



## **Communiqué of the 2005 Commonwealth People's Forum**

### **On the occasion of a dialogue with Commonwealth Foreign Ministers**

**Malta, 26 November 2005**

We, the members of civil society and the representatives of peoples' organisations in the Commonwealth at the Commonwealth Peoples' Forum, from 20 to 25 November, in Malta:<sup>1</sup>

**share a deep concern** that we live in an unequal and unjust world of economic growth for a few countries, growing inequality in many countries, continued deprivation in less developed countries, and a world where human security is under unprecedented threats from increasing militarisation, unjust trade and growing intolerance.

We believe that poverty denies the right to live in dignity and is the result of unequal and unjust power relationships among and within countries, communities and families. The poverty "curtain" must be removed.

We consider it a moral and political challenge to live in a world where 50,000 people die every day from poverty related causes, where more than a billion people live in poverty and an estimated 8,000 people die of HIV/AIDS every day. There is unprecedented expenditure for war and militarisation. While some countries have made overdue increases in Official Development Assistance, many lag behind, and the international community is falling further and further behind in meeting the Millennium Development Goals, making achievement by 2015 increasingly unlikely. The eradication of poverty means meeting the challenges of the debilitating cycle of the debt trap, trade injustice, insufficient aid, lack of aid accountability and effectiveness, failing governance, and conflict over natural resources and ideologies.

We will promote and strengthen networking and solidarity among the peoples of the Commonwealth and network with governments and different sections of the Commonwealth including the Youth Forum, the Business Forum and Commonwealth Associations to advance sustainable development, human rights and democracy.

We affirm that cultural diversity, pluralism, gender equity and tolerance are crucial to attain social and political stability, democratic governance, economic growth, human security and peace.

We are the first generation in human history with the resources to eradicate poverty globally.

**Within this context, we:**

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<sup>1</sup> There were 623 participants from 36 countries taking part in the three plenary sessions at the Commonwealth People's Forum. The 41 workshops involved more than 1,300 participants.

*Recognise* the urgent need to eradicate poverty, attain gender equity and justice, and realise the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals.

*Reaffirm* the role and responsibility of civil society organisations and people, in advancing freedom, human rights, social and economic justice, and sustainable development, with particular attention to the needs of women, people with disabilities, excluded and marginalised people

*Emphasise* the obligatory role, responsibility and accountability of the state to respect and protect human rights for all people and to realise and promote all aspects of social and economic justice and sustainable development

**We call on Commonwealth governments** to consider the following key recommendations,<sup>2</sup> which emerged from the 14 national civil society consultations, the discussions of the Committee of the Whole<sup>3</sup>, the e-consultation and the deliberations of the Commonwealth People's Forum in Malta, **to:**

## **I. Civil society and Governance**

1. Commit to a process to monitor the implementation of CHOGM statements and provide a formal report back to the next CHOGM, including an assessment by civil society;
2. Create enabling political and legal conditions to ensure the participation of people's and civil society organisations in governance, advancing democracy, sustainable development and human rights;
3. Heed the strong call from Commonwealth youth to be involved in all levels of decision-making that affect their lives;
4. Ensure diplomatic leadership in enhancing the participation of civil society in multilateral organisations, including the United Nations and multilateral economic institutions, and support the Commonwealth Foundation in programming which promotes this objective;
5. Commit more financial resources to strengthen the effectiveness of the Commonwealth Foundation, appreciating its role in developing partnerships between civil society and governments and in strengthening networking among civil society and cultures across the Commonwealth;

## **II. Democracy and Human Rights**

6. Ensure that states respect, promote and protect the enjoyment and full realisation of all human rights, including freedom of association and expression, for all people and ensure that human rights norms are not compromised for security or migration management reasons;
7. Ensure that the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group investigates and reports whenever democratic freedoms and human rights, including the freedom of association, the right to free collective bargaining, the right of expression and to due process in law are violated by the deliberate action of the governments of the respective states;

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<sup>2</sup> A detailed report of all the findings of the Commonwealth People's Forum will be found in a report to be published by the Commonwealth Foundation.

<sup>3</sup> The Committee of the Whole is a preparatory committee for the CHOGM bringing together government and civil society representations, assisting the Commonwealth Secretariat.

8. Undertake immediate steps, including legal, educational, social or cultural, to stop violence against women and girls;
9. Convene annual meetings of Commonwealth Labour Ministers, together with representatives of trade unions, employers' associations and civil society organisations to promote respect for and implementation of ILO core labour standards and to enhance employment opportunities and decent jobs, particularly for poor and marginalised people;
10. Establish a Commonwealth Expert Group on policing to develop guidelines on training, accountability mechanisms, legal regimes and professional support to ensure democratic policing;
11. Recognise the human rights of asylum seekers and refugees and cease the use of administrative detention, except where non-custodial measures have proved ineffective;
12. Take immediate legal action and establish policies to ensure the rights of migrant workers, and the rights of workers in the unorganised sector;

### **III. Sustainable Development and the Millennium Development Goals**

13. Commit resources and establish appropriate policy and programme frameworks to ensure the realisation of the Millennium Development Goals by 2015, with appropriate interim targets, doing so within a human rights framework, utilising the potential of ICTs, with the active participation of civil society in decision-making and implementation;
14. Work together to increase the quantity and quality of aid, in order that developed countries meet the 0.7% of Gross National Income (GNI) target by 2015, or before, with appropriate interim targets, while ensuring that aid is not diverted from poverty eradication and human security;
15. Promote and guarantee women's rights, sexual and reproductive health, women's leadership, participation of women in the process of governance and development and increase budget allocations for these purposes;
16. Recognize the critical implications and impact of climate change for all humanity and particularly for achieving the Millennium Development Goals, and mandate the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Commonwealth Foundation to prepare a programme of action on climate change, involving consultation with civil society and other sectors;
17. Urgently ensure adequate budgets to guarantee the right to free, quality, universal schooling, with a priority for girls, and further strengthen the Commonwealth Education Fund, encouraging twinning relationships between schools in the Commonwealth. Promote respect for diversity, pluralism, human rights, gender equity and tolerance for all cultures and beliefs through quality education;
18. Recognise that one in six Commonwealth people live in slums and that adequate shelter, with secure tenure and access to essential services, is vital to the achievement of all the MDGs, including those on poverty, education, and health. Ensure that planning for slum upgrading and sustainable urban development is a cross-cutting issue within poverty reduction and national sustainable development strategies. Pay special attention to the need for sustainable rural as well as urban livelihoods;
19. Ensure the human right to health care for all, devoting adequate resources to ensure universal, free and sustained quality access to treatment for all those infected by and affected by HIV/AIDS, especially women, children and older persons, and immediately substantially scale up international support for the treatment as well as prevention of HIV/AIDS;

20. Create opportunities for young people to discuss issues of health and sexuality, and empower them to assist in all areas of health education, including HIV/AIDS;
21. Take the necessary legal, social, educational and cultural steps to stop stigmatisation and discrimination against people infected by and affected by HIV/AIDS;
22. Remove from trade and intellectual property agreements any obstacles to access, supply and distribution of affordable quality generic drugs;
23. Advance agreement among Commonwealth governments on migration of health and education workers with the objectives of meeting national needs and self-sufficiency.
24. Recognise the vulnerability of small island developing states to natural disasters and economic globalisation and ensure appropriate policies and adequate resources for their sustainable development;
25. Initiate steps to develop a common action plan to address and mitigate natural disasters in the countries of the Commonwealth;
26. Pay particular attention to the legitimate aspirations of young people to sustainable livelihoods, through access to education, ICTs and adequate training in entrepreneurship;

## **V. Economic Justice**

27. Work together to abolish unjust trade practices that perpetuate poverty, and, within a framework that assures national food security, abolish agricultural subsidies by richer countries and dumping of goods in poor countries;
28. Cease policies, whether national, bilateral or on the part of multilateral institutions which bring about the privatisation of basic services such as water, sanitation, health and education; and ensure effective delivery of quality public services, which are universally available, accessible and affordable, and ensure democratic accountability of service providers;
29. Assure increased democratic public policy space by removing conditionalities on the part of the IMF, World Bank and WTO;
30. Work together to achieve the cancellation of all debts of the less developed countries;
31. Convene annual meetings of the Commonwealth Trade Ministers and civil society representatives to promote trade justice and sustainable development.

We acknowledge and appreciate the space provided by the Commonwealth for civil society organisations to participate in the CHOGM. As representatives of civil society, we will continue to be committed to strengthening our networking and alliance building processes in order to improve our internal democracy, transparency and accountability.