

STUDENTS ROLE-PLAY As COMMONWEALTH LEADERS

Ottawa, Ontario, high school student Shawn Singh knows from experience how difficult a consensus can be to achieve. Last spring, he took part in the Na-

tional Student Commonwealth Forum, a week-long event during which students from across Canada role-play as leaders of Commonwealth

nations. They discuss issues facing the Commonwealth, and try to overcome obstacles to agreement. "Consensus was the big word," he recalls. "It's a great goal, but it's hard to achieve."

The 120 participants attend workshops and small discussion groups during the week leading up to the model heads of government meeting. They discuss issues such as Canada's role in the Commonwealth, human rights, the environment, AIDS awareness, women's rights, and economic development. Discussions focus on both Canadian and international issues.

Mr. Singh, 18, says it was a really good experience. "I met a lot of new people, and I've stayed in touch with some of them." He learned about the country he represented—Singapore—and he enjoyed debating so much that he decided he would become a lawyer.

The forum, which has been held every year since 1973, is sponsored by the Ottawa branch of the Royal Commonwealth Society. The goal of this international non-governmental organization is to support the Commonwealth. In Canada, there are about 2500 members and branches in cities across the country.

The work of planning the forum is done by young people who attended in previous years, and one adult volunteer. Mr. Singh and the other organizers are now busy making sure this year's forum is even better than last. ☺

DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES

In 1971, Commonwealth members agreed on the Singapore Declaration, the first statement of six principles forming the foundation of their ethical beliefs. The Singapore Principles underlying the Commonwealth are:

- a belief that international peace and order are essential to the security and prosperity of mankind;
- a belief in the liberty of the individual under law;
- the recognition racial prejudice and intolerance as a dangerous sickness...
- the opposition all forms of racial oppression, and a commitment to the principles of human dignity and equality;
- the recognition of the urgency of economic and social development to satisfy the basic aspirations of the vast majority of peoples of the world; we seek the progressive removal of the wide disparities in living standards amongst our members.

In 1991, at the Heads of Government meeting in Harare, Zimbabwe, Commonwealth leaders reaffirmed these principles. In

the Harare Declaration, they pledged to concentrate on the following areas:

- the protection and promotion of the Commonwealth's fundamental political values of democracy, the rule of law, just, honest government and fundamental human rights;
- equality for women;
- universal access to education;
- eradication of apartheid and the establishment of a democratic, non-racial, prosperous South Africa;
- the promotion of sustainable development and the alleviation of poverty;
- protection of the environment;
- action to combat drug trafficking and abuse; and communicable diseases;
- assistance to small member-states in tackling their particular economic and security problems;
- support of the United Nations and other international institutions in the world's search for peace, disarmament and effective arms control, and the promotion of international consensus on major global issues.