

Commonwealth Secretariat

The Commonwealth Secretariat, located in London, was established in 1965 to consolidate and co-ordinate the many strands of long-standing consultation and co-operation — in education, law, science, economic statistics, and other specialized fields. It is staffed by 305 people from Commonwealth countries and is financed by member governments under a system of assessed contributions.

From 1965 to 1975, the first Secretary-General, Canadian diplomat Arnold Smith, steered the Secretariat toward practical achievement and policy leadership. This approach was followed by his successor, Shridath Ramphal, a former Foreign Affairs Minister of Guyana. The third Secretary-General, Emeka Anyaoku of Nigeria, presided over the Commonwealth's reaffirmation of its commitment to its fundamental political values in both the Harare Declaration of 1991 and later in the Millbrook Action Program of 1995. The current Secretary-General, Don McKinnon, former Foreign Affairs and Trade Minister of New Zealand, was appointed to the post in April 2000 for a four-year term. The Secretary-General is responsible to heads of government collectively.

Gender Equality Program

The Commonwealth's vision and mandate is to work toward a world where women and men have equal rights and opportunities at all stages of their lives.

Commonwealth leaders endorsed the Plan of Action on Gender and Development at their 1995 meeting in Auckland. The aim is to make gender issues a priority in all policies, programs and activities of member governments and the Secretariat. Furthermore, participants at the heads of government meeting agreed to encourage member states to ensure that women make up at least 30 per cent of their political, public and private sector leaders by 2005.

Today, the Gender Affairs Department of the Commonwealth Secretariat implements four gender equity programs. The Gender Mainstreaming Program helps promote the integration of gender into all policies and programs of the Secretariat and member governments. The Human Rights Program promotes the rights of women and the girl child, including the elimination of violence against women and sexual exploitation of children for commercial purposes. The Gender, Politics, Peace and Conflict Resolution Program assists Commonwealth governments achieve a 30 per cent intake of women into all decision-making bodies. And finally, the Program on Integration of Gender into Macro-economic Sectors seeks to ensure that gender issues form an integral part of macro-economic policies and that these policies appropriately target women in dire poverty.