

It was, therefore, a particular satisfaction that my current visit to Canada should have begun with the Dalhousie Conference on the Commonwealth and Non-Governmental Organizations recently held in Halifax. Canada's Royal Commonwealth Society made an important contribution to that Meeting and I know that you would wish me to place on record here in Ottawa on behalf of all who work to strengthen and sustain the Commonwealth our deep appreciation of the contribution made by the Government of Canada to the success of this meeting of Commonwealth NGOs. That support, supplementing the efforts of the University of Dalhousie, is typical of the practical yet imaginative contributions to Commonwealth development we have come to expect from Canada.

The Dalhousie Conference, attended by 66 participants from 18 Commonwealth countries, was an important beginning of what I hope will be an enlarging contribution by the Commonwealth's NGOs to the goals of Commonwealth co-operation and, therefore, to the strengthening of the Commonwealth itself.

The specific recommendations of the Dalhousie Conference will command the attention of the Secretariat and I am sure that they will also receive the attention of Commonwealth Governments upon whose support their implementation so greatly depend. But there is one element of the Conference's concerns from which I believe there can be no dissent, namely, the importance they attach to increasing public understanding of the Commonwealth.

One of the functions that devolves on the Secretariat as the central agency of Commonwealth Governments - and it is one which I attach the utmost importance - is that of widening and deepening popular understanding of the reality of the contemporary Commonwealth. I have long been convinced that in discharging this function we can be greatly assisted by the active co-operation of the Commonwealth's voluntary organizations. Organizations like the Royal Commonwealth Society - that should be able to command large and influential memberships with a commitment to the Commonwealth - can certainly render complementary service in this field of Secretariat activity. But such service can only be rendered, of course, if it is informed throughout by an understanding of the true nature of the modern Commonwealth and by an awareness of the importance of enlarging that understanding among all the people of the Commonwealth.

There can be no doubt of the strength of the commitment to the Commonwealth on the part of the leaders of our countries, on the part of Presidents and Prime Ministers, of other Ministers and of Senior Officials. There is abundant evidence of that commitment: the importance which Commonwealth leaders attach to their biennial summit meetings, and more specific consultations on political issues; the importance Governments attach to regular Commonwealth consultations in such fields as education, health, law and economic matters, including the whole range of international economic issues; the increasing support Governments extend to the many programmes of practical co-operation that exist within the Commonwealth; the readiness of Governments to make greater use of Commonwealth machinery for advancing consensus on