

COMMUNIQUÉ

SIXTH MEETING OF THE COMMONWEALTH YOUTH MINISTERS 6 CYMM, NASSAU, THE BAHAMAS MAY 24 TO 26, 2006

The Sixth Meeting of Commonwealth Youth Ministers convened in Nassau, the Commonwealth of The Bahamas from May 24 to 26, 2006. The Meeting was preceded by meetings of the Pan-Commonwealth Regional Advisory Board and the Pan-Commonwealth Youth Caucus from May 22 to 23, 2006. These Meetings comprised senior government officials and youth representatives of the Commonwealth. The theme of the 6 CYMMM was “Youth Empowerment for the Eradication of Poverty, Crime and Violence and HIV/AIDS”.

2. The Meeting was attended by twenty-three Ministers from forty-three countries and by representatives of the Commonwealth Advisory Body on Sports (CABOS), the CARICOM Secretariat, the Commonwealth Youth Exchange Council (CYEC), the United Nations Fund Children Fund (UNICEF), and the University of the West Indies (UWI) participated as observers.

3. The Opening Ceremony of the Meeting included addresses by the Honourable Perry G. Christie, Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of the Bahamas, the Right Honourable Donald Mc Kinnon, Commonwealth Secretary General, and the Honourable Olifant Mfa, Assistant Minister of Labour and Home Affairs of Botswana. Minister Neville W. Wisdom, Minister of Youth, Sports and Housing of The Bahamas, who was elected Chair of 6 CYMM, also addressed the Opening Ceremony.

4. Ministers expressed their warm appreciation to the Governor-General, the Government, and the people of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas for their warm and generous hospitality. They acknowledged the special arrangements made for CYMM and the excellent administrative and logistical support provided by youth and government volunteers who comprised the Bahamas Task Force. They also congratulated Honourable Neville W. Wisdom, for his leadership in chairing the Meeting.

Youth empowerment and development issues

5. The Ministers welcomed the opportunity of the Meeting as a valuable forum for exchanging national experiences for the holistic development of young people. The Ministers expressed concern that their Meeting was taking place against the background of a growing world youth population estimated to reach three billion by 2015. This growth is giving rise to increased pressures on Governments and CYP to develop strategic, integrated and sustainable outcomes to address escalating challenges brought about by unemployment, HIV and AIDS, violence and crime and other challenges of globalisation. The Meeting further recognised that

these issues contribute to greater inequity, dire poverty, vulnerability and widening social exclusion and marginalisation among young people.

6. Against this background, the Meeting acknowledged CYP's zero real growth budget since 1995 and the Secretary-General's request for an increase in resources, juxtaposed with the growing demands on resources from Governments' and Youth networks. These demands continue to outstrip CYP's ability to play an advocacy, brokerage and catalytic role in guiding and supporting Government policies and strategies on youth development and empowerment in ways that are mutually reinforcing to young people and their countries and communities.

CYP Progress Report 2003-2006

7. The Meeting accepted the Commonwealth Secretary-General's report on the achievements, challenges and lessons learnt from CYP's programming in its four strategic areas (Youth Enterprise Development, Youth Networks and Governance, Youth Participation and Youth Work Education and Training) during the period 2003-2006. The Report also highlighted Commonwealth Heads of Government (CHOGM) mandates for youth that are underpinned by the Commonwealth work in the areas of peace, democracy, equality and good governance, and development.

8. Acknowledging CYP's unique position as the only international agency that focuses solely on youth, the Meeting further noted CYP's competitive advantage in fostering youth networking and participation in its programming, and in forging strategic partnerships to broaden the impact of youth development for a wider beneficiary population. The Meeting reiterated the centrality of CYP's role as a repository of Commonwealth-wide best practices and lessons that can be shared to mitigate effects of resource constraints on youth development.

9. The Meeting endorsed the alignment of CYP's strategic planning cycle from the current three-year cycle to that of the Secretariat's four-year strategic planning cycle, commencing in 2008. The Meeting further endorsed the establishment of a biennial ministerial mid-term review panel to look at CYP progress and financial performance. The panel will be drawn from the four Commonwealth regions and include the incoming and outgoing CYMM chairs, and youth caucus members each region. Other modalities will be further determined and presented to CYMM 2008 for approval.

Pan-Commonwealth Youth Caucus

10. Ministers welcomed the report of the Youth Caucus and the significant contributions it had made to the governance process. The Report highlighted the various achievements and in-country interventions of the Youth Caucus across the four Commonwealth Regions of Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and the South Pacific, and noted that this work was guided by CYP's Strategic Plan as a means of creating better focus and impact. Youth internships for the RYC Members, the formation of the Commonwealth Young Journalist Forum (CYJF) and the development of Youth Caucus website were among laudable highlights mentioned.

11. The Report also outlined the need for the revision of the *Youth Representatives Handbook* in order to make guidelines more transparent, noting the requirement to ensure the selection of active youth leaders who are committed and accountable during their full tenure.

12. In conveying their appreciation to the Ministers, the Youth Caucus also requested Member Governments to provide greater support to RYC representatives to allow them to be more effective as agents of change in their development and advocacy work in their communities and societies.

Commonwealth Youth Programme – The Way Forward

13. CYP presented a report outlining the youth development paradigm that will inform and guide its work during the period 2006 to 2008. This paradigm advocates for a holistic approach to youth development and empowerment that puts young people at the centre through Youth Enterprise and Sustainable Livelihoods (YESL), Governance, Development and Youth Networks (GDYN) and Youth Work Education and Training (YWET). It emphasises the importance of research and an evidence-based approach to youth development to enhance impacts at national, regional and international levels.

14. The report also introduced the concept of the Youth Development Index (YDI) which is a “framework that provides measurement for the purpose of evaluating changes in the status of youth development at human, institutional and national level”. The Meeting adopted the paper, and endorsed the call for a more strategic approach to be taken to youth development, reinforced by the rights-based and evidenced-based approach to youth development.

Commonwealth Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment (PAYE) 2006 - 2015

15. CYP presented a draft Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment (PAYE), which provides the overarching framework for its development work with young people during the period 2006 to 2015. The draft Plan takes into consideration the views and recommendations of Member Governments and their experiences in the implementation of the PAYE developed for the period 2000 to 2005. The PAYE is in line with Commonwealth mandates, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and other global challenges and will inform the work of CYP and all its development partners. PAYE is the framework document for all Commonwealth youth development and views the empowerment of young people as ‘creating and supporting the enabling conditions under which young people can act on their own behalf and their own terms, rather than at the direction of others’.

16. The Meeting recognized that PAYE continues to provide a deliberate, transparent and accountable instrument for CYP’s work in Youth Development to guide the engagement of member governments, the young people and all other stakeholders. The Meeting endorsed the framework and implementation rationale for the PAYE at the national and the wider Commonwealth levels and with the strategic involvement of youth networks in implementation, progress reporting and monitoring. The Meeting endorsed a new mandate

for CYP to continue with the PAYE up to 2015, which is also consistent with the MDG time-frame.

Youth Development Index (YDI)

17. The Meeting noted with appreciation CYP's pioneering work in spearheading the Youth Development Index (YDI) in order to achieve a standardised tool that can measure critical aspects of youth development. The Meeting accepted the merit of an evidence-based approach to inform responses to youth development interventions. They further recognised the importance of the YDI in the context of measuring the impact of Government strategies for youth development across all sectors, the nexus of the YDI with the PAYE, with CYP strategic programming and with national development. The Meeting agreed that priority be given in the YDI to first measuring the impact and progress in the three priority areas of the CYP. The Meeting endorsed CYP's continued approach to the development of the YDI in partnership with other development agencies and institutions.

Health and HIV and AIDS

18. Ministers recognised that HIV and AIDS continue to be a global emergency, noting further that HIV and AIDS ranks among the most severe issues facing youth in the Commonwealth. They urged the Commonwealth to redouble efforts at HIV and AIDS peer education and training which focus on life-skills as well as life styles and behaviour change and to support countries in implementing youth-centered approaches to counter the HIV and AIDS epidemic.

19. The Meeting further noted that substance abuse, the growing incidences of communicable and preventable illness affecting youth and other pathological behaviour result from youth alienation and exclusion and from other challenges of modern-day living. In this regard, the Meeting urged the CYP to continue to focus education and awareness programmes for Governments and youth in the context of creating sustainable livelihoods and to develop an index of best practices in the area for the benefit of member countries. Most significantly, the Meeting acknowledged the need to find more creative approaches to spread positive messages on healthy living and HIV and AIDS through music and non-traditional media that resonate with youth populations.

Crime and Violence

20. The alarming increase in the incidence of crime in which young people are the principal victims as well as the perpetrators was highlighted at the Meeting. Ministers examined the multiplicity of causes which result in the high incidence of youth violence, and increasing youth criminal trends and how government policies affect the future of young people, and the choices they make. Unemployment and unstable family relationships were acknowledged as important factors influencing youth involvement in crime and violence.

21. The Meeting discussed the need for countries to share best experiences and models for dealing with youth crime and violence having regard to the scope and scale of dealing with large and small populations across the Commonwealth.

Promoting Respect and Understanding

22. The Meeting discussed the challenges and unique advantages facing the Commonwealth its development and democracy work in keeping with the mandate of the 2005 CHOGM to develop strategies on promoting Respect and Understanding in Commonwealth and to prepare a Report for CHOGM 2007. The Meeting noted that these challenges are linked to the multi-culturism of the Commonwealth, at individual community, national, regional and international levels.

23. Recognising the importance of young people to the promotion of respect and understanding, the Meeting concluded that young people depend on positive family structures and the support of policy makers. Building upon the unique advantage of the Commonwealth as an expression of diversity, consensus-building, democracy and partnerships, the Meeting called on the Commonwealth Secretariat to document case studies from around the Commonwealth dealing with conflict management, develop materials on dispute resolution and peace education targeted at young people, and to continue to mainstream education, curriculum and awareness among youth to address stereotypes.

National Youth Councils and National Youth Policies

24. The Meeting commended Member Governments for the tremendous strides made in implementing National Youth Policies and encouraged those Governments which have not yet done so to implement national youth policies. The Meeting acknowledged that together with the existence of National Youth Councils, youth policies significantly accounted for building fundamental youth capacity, youth leadership, democracy, advocacy and positive youth participation and engagement.

25. The Meeting encouraged Governments to integrate national youth policies into economic development policy in the context of sustainable youth development. The Meeting endorsed an asset-based approach to youth policy formulation, recognising its linkages to a democratic youth-centered approach to the design, monitoring and evaluation of policy and related youth programmes. The Meeting encouraged Governments and the Commonwealth Secretariat to design an agenda that makes an appropriate balance between welfare and development in youth development.

Youth Mainstreaming

26. The Meeting accepted CYP's proposed youth mainstreaming approach as a core element in implementing the PAYE, YDI and Strategic Plan. It was agreed that governments should mainstream youth development and empowerment in all policy making, planning and programme delivery in the political, legal, economic and social spheres. The Meeting

recognised that Youth Ministries should seek to ensure increased allocations for youth development from the national budget, as appropriate. It acknowledged the importance of setting targets for youth development and monitoring and evaluating progress through the YDI. The Meeting agreed that Youth Ministries should be more strategically placed to enable them to effectively lead the multi-sectoral, youth mainstreaming approach.

Youth and the Digital Divide

27. The Ministers underlined the significant potential contribution of information and communication technologies for youth development. The importance of ICTs to youth was emphasised in the areas of education and research, for career and other choices, for partnerships and advocacy networks, for social change and for income-generation and for the participation of young people in youth policy making. Ministers regretted that many youth in the Commonwealth are not able to fully exploit the tremendous potential offered by ICTs.

28. Acknowledging that the fast developing discipline of ICT necessitates that young people are part of the latest development, the Meeting encouraged CYP and Governments to continue to facilitate opportunities for youth-capacity building for ICTs and to examine mechanisms for forging partnerships with major ICT service providers to enhance young people's access to and use of ICTs.

Youth Participation in Commonwealth Development

29. Ministers endorsed the principle of the rights-based approach to the participation of young women and men in the design, monitoring and development of programmes and policies and agreed that the Regional Youth Caucuses have strategic roles to play in this regard. The rights-based approach to youth development involves express linkage to rights, accountability, empowerment and non-discrimination among other fundamental tenets.

30. The Meeting emphasised the vital role of the family and family relationship in youth issues and development. It also reiterated the necessity for programmes to recognise the importance of supporting family structures and wider positive societal relationships.

31. Governments and CYP were urged to continue to empower young women and men with the essential knowledge skills and capacities to be effective in these roles and to provide them with adequate tools and resources to engage collaboratively in improving their communities.

Youth Development Strategies – The Commonwealth Experience

32. The Meeting welcomed the opportunity to benefit from the experiences and valuable lessons of Member countries. Presentations and discussions in the areas of research-based enquiry, development of human capital, participation in decision-making, enterprise and wealth creation and the overall empowerment of young people took into account the

challenges of globalization, changing youth culture and the need for creativity and innovation in addressing youth development strategies.

33. In order to learn from Pan-Commonwealth experiences and best practices, the Meeting resolved that each of the Regional Centres, in close collaboration with national centres for youth development, be declared as focal centres for learning and research in specific areas of CYP's work.

CYP Strategic Plan

33. The Meeting received the new 2006-2008 CYP Strategic Plan and agreed to consolidate priorities and incorporate the CHOGM 2005 mandates and other emerging global challenges in the Plan. CYP informed the meeting of the strategies identified for implementation under the three new programme areas which were developed from the consultations with Regional Advisory Boards and Youth Caucus held during September and October 2005.

34. The Meeting endorsed CYP's strategic and operational plan for the two-year period 2006-2008 in relation to Governance, Development and Youth Networks (GDYN), Youth Enterprise and Sustainable Livelihoods (YESL) and Youth Work Education & Training (YWET). The Meeting further endorsed that CYP will incorporate the cross-cutting themes of the Commonwealth Secretariat relating to ICT, Capacity-Building, Youth Participation, Youth Mainstreaming, evidence-based research, Gender Equality and Equity and communications and marketing.

35. Recognising the importance of sports to youth development and its positive power to deliver the mainstream youth development agenda in CYP's strategic areas and in particular relating to the promotion of healthy lifestyles, increasing awareness of HIV and AIDS, reducing crime and poverty, and for engaging youth to realise their full potential, CYP was urged to use sports as a programme delivery mechanism.

36. The Meeting also commended CYP's efforts to align its Strategic and Operational Plans with the PAYE, the YDI and within the overall rework of CHOGM mandates on youth development. The Meeting requested CYP to further refine its Strategic Plan in line with inputs made at the various thematic workshops.

37. The Meeting adopted a Resolution of the Pan-Commonwealth Youth Caucus for the Youth representatives to be appointed for a two year term with another two year term being available to them based on their willingness to serve as further subject to assessment of their performance by relevant stakeholders.

38. The Meeting agreed to the inclusion of Regional Youth Coordinators and the Pan-Commonwealth Caucus Chair on the mid-term review panel.

CYP Financial Matters

39. The Meeting received reports on the Secretary's General request for increased resources for CYP, Proposed Pledges for the Work Cycle 2006-2008, the CYP Budget for 2007-2008, and Arrears of Pledges.

40. The Meeting approved the current budget based on zero real growth, as presented by CYP.

41. Recognizing the value of the CYP as a catalyst in bringing about life-changing experiences among the youth across the Commonwealth, the Meeting resolved that the CYP should continue to play this crucial role in order to realize the goal of youth empowerment for the eradication of poverty, crime and HIV/AIDS. To this end, Ministers agreed that the Programme can benefit from increased resources and that such additional resources should be channeled to programmes and not administrative costs. The Ministers therefore called on all member states to, in their best endeavors, consider making more resources available to the CYP, as appropriate.

42. In this connection, the Meeting recognized that, for a number of reasons, some member states are unable to make immediate commitment to financial increases to the CYP. It was acknowledged that assistance may be provided on a regional basis, for specific projects or contributed in kind. The Meeting agreed that the CYP will forward to Ministries of youth for their consideration a proposal for an increase in the CYP's budget for the 2006 to 2008 financial year.

43. The Meeting called on member states with arrears to redeem their pledges as matter of priority.

Commonwealth Youth Development Awards

44. Ministers received the report on progress made with the Commonwealth Gold and Silver Awards which recognise the contribution of young people in enhancing the quality of life of people at community and grass roots levels of member countries. They endorsed recommendations for greater support of Governments and youth networks in the promotion of the programme within their respective countries, for the linkage of the programme with ongoing national developments awards and schemes, and the enhanced involvement of the Youth Caucus in the overall delivery and implementation of the Awards.

Reports from Collaborating Agencies

45. The Meeting acknowledged reports from CYP partners in youth development including UNICEF, the CARICOM Secretariat, the Commonwealth of Learning and the CABOS, the Commonwealth Youth Exchange Council (CYEC) and underscored the need for continued strategic collaboration as a means of maximizing resources to benefit youth development across all Commonwealth regions. The Meeting noted the recommendation from

CYEC that in an attempt to harmonise the work being done between CYP and CYEC, the Youth Caucus should be involved in the planning and participation of the Commonwealth Youth Forum (CYF).

46. As a result of the CABOS report, the Meeting received a recommendation for the formal establishment of the Commonwealth Youth Games. The Meeting acknowledged the merits of the proposal as a means of fostering healthy life styles and the spirit of cooperation, sportsmanship and leadership among youth. However, the Meeting agreed that the matter required further consultations at the national and Commonwealth levels.

Message to CHOGM 2007

47. Ministers agreed to submit the attached message to CHOGM 2007 in Kampala, Uganda.

Next Meeting

48. Ministers agreed to accept the offer of the Government of Sri Lanka to host their next Meeting in 2008 and also accepted the offer of the Government of India as an alternate option.

Nassau, the Bahamas
May 26, 2006