

leap from the page. Less dramatic but no less important is the Commonwealth's success in guiding military or one-party states into the path of pluralism and democratic practice, overtly in election monitoring exercises, more discreetly through the Secretary-General's good offices which have so often de-fused potential civil wars.

In the field of economics, the Commonwealth has a particularly credible record over debt relief, where the Commonwealth's support for British initiatives in 1990 and 1994 has already begun to reduce the burden of debt on those least able to bear it. Thanks to the Commonwealth, the issue of debt sustainability has been on the agenda of the IMF and the World Bank since 1966. Private investment flows to Africa, Asia and the South Pacific are already being augmented through the Commonwealth Private Investment Initiative (CPII) which Commonwealth Finance Ministers conceived, and a fourth fund in the Caribbean is likely to be established this year.

In the social field Commonwealth Youth Ministers will meet in May this year to endorse a Plan of Action on the empowerment of young people - and I am particularly glad to see so many young people with us today. This Plan will give new vigour to the work of the four regional centres through which the CYP's programme is delivered, enabling young people to participate in the national life of their country and win a hearing for their views. The innovative diploma for development now to be delivered by distance learning, owes much to the COL which British Columbia as well as the Government of Canada generously support.

The Plan of Action on Gender and Development devised by the Commonwealth, and launched at the Beijing UN Conference on Women in 1994, is now being implemented by Commonwealth Governments across the board, again with strong Canadian leadership. Our Health Programme fulfilling the mandates of the last ministerial meeting - the first ever to be hosted by South Africa - is so calibrated as to enable better resourced organisations like the World Health Organisation (WHO) to direct their funds into needy Commonwealth countries, with women, children and Aids