

At the ministerial level, there are a number of Commonwealth meetings held on a regular basis. Finance ministers, for example, confer every year, immediately before the meeting of the World Bank, in order to review and discuss recent developments in the international economy. The Secretary of State for External Affairs attended the 1975 Commonwealth finance ministers' meeting, where the "new international economic order" was discussed. In addition, there are regular meetings of ministers of law, health and education, as well as meetings of other ministers when circumstances warrant them, such as the 1974 meeting of Commonwealth delegates to the World Food Conference in Rome and a subsequent ministerial meeting in London in March 1975, which led to the establishment of the Food Production and Rural Development Division of the Commonwealth Secretariat. Officials of Commonwealth governments also confer regularly on technical matters.

Commonwealth functional co-operation

Co-operative ventures constitute an expanding area of Commonwealth activity. Economic assistance for developing members has long been a matter of concern — the Colombo Plan was a Commonwealth initiative arising from consideration of the political and economic problems of South Asia by Commonwealth foreign ministers meeting at Colombo in January 1950. As the scheme for assistance emerged in the first few months of 1950, a decision was taken to invite non-Commonwealth countries in the area to participate in the Plan. This was done to ensure economic progress throughout the whole of South and Southeast Asia. A further step towards practical co-operation for development was taken by heads of government at Singapore in 1971, when they agreed to change the Commonwealth Program for Technical Co-operation. Developing as well as developed members make voluntary contributions to the CFTC to support its activities in technical assistance, export development, training and education. Between June 1974 and June 1975, the CFTC had completed, begun or approved some 700 projects in Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, the Mediterranean and the South Pacific. The operation of the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan is a practical result of Commonwealth co-operation in education. Between 1970 and 1975, 2,083 Commonwealth scholarships have been taken up in 15 countries; in 1975-76, the plan made 1,114 awards. The 1973 Heads of