strengths. But the emergence of new institutions like the WTO is changing the world, and the proliferation of new regional associations threatens the multilateralism on which the Commonwealth is founded. It is quite understandable that Commonwealth governments should give first priority to their regional agenda: Canada in NAFTA and Britain in the EU can be said to have done so already. But there are dangers. For instance, when the Caribbean and African High Commissions in London presented the Secretariat with an alternative draft Economic Declaration with the thought that this might displace the Secretariat's text which was based on consultation with all our member countries, the procedure was not without its risks for our collective solidarity and welfare.

One must also ask how much success we have had in implementing the third leg of the Millbrook Action Programme of 1995, which called for the Commonwealth to share its techniques of consensus-building with other fora. True, we increasingly hold Commonwealth ministerial meetings in the margins of other international events like the Commission on Sustainable Development, or the annual meetings of the IMF and the World Bank. But the transmission mechanism is imperfect and our practice of building consensus rather than voting seems not always to be compatible with the ground rules on which other organisations