

**Commonwealth Forum of National Human Rights Institutions
Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, 23-24 November 2009**

Concluding Statement

The Commonwealth Forum of National Human Rights Institutions, (hereinafter referred to as 'the Commonwealth Forum') met at Crowne Plaza Hotel, Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago from 23 to 24 November 2009. The meeting, which was co-hosted by the Trinidad and Tobago Ombudsman Ms Lynette Stephenson, and the Canadian Human Rights Commission represented by Mr. David Langtry, was officially opened by the Deputy Commonwealth Secretary General Mrs Mmasekgoa Masire-Mwamba, and addressed and closed by the Commonwealth Secretary General His Excellency Mr Kamalesh Sharma.

The theme of the meeting was climate change and human rights. The meeting brought together commissioners and senior officials from the participating institutions drawn from 24 Commonwealth countries, international partner institutions including the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and Witness (NGO). Delegates shared experiences and good practices in monitoring, protecting and advocating for human rights (and ways to include) the use of international, regional and national systems. They also identified constraints and challenges faced by national human rights institutions in the Commonwealth.

Climate Change and Human Rights

The focus of the meeting was climate change and human rights, with the objective of feeding into the CHOGM processes. In particular the meeting discussed the impact of climate change on the enjoyment of human rights, and noted that serious deterioration of the environment is a threat to the well-being of current and future generations. Any further delay in recognising the human rights linkage by governments and the private sector, will result in permanent and irreversible damage.

The focus of climate change has to this point been mostly on the impact on the planet ie. scientific, technical and economic dimensions. Consideration of the impact on people has not been given due weight nor has it been viewed through a human rights lens. Climate change affects fundamental human rights, such as the right to life, right to food, right to housing, right to health and right to work.

The Commonwealth Forum therefore called on Commonwealth governments to incorporate human rights based approaches into all their work on climate change. The Commonwealth Secretariat should integrate human rights based approaches in all its work on climate change, in keeping with its commitment to mainstreaming human rights and to addressing the particular contexts of small states.

The Commonwealth Forum further called for implementation of human rights obligations under international, regional and domestic laws by states and all relevant parties in responding to climate change. Commonwealth Forum members therefore need to promote recognition of the human rights dimensions of climate change in their respective countries- including how the rights contained in the key international instruments are threatened by the impacts of climate change. Forum members were also asked to advocate for government policies on climate change that are rights-centred.

The Commonwealth Forum called upon Commonwealth governments and other stakeholders, to put in place education, sensitisation and awareness programmes on climate change and human rights.

The meeting agreed to set up a Working Group on Climate Change and Human Rights that will:

- Review the outcomes of CHOGM
- Review outcomes of the UN climate change negotiations in Copenhagen
- Propose shared actions for the Commonwealth Forum
- Propose shared actions with the Commonwealth Secretariat Human Rights Unit

The composition of the Working Group shall be composed of the following member institutions: Canada, Cameroon, Maldives, Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda, and the Human Rights Unit.

Strengthening of NHRIs

The meeting discussed key developments amongst members and how the institutions could be further strengthened. It also exchanged experiences of protecting and promoting human rights in the Commonwealth and heard about challenges faced by members.

The Commonwealth Forum welcomed the establishment of national human rights institutions in Bangladesh, Seychelles and Swaziland, and recognised steps taken towards the establishment of a national human rights institution in Papua New Guinea.

The Commonwealth Forum agreed to consider establishing mechanisms and practices that will enhance networking capabilities of members.

The Commonwealth Forum reaffirmed its commitment to promote and facilitate strategic partnership and linkages between members themselves and between members and other regional and international bodies dealing with national human rights institutions.

The Commonwealth Forum recommitted itself as a body for collective expressions of support, encouragement or concern in relation to particular events and developments in individual member institutions for the better defence and promotion of human rights. The Forum will continue to take a united stand as appropriate to threats against human rights institutions and defenders throughout the Commonwealth.

The meeting reemphasised the need for recognition of the Commonwealth Forum by Commonwealth Heads of Government as a distinct permanent forum at CHOGM.

The Commonwealth Forum welcomed the establishment of the web site and its linkage to other human rights web sites. They encouraged Forum members, governments, NGOs and the general public to use the site as a resource for the promotion and protection of human rights in the Commonwealth.

The Commonwealth Forum noted with appreciation the expression of support by the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Office of the UN High Commissioner of Human Rights.

The Commonwealth Forum requested the Human Rights Unit of the Commonwealth Secretariat and other international partners such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to continue assisting in facilitating close co-operation between the Commonwealth Forum and its members.

The Commonwealth Forum reaffirmed the need for all members to function in conformity with the Paris Principles, and further urged the strengthening of co-operation with international partners such as the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to promote and protect human rights at national level.

The Commonwealth Forum called on Commonwealth governments and other international and regional partners to support the Forum and the work of its members.

The Commonwealth Forum acknowledged and appreciated the role played by the Uganda Human Rights Commission as the first Chair of the Forum in providing leadership and in spearheading the request for the establishment of a distinct Forum for NHRIs within the CHOGM processes. The Forum also acknowledged the role played by Canada, as Acting Chair, when Commissioners of the Uganda Human Rights Commission were not in place.

The Commonwealth Forum also expressed its appreciation to the Human Rights Unit and to the government of Trinidad and Tobago, through the office of the Ombudsman, for co-hosting the meeting with Canada and for all logistical support provided in the organisation of the Meeting.

Dated this 24th day of November 2009 at Crowne Plaza Hotel, Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago