



the support of a wide network of private, voluntary and professional organizations, including universities, parliamentarians, legal, medical and other professions and organizations in the media and in sports.

Moreover, it forms a web of sectoral governmental expertise dealing with very specialized fields of endeavour which enhances its members' ability to apply effective solutions to modern problems.

These assets provide the Commonwealth with effective means to face the challenges of the 1990s and beyond. The Organization derives specific capacities and comparative advantages that contribute to the Commonwealth's ability to "build bridges" and to generate consensus on delicate questions of Commonwealth or of global interest has been witnessed over and over in recent years. The Commonwealth has also played an effective role, when called upon, in the search for solutions to conflicts affecting its member states.

Its commitment to the promotion of political values, human rights, democracy, women's equality and good governance puts it at the forefront of worldwide efforts in these fields.

Through its functional co-operation programs, among other things, it has played an effective role in enhancing the capacity of member states to deal effectively with the challenges of the modern world, and it will likely be called upon to continue in this fundamental role.

The Commonwealth has proved that it is an effective means for sharing experiences and, consequently, for sourcing and delivering technical assistance to its member states.

Commonwealth Principles

The Commonwealth has no constitution, but it does have formal principles. The 1971 Declaration of Commonwealth Principles, adopted by Heads of Government in Singapore, sets out common principles: the pursuit of international peace and order in support of the United Nations; the promotion of representative institutions and guarantees for personal freedom under the law; the recognition of racial equality and the need to combat racial discrimination and racial oppression; and dedication to lessening the disparities of wealth between different sections of humanity.

In 1991, Heads of Government reiterated these fundamental principles of the Commonwealth and updated them in the Harare Declaration, with a view to providing the organization with a clear set of objectives, values and strategies for the 1990s and beyond. Special emphasis was given, in the Declaration, to good governance and the promotion of fundamental political values.

Commonwealth Consultation

Commonwealth governments consult at various levels. The highest level of Commonwealth consultation is at the Heads of Government Meetings (CHOGMs), held every two years. The initial custom was to hold all such meetings in London, but since 1971 they have been held in various member countries. Between the biennial CHOGMs, Commonwealth senior officials meet to review the implementation of decisions of the previous CHOGM and to identify issues that may be referred to the next. Commonwealth finance ministers meet every year to exchange views. Ministers responsible for health, education, employment, law and women's affairs also meet regularly, and other ministers may meet on an occasional basis. There are frequent meetings of officials or experts to consult on specialized subjects. The agenda is adopted on the basis of suggestions made by the Commonwealth Secretary-General after consultations with member governments. Unlike the agenda at the United Nations, it is not published. There is no involved process of negotiations among Summit "sherpas" to lay the groundwork for Summit decisions.

Heads of Government discuss world political, economic and social problems, how they affect their countries and what response can be made within the Commonwealth or by acting together in other international bodies. It is a unique forum, being both more private and less formal than