

crucial issues at the wider global level. These are all evidence of the value Governments place on the Commonwealth connection.

But we cannot truthfully claim that this perception of the vitality of the Commonwealth, of the nature, the role and the value of the contemporary Commonwealth, is as yet adequately shared by the people of the Commonwealth. Outside the narrow echelons of governmental or professional or academic eminence, too many people know too little about the Commonwealth. Lack of knowledge generates indifference; and it sometimes generates scepticism if not, indeed, suspicion. In some quarters, there is the added problem of misinformation, of wrong impressions, of past images distorting the vision of today's reality.

In some respects, we should not be surprised that this is so, when we consider the massive transformation that the Commonwealth has undergone. There has been the sheer increase in numbers: in the number of countries assuming full membership of the association on becoming independent, and of the number of people who belong to the Commonwealth. In 1948 there were eight members. This year, we have just welcomed the Seychelles as our thirty-sixth member. This change in the size of membership has considerable implications for the issue of information and perception. There are more countries with many more people who need to be brought to an appreciation of the Commonwealth. Meanwhile, in the old and new member countries alike, the passage of time releases generations who must be brought anew to an awareness of the Commonwealth.

But the change is not merely numerical. Besides the quantitative change in Commonwealth membership, there has been a change in conception and in character, a change in purposes and in priorities. These are changes that history has wrought, changes which mean that the Commonwealth of 36 is now qualitatively different from yesterday's Commonwealth of 8. To the task of bringing an awareness of the Commonwealth to its vastly enlarged constituency is therefore added that of helping all the people of the Commonwealth to keep in step with the changed nature of the association.

What is this new Commonwealth? What distinguishes it from the old Commonwealth? What are its contemporary realities? What does it do? Before I set out to answer these questions I would like to say something that may seem obvious, but which perhaps is worth restating lest memory and sentiment so becloud perception that we end up missing entirely the meaning and significance of the present. Over twenty years ago, this was said about the Commonwealth.

"The Commonwealth bears no resemblance to the empires of the past. It is an entirely new conception - built on the highest qualities of the spirit of man, friendship, loyalty and the desire for freedom. To that new conception of an equal partnership of nations and races I shall give myself heart and soul every day of my life."