

One of the best examples of Commonwealth cooperation is one of its first joint endeavours - the Colombo Plan. In 1950 Canada joined other donors in assisting the three newly-independent countries of India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. This was the first major international initiative to assist third world countries. It became a model of international cooperation, and soon spread to Africa and the Americas. That work continues and the Commonwealth now accounts for 40% of Canada's assistance.

New initiatives continue to be launched, a major one being the Commonwealth Immunization Program which came out of the 1985 Heads of Government Meeting in Nassau. Every year five million children die from preventable diseases and an equally large number are crippled. In response Canada launched a 25 million dollar program which has increased global immunization from 25 to 30% - not perfection, but a significant step in the right direction.

Of course, the Commonwealth family also works politically in developing consensus and in taking concrete actions, such as the process which led to the independence of Zimbabwe, and the action on the NASSAU declaration on South Africa.

It is easy now to think of Zimbabwe as just another independent African state. In fact, some short years ago, it had a white minority government that showed no signs of compromising. The Commonwealth kept that problem in the public eye; achieved agreement on steadily-increasing pressure, both political and economic, undermined international support for the Smith regime; and facilitated the negotiation of a solution. More than anything else, that success carries hope for the future of all Southern Africa.

One of the most interesting features of Commonwealth meetings is they soften sharp edges. They make debate possible among countries who differ in their economic conditions, perspectives, their international affiliations.