

## HOW DO WE GET THEIR ATTENTION?

By Jim Carr

There is nothing scholarly about this piece, just a few observations from a former journalist who became enamoured with the Commonwealth.

It was in 1987 when young leaders from 37 countries around the Commonwealth were brought to Ottawa. The purpose was to develop young leadership, to see if fresh minds could tackle old problems, to determine whether or not a consensus could be found on the pressing issues of the moment, notably the dismantling of the apartheid regime in South Africa. We did reach a consensus. We did talk through our divisions and left that weeklong gathering buoyant and full of hope. If 75 young men and women from every part of the world, from every religious grouping and with vastly different cultural backgrounds could agree on something as complex as dismantling apartheid, then the Commonwealth must be doing something right.

We were bound together by a common language and a shared democratic tradition, as oddly shaped as some of those traditions appeared to be. Yet, in the end what mattered was that, in spite of all that diversity, we achieved unity. What emerged was a bond of fellowship and common purpose that none of us would forget soon.