

The Commonwealth in the 3rd Millennium Colloquium
1998

The Royal Commonwealth Society

This is a collection of presentations made at the 1998 Colloquium in Ottawa. Topics discussed at the Colloquium included: trade in the next millennium; the Commonwealth's image problem; a proposed agenda for governance and the Commonwealth; Commonwealth technical co-operation; Commonwealth co-operation in health and population challenges; decentralisation, democratisation and empowerment at the local level; and education. Speakers included: The Hon Sir Humphrey Maud, KCMG, Commonwealth Deputy Secretary-General (Economic and Social Affairs); Mr. T. G. Plumtre, Senior Vice President, Trade Finance and Correspondent Banking, The Bank of Nova Scotia; Murray Burt, International President of the Commonwealth Journalists Society; and Lewis Perinbam, Senior Advisor, External Relations, The Commonwealth of Learning; the Population Council and CIDA. The presentations raised many issues and resulted in a few recommendations for the Commonwealth. For instance, it was noted that, while the Commonwealth has advantages to offer the 3rd millennium (techniques of consensus-building and quiet diplomacy), it suffers from weaknesses resulting from the failure of its members to meet resource commitments and to demonstrate the necessary political will. With respect to economic development and trade, the Commonwealth has an important role to play in transferring assistance and building stronger knowledge networks. The member states were urged to adopt guidelines regarding government and justice embodied in the Singapore, Lusaka, Harare, and Edinburgh declarations. Among others, it was recommended that the Commonwealth:

- continue helping member countries strengthen core government institutions and their functions, especially regarding policy formulation, implementation and coordination, finance and audit, civil service and law reform, in recognition of the linkage between governance and development, and to extend its activities to defend and promote freedom of expression;
- explore means to correct the misbehaviour of police and enhance mutual understanding between police, the media and human rights activists;
- share resources and assistance in education and learning; to reduce tuition fees;
- support small states and islands as they face challenges in the global economy, sustainable development, illicit drug trade;
- raise the profile of the Commonwealth and to act on the erosion of respect for basic human rights and democracy in Nigeria;
- give greater priority to sustainable development, environmental and population issues;
- urge members states to establish National Human Rights Commissions and to improve access to education by girls and women.