

Objectives at the Auckland Meeting

The discussions among heads of government in Auckland will concentrate in large part on ways to enhance the Commonwealth's work towards the objectives established in its 1991 Harare Declaration. Discussions will be organized under three broad themes: advancing Commonwealth fundamental values, co-operation for economic and social development, and facilitating international consensus-building. The Commonwealth already is active in all these areas, but there is general agreement that additional concrete measures, structured as an action plan, would give the Commonwealth's work a sharper focus.

Fundamental Political Values

The Harare Declaration established the promotion of fundamental values as a central purpose of the Commonwealth. Members agreed that the Commonwealth should work for the protection and promotion of democracy, the rule of law, the independence of the judiciary, just and honest government, and fundamental human rights.

The Harare Declaration was intended as an instrument to encourage developments in these directions, not as a statement of already achieved standards.

Since Harare, four Commonwealth countries that previously had one-party political systems (Kenya, Malawi, Seychelles and Zambia) and two that were under military regimes (Ghana and Lesotho) have made the transition to multiparty electoral systems, in each case with the encouragement and practical contributions from the Commonwealth.

The presence of Commonwealth observers at elections is a safeguard against irregularities. An election observer group can be all that stands between elections in which voters have confidence and a process which intensifies conflicts. The Commonwealth has observed 15 elections in 13 of its member countries, most recently in St. Kitts & Nevis in July and in Tanzania in October.

The Secretary-General has used the Harare Declaration as a basis for taking clear stands both publicly and through the exercise of "quiet diplomacy," to give positive support to democracy and to oppose anti-democratic developments in Commonwealth countries. He has actively employed discreet "good offices" to avoid and resolve conflicts in Commonwealth countries.

Heads of Government are expected to consider providing the Secretary-General and the Commonwealth with an expanded and more explicit mandate for this extremely valuable work.