

modities and raw materials if the developing nations are to be able to predict and plan for their future. This is a complex problem, and solutions will depend on more assured access to finance, to technology and to markets. Each of these needs is itself surrounded by certain difficulties and there is not always agreement about the solutions.

We know, for example, that over the past five years the gap in access to finances has widened — particularly for those developing countries which must import the oil for the need for industrial development. It is now quite evident that we have to adapt the international lending institutions to alleviate the impact of these structural difficulties.

We also know that more imaginative approaches to the sharing of technology are essential — approaches based on bilateral, trilateral or regional co-operation.

Access to markets is absolutely essential to developing countries. In part, this can be achieved through multilateral trade negotiations. But equally essential is the access they have to markets in developed countries — an objective that is frustrated by protectionist measures in the latter countries.

Food security is another pressing issue. If we cannot reach agreement on ways of increasing food productivity in developing countries within the next decade, the combined food deficit will have increased by as much as four times.

The level of expenditures on armaments is not only a threat to world security. It cuts heavily into the resources that could be made available for development. This year we will spend about \$450 billion on armaments, and only about \$30 billion on development assistance.

Role of Commonwealth

Against this background, what might be the role of the Commonwealth — not as a collectivity of nations, but as an institution having a demonstrated capacity to effect change and, on occasion, to play a key role in making vital political change possible. Nowhere has this been more amply demonstrated than in resolving the difficulties of Zimbabwe, a country whose admission to the United Nations I had an opportunity to witness at the General Assembly a few weeks ago.

From a number of perspectives, the Commonwealth enjoys many advantages in effecting change in North-South relations, even though it is itself composed of nations belonging to both developed and developing nations. For one thing, it serves as a bridge between the two groups of nations, by promoting an awareness of mutual Commonwealth interests and interdependencies — and in this it again mirrors the growing interdependent nature of our world.

The Commonwealth also provides a rare opportunity for high-level consultations in an informal, frank and intimate setting, avoiding the rhetorical or adversary character of certain other international fora. More importantly, it need not be dominated by bloc-to-bloc attitudes or strategies — factors which too often result in the rigidity and inflexibility which hamper international resolution of problems.