

because of the shared working traditions and methods that prevail throughout our membership, offers a facility for working towards solutions. That is what it is for: to that it is dedicated.

We are now actively preparing for the next meeting of our Heads of Government, which opens in London on 8 June. This is the apex of the Commonwealth relationship, a forum for debate unparalleled in the world. It brings together not just the leaders of one bloc or interest group in the world, but those of countries as diverse in their economic wealth as Canada and Bangladesh: as diverse geographically as Fiji and Malta: landlocked Zambia with island Barbados - a vast range of races, colours, religions, political philosophies, right across the world.

It brings together members of many of the world's regional groupings - the Organisation of American States and the Association of South East Asian Nations; the European Community and the Organisation for African Unity. With unique informality the Heads of all these Governments - there were 31 Presidents and Prime Ministers around the table in Kingston, Jamaica, in 1975 - exchange ideas on their own and each others' preoccupations: an unrivalled forum for political enlightenment. And they also decide on practical initiatives.

Every year too, we organise a meeting of the Finance Ministers of the Commonwealth: meetings of Ministers of Education, of Legal Affairs, of Health, are regularly organised by the Secretariat. We have had meetings of Ministers concerned with Youth Affairs and meetings of Agriculture Ministers concerned with the problems of food production and rural development. In all these fields and in many others we work together on practical solutions to shared problems.

It is out of these processes of consultation that has come our Fund for Technical Co-operation - the operational arm that gives us a capacity to act in the service of development. The basis of the CFTC's success is that the Fund truly belongs to and is operated by all its members together. All subscribe to the Fund: it belongs not to the rich countries, but to all its countries. It benefits development, but all are donors.

More important yet is the fact that so many of the experts provided by the Fund to developing countries are themselves from other developing countries: of our present total of some 250 experts in the field, 44 per cent are themselves from developing countries. This is not just a good example of the poor helping each other - although it is that, and that is good. It is equally important in functional terms; in terms of relevant skills and experience. In the CFTC the resources of the Commonwealth are combined to find the most suitable and the most useful way of helping other members: it is the very foundation of all we do, and I commend it to you for study, if not necessarily for imitation!

But much of the work asked of the Secretariat by member countries is in the wide area of political and economic relations