

It follows that the essential quality of the Commonwealth today is not the likeness of its member states but their diversity -- but a diversity that subsists on the basis of mutual respect and in an environment of constant effort to identify and promote elements of accommodation and accord. I believe that President Nyerere came closest to capturing this reality of the modern Commonwealth when he described it, not in institutional terms, but as:

"people meeting together, consulting, learning from each other, trying to persuade each other and sometimes co-operating with each other, regardless of economics or geography or ideology or religion or race."

When it is recalled that these 'people' constitute, or at least represent, one quarter of all the peoples of the world, it is self-evident how significant in global terms are these processes and habits of dialogue, understanding and co-operation. This facility for bridging the many gaps that divide a scattered and disparate humanity is what the Commonwealth truly is.

Commonwealth Heads of Government are particularly mindful of this facility and value greatly the opportunities it provides. They share with each other the knowledge that at the national level it is with each of them that the buck stops. They, more than most, are conscious of the inter-action between the national and the international condition and are aware of how much the complexity, and often the fragility, of the former is compounded by the latter. They know that in the fluid conditions of the contemporary world there is no immunity from instability, that all societies are to some extent at risk, and that the price of social cohesion is an ongoing process of reappraisal and responsive change.

I have little doubt that these shared perceptions contribute much to the intimacy and candour of their biennial consultations and the relationships, rooted in understanding and friendship, that sustain their exchanges between meetings.

Speaking after the Ottawa Meeting of 1973 Prime Minister Manley of Jamaica, who was later to guide the Kingston Meeting of 1975, summed it up thus:

"We contain every factor which now challenges the political intelligence of mankind. We have rich nations and poor; our politics range from the libertarian through the authoritarian to the incredible. Yet withal there is a strange indefinable yet surviving goodwill: I am almost tempted to say an instinctive empathy... the truth is that none of us... really understand why we have this capacity for communication, and, stranger still, the continuing will to use it. But it is there."

And if these realities of the Commonwealth condition serve to explain what the Commonwealth is, they also serve to determine what the Commonwealth does. Certainly, high on any list of Commonwealth commitments is the obligation to place its facility for communication and consensus-building at the service of the international community. A Commonwealth of 35 (soon to be 36 member states with the independence of the Seychelles within the week) cannot but be concerned with global problems. An outward-looking Commonwealth must contribute to the search for global solutions. It is important that this reality be understood both within and outside the Commonwealth. There are, in truth, today no Commonwealth problems as such; those issues that agitate Commonwealth member states in general will almost invariably