

## II

# MULTILATERAL ACTIVITIES

## ORGANIZATIONAL

### The Commonwealth

In 1972 the Commonwealth continued to be one of the main pillars of Canadian foreign policy. The Commonwealth serves not only the purpose of bringing together nations of divergent economic status, race, religion, political system and regional commitments but, because its members share many similarities of culture, heritage (including a common language) as well as similar institutions and working methods, the Commonwealth is a unique forum which allows informal and fruitful exchange of opinions, often leading to decisions for common action. Although the Commonwealth preference system is no longer the cement of Commonwealth relations, trade within the association continues to play an important part in the bilateral relations between members. In an era in which Canada seeks to divert its relations and commitments from a purely continental focus, it is therefore in Canada's practical interest to maintain and strengthen its relations with the nations of the Commonwealth in economic, cultural, educational, aid-related, medical, legal and other matters.

Reflecting this assessment of the value of maintaining and reaffirming Canada's commitment to the Commonwealth, participation in Commonwealth conferences and meetings remained at a high level in 1972. The Department of External Affairs played a coordinating role by ensuring that Canadian delegations to functional con-

ferences and meetings were appropriately selected and that their instructions were in accord with Canada's policy regarding the Commonwealth and in the wider international sphere. In 1972, Canada was represented at a multitude of Commonwealth meetings and conferences including the Commonwealth trade ministers meeting in London in February, the Conference on Consular Relations within the Commonwealth in London in May, the annual Pre-World Health Assembly meeting of Commonwealth health officials in Geneva in May, the meeting of Commonwealth officials to discuss youth issues in preparation for a meeting of Commonwealth ministers in Lusaka (January 29-February 3, 1973) in London in June, the eighth meeting of the Commonwealth Air Transport Council in London in August, and the seventh biennial meeting of the Commonwealth Scientific Committee, held in Canberra in October.

An examination of this last organization, the Commonwealth Scientific Committee, may provide an insight into what functions Commonwealth organizations seek to perform. The Commonwealth Scientific Committee, whose origin dates from the Commonwealth Scientific Official Conference of 1946, promotes collaboration between governmental scientific organizations in Commonwealth countries. With the support of the Government of Canada, the Commonwealth Scientific Committee is transforming itself into an organization more closely reflecting the present realities and future