

Note for Correspondents

The Consultative Committee meeting will bring together delegates from many different parts of the world. The countries participating in or associated with the Colombo Plan for Co-Operative Economic Development in South and South-East Asia now include not only most of the Commonwealth countries and the United States but also all the independent countries and most of the dependent territories in South and South-East Asia, an area stretching from Pakistan to the Philippines and containing more than 600,000,000 people.

The Colombo Plan had its origin in a meeting of Commonwealth Foreign Ministers, which took place in Colombo in January 1950. The Governments of the countries of South and South-East Asia were faced with a number of formidable problems many of an economic character. They were making determined efforts to improve the economic condition of their people and to promote greater economic stability in their part of the world. Some assistance in this connection was being received from the United Kingdom, the United States and United Nations agencies. There was clearly a need, however, for a more co-ordinated approach to the economic problems of the area. The Foreign Ministers of the Commonwealth countries which met in Colombo took the initiative in considering further international action to deal with the problem, because three quarters of the people of South and South-East Asia live in countries which are part of the Commonwealth and the whole area is one with which Commonwealth Governments have close political and economic ties. In taking this initiative, however, the Commonwealth countries contemplated that all countries in South and South-East Asia should be invited to participate on equal terms in whatever plan could be devised, and that other countries outside the area might also wish to become associated with the Plan.

The first step was the establishment of the Consultative Committee, which first met in Sydney, Australia, in May 1950. This preliminary meeting was followed by a meeting in London, in October 1950, at which the Colombo Plan was drawn up. This embraced six-year development programmes of Commonwealth countries in South and South-East Asia and assessed the economic needs and resources of the whole area. Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Indonesia and Thailand were represented by observers at the London meetings. The United States, which was already co-operating with countries in South and South-East Asia under provisions of what was known as the "Point Four" programme, joined the Consultative Committee as a full member in 1951. By 1952, Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Nepal and Viet-Nam had also become full members, and Indonesia participated as a full member at the 1953 meetings in New Delhi. Thailand has continued to send observers to the Consultative Committee meetings and the Philippines has also been represented in this way at two of the meetings.