



Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting

Malta, 25-27 November 2005

MALTA DECLARATION ON NETWORKING THE COMMONWEALTH FOR DEVELOPMENT

1. We, the Heads of Government of the Commonwealth, meeting in Malta from 25 to 27 November 2005, firmly believe that our Commonwealth is a rich, globally representative, relevant and dynamic network of nations and peoples, well equipped to respond to the pressing challenges of our time.

2. Ours is a network of governments and peoples, nurtured by shared values, institutions and conventions, as well as a common working language and history of collaboration. These attributes provide a platform on which to build and consolidate the foundations of democracy in our societies as well as to redress social and economic disparities in a coordinated and effective manner.

3. We reaffirm that democracy and development are organically interlinked and mutually reinforcing. Democratic governance facilitates sustainable development. At the same time, poverty and inequity can place democracy in peril. We therefore reiterate our firm commitment to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and are deeply concerned by the uneven progress attained so far.

4. We are determined to intensify our efforts to meet the Millennium Development Goals and their associated targets, and to help one another to do so. We are mindful in particular of the Goal to develop a global partnership for development. In this regard, we are committed to making available the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communications technologies (ICTs), in partnership between the public and private sectors.

5. We view ICTs as powerful instruments of development rather than ends in themselves, delivering savings, efficiencies and growth in our economies. We also recognise the ability of ICTs to act as catalysts in creating new economic synergies, offering opportunities to overcome the constraints of remoteness, small size, and other factors which have traditionally acted as a brake on development.

6. We firmly believe that the Commonwealth can contribute meaningfully to measures aimed at bridging and closing the digital divide, and are resolved to do so. ICTs provide an opportunity for individuals to learn, to grow, to participate more actively in society and to compete more effectively in markets.

7. We support the Digital Solidarity Fund as endorsed by the World Summit on the Information Society. Our goal is to see information technology made accessible to all. We recognise that this requires, in particular, investment in infrastructure, effective telecommunications, education, and coordinated public policy. We also recognise that the wealth of human and technical capital within the Commonwealth can be shared for the benefit of our developing member states. We will therefore use and seek to strengthen existing mechanisms and resources toward that end, collaborating with partners in other organisations within and beyond the Commonwealth, as well as with the corporate sector and civil society. We will also seek to use ICT networks to enhance the effectiveness of existing Commonwealth networks.

8. We endorse the *Commonwealth Action Programme for the Digital Divide* as our roadmap. We view the Commonwealth's priorities, in particular, as being the development of policy and regulatory capacity, the modernisation of education and skills development, the promotion of entrepreneurship for poverty elimination, the promotion of local access and connectivity, and the strengthening of local and regional networks. We request the Secretary-General to establish the Steering Committee of relevant existing Commonwealth agencies, including member states, to work with the Commonwealth Secretariat in implementing the Action Programme.

9. We welcome the launch of an Indian initiative on a Pan-African E-Network project that will link all the 53 member states of the African Union and assist in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, especially in respect of education and health.

10. We also endorse the establishment of a Special Fund to enable implementation of the specific activities and to achieve the performance targets envisaged in the Action Programme, and call for contributions to the Fund so that it can become operational without delay. In this context, we note with appreciation the substantial contributions to the Fund announced by India and Malta.