



CHRI

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NEWSLETTER

THANK GOODNESS IT'S OVER!



Protest against abductions and disappearances in Sri Lanka

Photograph by Vikalpa | Groundviews | CPA

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The Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) is an independent international NGO mandated to ensure the practical realisation of human rights in the countries of the Commonwealth

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Commonwealth Legal Education Association

Commonwealth Parliamentary Association

Commonwealth Press Union

and

Commonwealth Broadcasting Association

These sponsoring organisations felt that while Commonwealth countries had both a common set of values and legal principles with which to work, they required a forum to promote human rights. It is from this idea that CHRI was born and continues to work.

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Thank Goodness It's Over!



Protest against abductions and disappearances in Sri Lanka. Photograph by Vikalpa | Groundviews | CPA

The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) held in Colombo, Sri Lanka in November last year was marred by a number of controversies ranging from the call for boycott by several international organisations on account of Sri Lanka's human rights record, to the refusal by Canadian, Indian and Mauritian Heads of Governments to attend the Summit. In the lead up to the Summit there was evidence of the government cracking down on

its critics and dissenting voices, with human rights defenders, journalists and opposition activists facing harassment and threats. Simultaneously, the government instituted eye-wash mechanisms like the Commission of Inquiry to look into disappearances, so as to deflect international pressure that it make honest inquiry into atrocities alleged to have been committed in the last brutal days of the conflict in northern Sri Lanka.

Following its recent trend of using visa regulations as a means to curtail civil liberties – an international delegation that included the UN Special Rapporteur on Independence of Judges and Lawyers had their visas revoked, causing the event, co-hosted by the International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute and the Bar Association of Sri Lanka, to be cancelled.

In November, during the UK Prime Minister's tour of the Northern

Province, over 150 families of people reported missing staged a demonstration in an attempt to meet the Prime Minister but were prevented from doing so by the riot police. Even the Australian Senator, Lee Rhiannon, and New Zealand MP, Jan Logie, who wanted to engage in a fact finding mission on human rights violations were accused of violating their visa regulations and quickly deported.

If official visitors and the public were carefully sequestered from each other by the Ministry of Defence, the People's Forum designed to showpiece Commonwealth "participation" was a controlled and managed exercise from the word go. When UK's Minister of State, Hugo Swire, criticised Sri Lanka and Maldives over human rights issues in his speech at the Forum, the Lankan administration reacted strongly, demanding an explanation from organisers on Swire being allowed to speak at the Forum at all. The Chairman of the Subcommittee of the Commonwealth People's Forum, Dr Lalith Chandradasa, President Rajapaksa's brother-in-law, also said that they were contemplating registering a formal protest over the speech with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Commonwealth Secretariat.

It was evident in the way the government was involved in fine

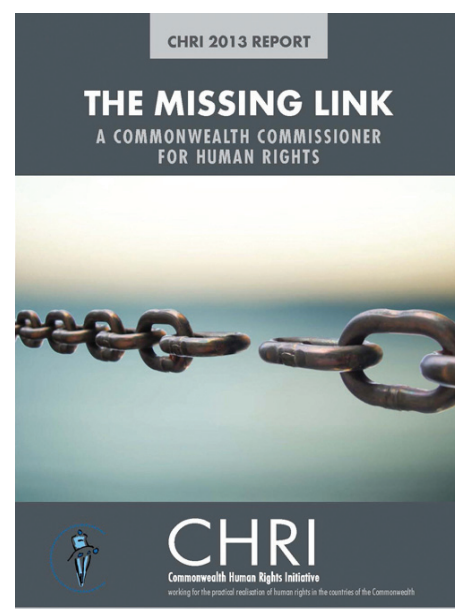
tuning every event around the Commonwealth Summit that it sought to ensure that the various events proceeded according to script. Right from the registration process which required NGOs to register with the Ministry of Defence, the government tried to maintain a tight control of whom it permitted at and around the Summit. The Commonwealth Foundation and the Secretariat need to question the fact that NGO matters in Sri Lanka come under the Ministry of Defence. This cannot be conducive to a healthy civil society.

There has been a real danger of reprisals after CHOGM against civil society organisations that raised concerns or chose not to participate in the Commonwealth People's Forum. It is hoped that the Commonwealth Foundation will monitor the situation it leaves behind and supports those against whom the Government of Sri Lanka takes unwarranted actions.

The refusal of the Commonwealth Secretariat to change the venue of the Summit, while the world pressed Sri Lanka to investigate credible allegations of war crimes against its civilian population, has allowed Sri Lanka to continue to thumb its nose at the international community and disregard its obligations under international law. Its softly-softly approach has yielded no hard results and its authoritarian trends have not been stemmed.

With no credible investigation till date, calls for a resolution seeking international investigation at the March 2014 UN Human Rights Council Session are gaining momentum.

In a way, the 2013 CHOGM typified what the Commonwealth has become, a place of style and shadow play over substance, with the "official" stately gavotte of diplomacy dancing its empty steps over the rights and concerns of a billion people watching helplessly from outside. Meanwhile, the papered over controversies and value ambivalence that dogged this CHOGM continue to weaken it internally. Mauritius, in protest at the devaluing of the Summit, refused to host the next one and obliging Malta will once again be the default host in 2015. ■



The Commonwealth Abandons Its Humane Principles

By James Manor*



Photograph by British Tamils Forum

The decision to hold the 2013 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Sri Lanka was a grotesque mistake. It entailed the abandonment of enlightened principles that have made the Commonwealth an important force of human decency for a quarter century.

This was not apparent from much of the media coverage of the event. Many reports were based on the ignorant view that the Commonwealth was a boring, purposeless relic of empire. This is an

unfair view; the Commonwealth has been committed to the promotion of rights, the rule of law and democracy. Those principles have been elaborated on several occasions – most recently in early 2013 when the Head of the Commonwealth, Queen Elizabeth II, signed a robust reaffirmation in the form of the Charter of the Commonwealth. On several occasions since 1995, the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG), a high-powered agency of the Commonwealth designed to address country situations that violate those

principles, has done just that, sometimes with real impact.

Far from being boring, the award of the 2013 CHOGM to Sri Lanka – whose government brazenly abused Commonwealth principles during the civil war and continues to do so today – was an appalling act of self-harm by the Commonwealth.

To understand the scale of this disaster, we need to set aside some myths. The first is the idea that only the old Dominions, that is, the white-majority, care about rights,

democracy and the rule of law. This is nonsense. The Secretary-General who steered the Commonwealth to that first strong commitment to enlightened values in 1991 was an African – Chief Emeka Anyaoku of Nigeria. Thereafter, he also helped persuade several heads of government to abandon one-party rule for competitive multi-party systems. And when President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia lost in the first multi-party elections in 1991, that same Secretary-General helped to dissuade him from nullifying the popular verdict by clinging on to power.

Moreover, while one head of government who boycotted the 2013 CHOGM was from an old

supporters of Sri Lanka and those who want accountability from the Sri Lankan government is not one based on race.

A further myth is the claim that the Indian government instructed the Secretary-General, Kamallesh Sharma, a former Indian diplomat, to ensure that CHOGM went to Sri Lanka. Senior official sources in New Delhi have through the years pressed the Commonwealth Secretariat to take a tough stance on abuses in Sri Lanka – and of course, the Indian Prime Minister declined to attend.

For many months before the 2013 CHOGM, advocates of Sri Lanka as the venue argued that (i) abuses

continued even after the end of the war in May 2009.

Evidence for this comes from numerous reputable sources: the Commonwealth Journalists Association, the Commonwealth's Observers at the 2010 election in Sri Lanka, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Reporters Without Borders, Article 19, the Minority Rights Group International, Freedom House, the International Crisis Group, the European Union, the US State Department, the Office of the Leader of the (British) House of Commons and BBC World Service.

It is not just members of the Tamil

But gross violations of rights and Commonwealth values have continued even after the end of the war in May 2009.

Dominion (Canada), a second was from Mauritius (even at the cost of losing the opportunity of hosting the next CHOGM in 2015). India's Prime Minister also did not attend and sent his Foreign Minister – a decision that bordered on a personal boycott. Meanwhile, one of the old Dominions (Australia) ignored evidence of recent abuses in Sri Lanka by attending the event. Its leaders are so obsessed with immigration issues that they have cultivated the Colombo government in the hope of keeping boatloads of Sri Lankans from sailing to their shores. So the distinction between

there had ceased once the civil war against the Tamil Tigers ended in May 2009 and (ii) awarding the meeting to Colombo would persuade Sri Lanka's administration to become less brutish. Both claims have proved false.

The brutalities committed by Sri Lanka's army late in the war are legitimate causes for concern – as the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the UK's Channel Four have indicated. But gross violations of rights and Commonwealth values have

minority who suffered abuses in Sri Lanka. Former General Sarath Fonseka, in the aftermath of contesting as the main opposition candidate in the Presidential Election of 2010 (polling 40.15 per cent of the votes while losing to President Mahinda Rajapaksa), despite having the status of a hero amongst the Sinhalese ethnic majority, was arrested, tried and convicted of an array of offences and sentenced to 30 months rigorous imprisonment. The Chief Justice of Sri Lanka's Supreme Court, also from the ethnic majority, was controversially impeached

following decisions that were inconvenient to the government. When the Secretary of the Judicial Services Commission stated that the impeachment threatened the independence of the judiciary, he was stabbed by “unidentified attackers”.

Similarly, numerous human rights activists and critics of the government, irrespective of their ethnicity, were threatened, abducted, forced to disappear or killed. So have several journalists who wrote reports critical of the government. Members of Rajapaksa’s government, like his Defence Minister (the President’s brother) indulge in openly threatening any critical voices.

Outrages also extended to the Muslim minority community which has for decades carefully avoided offending the Buddhist Sinhalese majority. Other religious minorities were harassed, threatened and attacked too. In 2013, there were 65 documented attacks on Christian churches by extremists. While the attacks are well documented, the police action was slow and government response sometimes apathetic, that an investigation would undermine religious amity.

Another spectacular indication of the government’s persisting post-war abuses is a transcript of a telephone discussion in July 2012 between a senior woman journalist from an independent newspaper and Sri Lanka’s Defence Minister.

The transcript has been quoted in (among other places) the *Round Table*, a well-respected and far from incendiary Commonwealth journal. After the Minister, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, made a menacing comment, the journalist asked if he was threatening her. The Minister replied “Yes I threatened you. Your type of journalists are pigs who eat sh*t! Pigs who eat sh*t! Sh*t Sh*t Sh*t journalists...You are a sh*t sh*t journalist. A f***ing sh*t....I will put you in jail...People will kill you...”

There was much more in this vein. He used these four letter words 22 times during two telephone conversations. The Commonwealth Secretariat is well aware of the events noted above, and yet went ahead with plans to hold the CHOGM in Sri Lanka. Some have suggested that passivity and absent-mindedness led the Secretariat into this colossal miscalculation. But on at least two occasions, Secretary-General Kamalesh Sharma took steps proactively to ensure that the venue would not be changed.

First, many months before the CHOGM, he instructed the staff of the Secretariat to focus only on plans for the meeting in Sri Lanka. Alternatives were off the table.

Second, when the impeachment of Sri Lanka’s Chief Justice met with cries of controversy, the Secretary-General asked two senior jurists from the Commonwealth to examine whether the impeachment was legal. When they did so, he

kept their findings to himself and did not transmit them to CMAG, the agency which engages with Member Governments that have violated Commonwealth principles, as the impeachment plainly appeared to do.

However, the findings of the jurists found their way into the public sphere. Both legal opinions were damning indictments of the Sri Lanka government. And yet the Secretary-General declined to refer the reports to CMAG – which is mostly dependent on him for information before it can act. Had CMAG seen the reports and engaged the Sri Lanka government on the issue, it could have been difficult to proceed with hosting the CHOGM in Colombo as planned.

So the Secretary-General did not sleepwalk into this catastrophe. He bears the responsibility for it, and for squandering the Commonwealth’s aspirations of being a force for rights and the rule of law.

Though the “non-official” Commonwealth, which comprises professional and voluntary associations, remains a constructive force, we must now ask whether the “official” Commonwealth – principally the Secretariat – is good for anything any longer.

**James Manor is Professor of Commonwealth Studies at the School of Advanced Study, University of London ■*

Elections 2013: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back for Democracy in the Maldives

By **Devyani Srivastava**, Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative



“Silent Protest” demands elections in Maldives. Photograph by: Shaari

On 9 November 2013, the small island nation in the Arabian Sea elected Abdulla Yameen as its President. An unprecedented polling of close to 90 per cent was recorded in the elections with winning candidate Mr Yameen of the Progressive Party of the Maldives (PPM) securing 51.61 per cent as against Mohamed Nasheed of the Maldivian Democracy Party (MDP) who received 48.39 per cent. With this, the fledgling democracy has successfully elected its second leader under the 2008 Constitution that heralded a multi-party democratic system in the country.

Yet, there is little else by way of celebration. Even with a small electorate of just 239,593 and despite the best efforts of the Election Commission of the Maldives, the elections did not go off smoothly. As a result of repeated delays and disruptions in holding the elections the change of government could not take place within the constitutionally-stipulated time period (see table). Several worrying problems regarding democratic processes came to the fore which highlights the wide gap between the promise

and practise of democracy. Deep mistrust between leading political parties, polarised public opinion, shrinking space for independent voices, political debates centred on personalities rather than on key public policies, continued reliance on state institutions to protect and advance partisan interests and a highly politicised judiciary are just a few concerns that top the list. Eventually, the elections went off peacefully but not without forever denting the image of the small republic as a “modest model” of democracy (*The Economist*, 2011).

The Maldives Presidential Elections 2013: Brief Timeline of Events

(A detailed timeline is given in the Reports of the Commonwealth Observer Group)

7 Sep	Presidential Elections are held. No candidate receives over 50 per cent of the vote. Run-off election between the first two candidates to take place.
15 Sep	Jumhooree Party files a petition to the Supreme Court seeking annulment of 7 September election.
23 Sep	Supreme Court (four of the seven-member Bench) issues injunction against the holding of the scheduled 28 September run-off election.
7 Oct	Supreme Court majority verdict (four of the seven-member Bench) rules to annul the 7 September election. Supreme Court issues 16 Guidelines for holding the next election before 20 October.
8 Oct	Election Commission announces that the re-run of the 7 September election will take place on 19 October, with a possible run-off election on 26 October.
18 Oct	Jumhooree Party and PPM file a petition with the Supreme Court requesting an injunction against the 19 October election.
19 Oct	Supreme Court does not deliver a judgement on the injunction petition but instead refers all parties to the Guidelines. The police refuse to assist with transporting voting materials, and police officers prevent election officials from leaving the Election Commission building with voting materials.
21 Oct	Election Commission announces that the re-run election will take place on 9 November, with a possible run-off election on 16 November.
9 Nov	The re-run Presidential Elections are held. No candidate receives over 50 per cent of the vote. Run-off election scheduled for 16 November.
11 Nov	According to the Constitution, the five-year term of the incumbent government expires.
16 Nov	Run-off election is held.
17 Nov	Newly-elected President is inaugurated.

In a sense, the context for these elections was set as early as February 2012 when the then President Mohamed Nasheed was forced to step down in what many allege to be a military coup. Since then, Nasheed and his party the MDP have taken to the streets in protest, demanding fresh elections otherwise due in October 2013. The legitimacy of his successor, President Waheed, continued to be bitterly contested despite a national inquiry commissioned by Waheed giving his administration a clean chit. Nasheed, on his part, faced a real possibility of being barred from contesting the elections. He was undergoing a trial for illegally detaining a criminal court judge in January 2012 for three weeks

in violation of court orders, the punishment of which could range from just a fine to banishment for up to three years. Eventually, pressure from the international community ensured his participation in the elections.

A direct consequence of these events was that much of the public debate in the run-up to the elections centred on personalities rather than ideas. Engagement on public policy issues which directly affect people's lives and that which must inform voters' choice for any election to be meaningful was starkly missing. Additionally, as noted by local observers, opinion on each side was so firmly entrenched and negatively framed that little space was left

for conciliation based on national interest. Such an environment is only likely to breed intolerance and rigidity that could seriously delay, if not derail, the democratic reforms agenda in the Maldives. Both the judiciary and the police's role in the elections bear testimony to this.

Interventions of the Supreme Court in facilitating the elections have been hugely detrimental to the principle of separation of powers enshrined in the 2008 Constitution. In blatant disregard of due process, the Supreme Court annulled the first round of elections held on 7 September 2013 and issued a set of guidelines to be followed by the Election Commission for the conduct of fresh elections. The first

round was unanimously applauded for being fair, credible and inclusive by national and international observers. In particular, fears surrounding irregularities in voter registration were noted as being unfounded by the Commonwealth Observer Group. Moreover, Article 172(a) of the Constitution rests any challenge to the decision of the Election Commission concerning results of an election with the High Court and not the Supreme Court. Yet, the apex body accepted the petition from the Jumhooree Party requesting for annulment of the first round of elections. Notably, the Election Commission has pointed out that they were not given an opportunity to respond to the evidence of irregularities presented by the Jumhooree Party and the police on the basis of which the annulment was ordered.

Further, guidelines issued by the Court for the conduct of elections are a serious encroachment over the powers of the Election Commission, an independent body answerable to Parliament under the Constitution. Among other things, for instance, the guidelines included mandatory approval of the electoral rolls by the candidates which, in effect, gave the candidates the right to veto the polls.

These actions of the Supreme Court are symptomatic of a deeper systemic malaise. The judicial system in the Maldives has come under considerable criticism for being heavily politicised. During her visit to the Maldives in February 2013, the UN Special Rapporteur on Independence of Judges and Lawyers highlighted lack of independence,

lack of appropriate accountability mechanisms, lack of transparency, lack of public confidence, lack of fundamental pieces of legislation and using the threat of contempt of court to constrain lawyers' freedom of expression, as major problems within the Maldives' judiciary. Similarly, concern was expressed over the legitimacy of the Hulhumale Magistrate Court and the Special Bench of judges appointed to oversee the trial of Nasheed. Undoubtedly, judicial reforms must be a priority of the new government. An impartial, independent and accountable judiciary that acts without fear or interference is required not only to gain people's trust in the government but also to assimilate the Commonwealth values of rule of law and human rights that the Maldives reiterated through its new Constitution in 2008.

The other institution whose role during the elections cast serious doubts over its credibility is the Maldives Police Service. On 19 October 2013, the date set for re-vote by the Supreme Court, the police surrounded the office of the Election Commission and prevented its officials from leaving the building to facilitate the conduct of the elections. This was a gross overstep as the Supreme Court's order gave the police no such authority. They were only to ensure the transportation of the ballot boxes to the desired destination, not to determine whether the Election Commission actions were in accordance with the Supreme Court orders. Such partisan behaviour has continuously characterised police action, particularly since the transfer

of power in February 2012, thereby perpetuating a culture of impunity. Acts of police brutalities on 8 February 2012, for instance, are yet to be prosecuted, despite inquiries by independent oversight bodies having found individual officers guilty. This indicates that the Maldives police remain a coercive force protecting narrow partisan political interests rather than serving as a professional service upholding rule of law. In moving forward, it will be crucial to address the excessive politicisation of the Maldives police through legal and institutional reform.

In a democracy, reforms agenda requires a collaborative and inclusive framework, in the absence of which it fails to inspire confidence among the people and is seen as perpetuation of narrow vested interests. Such doubts regarding the reforms agenda already existed in the Maldives, but are considerably heightened with the election of Mr Yameen, known to be closely allied with the pre-2008 leadership. Moving forward, it is crucial that his government takes measures to prevent the mistrust and polarisation from growing any further and steer political activity based on values of good governance, rule of law, human rights, an independent judiciary and a strengthened civil society. In this, support from the international community remains essential. The Commonwealth in particular must continue to play an integral role and extend every support that is required to realise its core values as emphasised in the recently adopted Commonwealth Charter, in the Maldives. ■

The Case for Open Government Partnership

By **Satbir Singh**, Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative



OGP in action. Photograph by Open Government Partnership

Commonwealth countries, particularly those from the developing world, should not only be joining the Open Government Partnership, they should be *leading* it.

The Open Government Partnership (OGP) was launched in 2011 with just eight members. Today there are 63 members. Of these, only eight are from Africa, while South Asia, home to over one-fifth of the world's population is completely unrepresented. More strikingly, just 11 of the Commonwealth's 53 Member States are members of the OGP, despite the very clear complementarities between the objectives of the OGP and the goals of good governance and democracy enshrined in the recently signed Commonwealth Charter. This article hopes to make the case for increased engagement with the

OGP by Commonwealth countries.

First, what is the OGP? It is a multilateral, international initiative with its membership comprising (a) governments which have made strong commitments to promote transparency, civic participation and accountability and (b) civil society organisations, private companies and multilateral institutions with experience and expertise in the practical work of building open governance. Recognising that the holders of knowledge and experience will not always be governments, this extended network of actors provides a platform for knowledge-sharing, engagement and mentoring that goes beyond the typical State-to-State paradigm.

So, what does the OGP offer to Commonwealth countries? Much

like the Commonwealth, OGP's relevance and value has grown with its membership. Membership is only possible once specific criteria are met and so the prominence of the enlarged OGP lends an aura of credibility to Member Governments' commitment to transparency. This credibility can help build the confidence of markets, creditors and credit rating agencies, which can in turn set countries on the path of governance reform.

A larger membership additionally ensures that a greater diversity of voices are heard and, as the OGP emerges as the agenda-setting forum for advocates of transparency and open governance, Commonwealth countries must join the discussion if their needs and concerns are to be incorporated in this emerging consensus. With their common legal frameworks and shared history under the Official Secrets Act, a larger cohort of Commonwealth countries within the OGP would additionally see these States tied into an institutionalised mechanism for sharing best practices and expertise which can be readily replicated across jurisdictions.

In an enlarged OGP, leading reformers from the South could also emerge as the key holders of

knowledge and expertise. India, for example, could bring the weight of its success in implementing its Right to Information Act to the table, while the Pakistani government could showcase its experience in drafting and implementing such laws in conflict or post-conflict regions. In such a scenario, the emergence of South-based heavyweights within the OGP would reduce the dependence on expertise from developed countries that typically skew the flow of information in such fora.

There are, however, obvious concerns among both governments and civil society and not all are unfounded. First, committing ourselves to any set of concrete actions inevitably gives rise to the fear that such commitments will be used by developed nations as yet another “stick” with which to beat their developing counterparts. Though it is difficult to definitively disprove a hypothetical, it is impossible to envisage a scenario in which the dominance of a forum by developed nations could be effectively countered with the absence of a significant number of developing countries as members. Additionally, as OGP commitments emerge as the global yardstick against which good governance is measured, refusal to join it does not guarantee insulation from the pressure for transparency that will be brought to bear on States by creditors, trading partners and international financial institutions.

Advocates, meanwhile, fear that the OGP is simply a talking shop for governments, with little genuine impact on policy. Such claims are confounded by the number of governments which have adopted freedom of information laws or open data policies as a direct result of accession to the OGP. The power of advocates to shape the agenda was on display at the OGP’s 2013 Summit in London, Aruna Roy, of the National Campaign for People’s Right to Information (NCPRI), stole the limelight from the US Secretary of State to deliver a stinging rebuke to the US National Security Agency’s surveillance programme, starting a tidal wave of criticism that has ultimately led the White House to signal its intent to reform its own practices.

Conversely, other activists fear a “race to the bottom” as States rush to tick off the OGP criteria, hurriedly passing, transparency legislations that lie dormant and meet none of the benchmarks that experts advise, but nonetheless satisfying the OGP requirement that Member States have an access to information law in place. Rwanda is a case in point, passing a disappointing Freedom of Information (FOI) law in 2013 and since then failing to take steps toward its operationalisation. This is a difficult concern to discount but the evidence is promising as civil society coalitions in Kenya and Ghana have fought off attempts by their government to

pass FOI legislation which does little to improve access to official information. Again, it is worthwhile to remember that as part of a larger cohort and with mentoring from leading developing states within the OGP fold, governments would find it harder to take regressive steps and would instead be measured against successful cases of reform, thus being driven into a pattern of competitive self-improvement.

With or without the countries of the Commonwealth, the OGP is emerging as the leading forum for governments and civil society to engage on issues of governance. Membership undoubtedly comes with risks but there is little to be lost and much to be gained; with a larger membership and the emergence of leadership from the South, the OGP would undoubtedly become a more robust platform for governments and civil society alike in their shared pursuit of open governance. ■

**Interested in
contributing to
this newsletter?**

Get in touch:

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The Alternate People's Forum

Interview with Dr Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu, Executive Director, Centre for Policy Alternatives, Sri Lanka



Q1. What prompted you to organise an alternate meet for civil society actors when the Commonwealth Foundation was already hosting an official civil society event?

We felt that the official Peoples Forum organised with the Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) would ignore the real concerns of civil society in Sri Lanka pertaining to the crisis of governance, the culture of impunity, the collapse of the rule of law, institutionalised militarisation and increasing religious intolerance. It was quite clear that the GOSL was not interested and would not allow any of these concerns to be aired; their priorities were different. The Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) was invited to be a part of the planning of the official forum by the Commonwealth Foundation but the CPA declined. We later learnt that in any event there was official GOSL opposition to our involvement in the planning of the event.

Q2. What sort of participation did you see at the alternate meeting?

Representatives of around 50 or more civil society organisations

working on human rights protection in particular participated, making up a grand total of 300 participants. Particularly heartening was the participation of people from the North and outside Colombo, given the threat and intimidation that several grass-roots organisations in the North have been subjected to around and during the visit of Navi Pillay, David Cameron and also during the provincial council election in the Northern Province in September.

Q3. What was the government's reaction, if there was any, to the Alternate People's Forum? Did government interference of any kind impact the hosting of this event?

The GOSL employed its usual tactic of hate speech and vilification against the organisers on the state-controlled media. This did not, however, significantly impact participation. However, the human rights exhibition was violently disrupted by extremist groups.

Q4. How did domestic and international media react to the Alternate People's Forum?

Given the self-censorship practised by local media, coverage was limited. Most of the coverage was on the web which has increasingly become the outlet for dissent in Sri Lanka.

Q5. What was the focus of the event? Are there any highlights you would like to share?

The event was dedicated to the life and work of one of Sri

Lanka's, and indeed the global South's foremost human rights defenders, Sunila Abeysekera (1952-2013). The event focused on the current situation in Sri Lanka from a rights perspective. These included issues of economic development and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) rights in addition to impunity, accountability and governance. There was a strong consensus on the current environment in the country and unanimity over the trend identified by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, about the country moving towards authoritarianism. In fact, participants felt that the situation was worse than described by the High Commissioner.

Q6. Did the event fulfil the goals and objectives you had in mind?

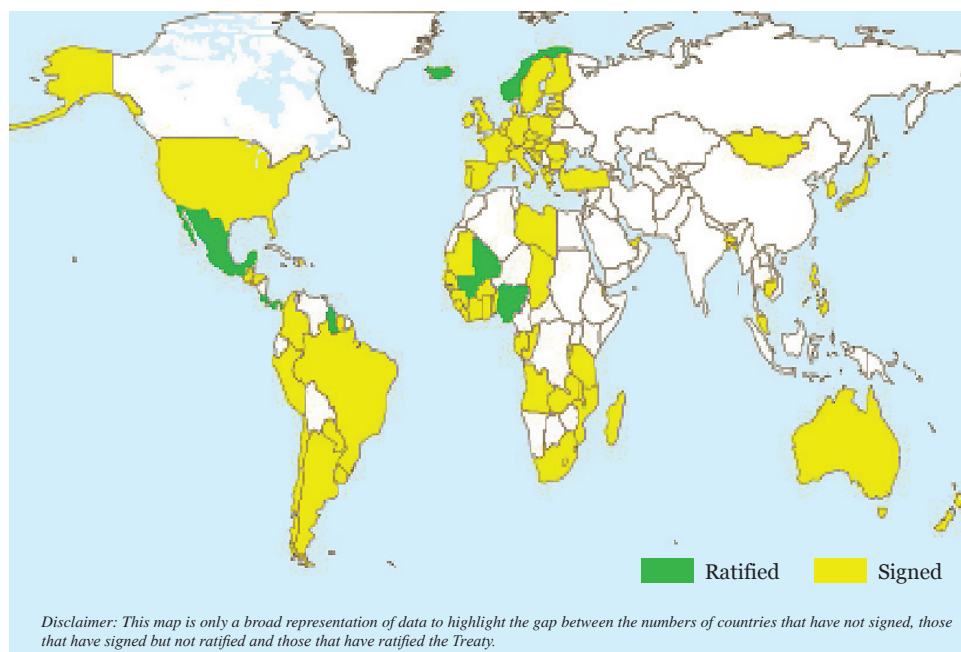
Yes. It focused attention on the current situation in the country and augmented solidarity amongst civil society rights groups fighting it.

Q7. What would you say to civil society activists in other Commonwealth countries who struggle to function in similar environments?

Persist. Do not give up. We have to strive to tell the truth. Regimes dislike us precisely because we provide the counter-narrative to their propaganda. Without this, impunity rules and destroys societies like cancer. ■

The Arms Trade Treaty: What Difference Will it Make in the Commonwealth?

By Helena Whall*



Countries that have signed and the ones that have ratified the Arms Trade Treaty. Map by Shilpi Roy Chowdhury

The Arms Trade Treaty: A Landmark Achievement

On 2 April 2013, the United Nations (UN) adopted the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) with a resounding majority. The Treaty establishes common international standards for the regulation of international trade in conventional arms, small arms and light weapons, ammunition, and parts and components, for the purpose of contributing to peace and security, reducing human suffering, and promoting cooperation and transparency. The UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, heralded it

as a “landmark” Treaty at a special event to mark the opening of the Treaty for signature. He said the Treaty “opened a door of hope to millions of women, men and children who live in deprivation and fear because of the poorly controlled international arms trade and the proliferation of deadly weapons”.

When the ATT opened for signature on 3 June 2013, 67 UN Member States queued up to sign the historic Treaty. At the time of writing, 116 countries are signatories to the Treaty, while eleven have ratified it and will be legally bound by it

when it comes into force after the fiftieth ratification. With eleven ratifications already and promises from other Member States for swift ratification, this could happen soon. Australian Ambassador, Peter Woolcott (President of the final Diplomatic Conference on the ATT in March 2013) told the UN General Assembly, in October 2013, that it was “possible” for the Treaty to enter into force in 2014.

Commonwealth Countries Demonstrate Support for the Arms Trade Treaty

Thirty-two Commonwealth Member States signed the Treaty, and four ratified it. Leading the way is the Caribbean Community (CARICOM); all its Member States signed the ATT, and Antigua and Barbuda, Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago ratified it. Eleven African Commonwealth members are signatories, with Nigeria being the first to ratify. Seven Pacific Commonwealth States signed the Treaty, while just two Asian Member States signed (Bangladesh and Malaysia). Cyprus, Malta and the United Kingdom from Europe, also signed the Treaty. Seventeen Commonwealth Member States

have yet to become signatories, notable amongst these are Canada and India.

Commonwealth Member States that signed the ATT:

Australia, Bahamas, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belize, Cyprus, Dominica, Ghana, Grenada, Jamaica, Kiribati, Lesotho, Malawi, Malaysia, Malta, Mozambique, Nauru, New Zealand, Rwanda, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Swaziland, Tuvalu, United Kingdom, Tanzania, Vanuatu and Zambia.

Commonwealth member states that ratified the ATT:

Antigua and Barbuda, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago and Nigeria.

Commonwealth member states that have not yet signed or ratified:

Botswana, Brunei Darussalam, Cameroon, Canada, Fiji, India, Kenya, Maldives, Mauritius, Namibia, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Singapore, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Tonga and Uganda.

It is no surprise that most Commonwealth Member States either signed and/ or ratified the Treaty, since many recognise its potential benefits for their

own countries' peace, security, and development, especially the developing and small island states. As Jamaica, speaking on behalf of CARICOM, said at the opening of the UN General Assembly in October 2013, the Treaty can "contribute significantly to reducing the suffering of many of our citizens and countless peoples around the world, especially women and children, who are living daily under the deadly and devastating impact of the unregulated trade in conventional weapons".

Several individual Commonwealth Member States played a key role in the negotiations for a strong and robust Treaty. Three of the seven co-authors of the original 2006 Resolution (calling for UN negotiations on an Arms Trade Treaty) were Commonwealth countries, namely: Australia, Kenya and the United Kingdom (UK). Many Commonwealth African countries and CARICOM states were strongly in favour of a Treaty which was wide in scope, including small arms and light weapons and ammunition, as well as conventional arms. New Zealand was amongst several Commonwealth states which pressed for tough criteria relating to international human rights and humanitarian obligations, ensuring that States which are party to the Treaty are mandated not to violate those commitments. From Asia,

Bangladesh pushed hard to ensure the Treaty provided for international assistance to developing countries in its implementation.

The Commonwealth, as an Association, Shows Lack of Leadership on the Arms Trade Treaty

Despite the significant endorsement of the Treaty by many Commonwealth Member States, the organisation failed to show support for the Arms Trade Treaty. Its first official statement on the ATT, made at the 2011 Perth Commonwealth Summit, was tentative at best. Heads of Government committed to: "Improve international security by... encouraging participation in the 2012 Diplomatic Conference to negotiate on the basis of consensus an effective Arms Trade Treaty which is of broad universal acceptance." According to the UK Foreign Affairs Committee report on "The Role and Future of the Commonwealth", released in November 2012, the Association demonstrated "shortcomings" and a lack of "coordination and leadership" during the first round of negotiations (which were unsuccessful in achieving a consensus on the Treaty). Despite these allegations, the Association remained silent during the final round of negotiations in March 2013.

At the Commonwealth civil society level, there is also little support for the Treaty, with two notable exceptions. The Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) has long recognised that peace and security are prerequisites for human rights, democracy and development. As far back as 1999, CHRI highlighted in its report, “Over a Barrel: Light Weapons and Human Rights in the Commonwealth”, produced in collaboration with a South African campaign coalition to the Durban Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting

highlight how the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in the Caribbean is “undermining peace and development in the region”. While Alan Duncan MP, UK Minister of State for International Development, called on Commonwealth Member States to “share” the UK’s progressive position on the Treaty, hoping that the “family instinct” shared by the Commonwealth Association would prevail during the negotiations.

Recently, CHOGM in Sri Lanka, in November 2013, provided

acknowledged adoption of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) in April 2013, aimed at regulating international trade in conventional arms and its opening for signature in June 2013...They acknowledged the accession to the ATT by a number of countries and called on others to consider doing so.”

While much of the focus of the recent Commonwealth Summit was on the post-2015 development agenda, the link between the effective implementation of the Arms Trade Treaty and the attainment

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(CHOGM), that small arms have “dire implications” for the protection and promotion of the Commonwealth’s guiding principles of democracy, the rule of law, development and human rights.

In 2012, the Royal Commonwealth Society in London, in collaboration with the UK Working Group on Arms, hosted an important Roundtable on the ATT and the Commonwealth, examining how Commonwealth Member States could ensure a successful outcome at the July 2012 ATT negotiations. The High Commissioner of Antigua and Barbuda used the occasion to

an excellent opportunity for Commonwealth Member States to move forward on signature and ratification of the Treaty, and for the Association to show its support for the recently adopted Treaty. At the October 2013 UN General Assembly, a Resolution was adopted on the ATT calling on “all States that have not yet done so to sign and, thereafter, according to their respective constitutional processes, ratify, accept or approve the Treaty at the earliest possible date”. However, the CHOGM Communiqué, issued at the conclusion of the Summit, was lacklustre in its call to action to say the least: “Heads of Government

of the Millennium Development Goals by many of its developing and small island Member States – that peace and security is fundamental to sustainable, long-term development – seemed to be lost on Heads of State.

Interestingly, since Sri Lanka will be chairing the Commonwealth for the next two years, at a fringe session on the side lines of the 2013 Commonwealth People’s Forum, Parliamentarian and Secretary of the Parliamentarians for Global Action’s Sri Lankan chapter, Thilanga Sumathipala, said Sri Lanka was “in principle” in agreement with the Arms Trade

Treaty, but there were some issues that “still needed to be worked out” before Sri Lanka could consider becoming a signatory to the Treaty. (Sri Lanka abstained from voting on the ATT on

which supports implementation efforts for the ATT particularly in developing countries; the United Kingdom pledged more than £350,000 to support States that wish to implement the Treaty; New

the activities of the UN Trust Facility, in assisting its members to implement the Treaty.

With many of its members soon to ratify the Arms Trade Treaty and

Several Commonwealth States have already made funds available for technical assistance to help other States implement the Treaty.

2 April 2013.) However, he said that from the point of view of the Parliamentarians for Global Action, there was a “definite need” for such a Treaty.

Looking Forward: Is There a Role for the Commonwealth in the Implementation of the ATT?

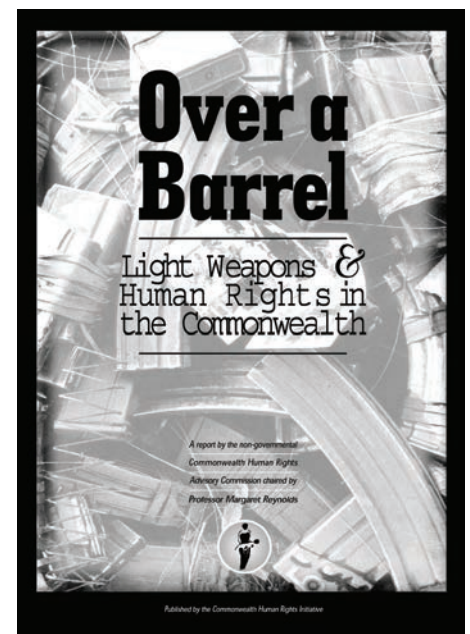
The October 2013 UN General Assembly Resolution urged those states “in a position to do so to provide assistance, including legal or legislative assistance, institutional capacity-building and technical, material or financial assistance, to requesting States that intend to become parties to the Treaty, in order to facilitate its early entry into force”. Several Commonwealth States have already made funds available for technical assistance to help other States implement the Treaty. Australia contributed US \$1 million to the UN Trust Facility Supporting Cooperation on Arms Regulation (UNSCAR),

Zealand has offered assistance to interested countries on ratification and implementation of the ATT; and Trinidad and Tobago has offered to host the proposed ATT Secretariat.

Several Commonwealth Member States, particularly developing and small island states, could struggle to effectively implement the Treaty and it is important that these countries receive adequate international assistance. As noted by this author in a blog post for Commonwealth Opinion (June 2013): “The Commonwealth Secretariat could make a real difference and show its support for the Treaty” by freeing some of the annual budget of the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation, with a coffer of around £24 million, designed to support economic growth, poverty reduction and sustainable development of Member States, particularly small island states, to complement

in need of assistance to implement it effectively, the Association has another chance to demonstrate its support and ensure that the Treaty has a real impact on the lives of the millions of citizens living within the Commonwealth.

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Post-CHOGM Responsibilities for Sri Lanka

By Jehan Perera



Commonwealth youth forum closing ceremony. Photograph by Commonwealth Secretariat

The hosting of the Commonwealth Summit in Sri Lanka was indeed a great triumph for Sri Lanka's government which made every effort for its success. There was strong opposition from some countries to Sri Lanka hosting CHOGM on the grounds that its government failed to live up to Commonwealth values during the last phase of its three-decade civil war. There were some Sri Lankan civil society groups that shared this international perspective, but others saw a rare opportunity to engage with their counterparts from across the Commonwealth and be

inspired by their work and presence.

The Commonwealth People's Forum that took place in the run-up to the Heads of Government Meeting was successful to the extent that it led to the production of a detailed outcome statement which was adopted without dissent. Over 200 international and 100 Sri Lankan participants took part in the event. Participants at the Forum expressed their appreciation at the manner in which their programmes were arranged. Members of the religious clergy present at the Forum represented all the dominant

religions of the island – Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. The participants' satisfaction was evident from the round of applause they gave to the local organisers. Two national organisations – Sewa Lanka Foundation and the Sarvodaya Movement – provided logistical support for hosting the event, taking foreign participants on "Learning Journeys" to Jaffna and Galle.

The overall theme of the People's Forum was "Equitable Growth and Inclusive Development Beyond 2015". The sub-themes that were

identified and commented on in the final outcome statement were issues of: Women's Political, Social and Economic Empowerment and Gender Equality; Young People, Livelihoods, Decent Work and Social Protection; Migration, Urbanisation and Human settlements; Health; Education; Food Security and Food Sovereignty; Heritage, Culture and Creative Expression; Governance and Diversity; Financing for Development; Global Environmental Justice Climate

- d. Commit to a framework of mutual accountability at the global, regional and national level; and
- e. Ensure that all development policies and processes are firmly grounded in a human rights based approach.

The Forum's statement also draws attention to the Sri Lankan government's attitude towards civil society. Civic organisations are unable to fulfil their role

accreditation, presumably owing to the failure to clear security.

As the Chairman of the Commonwealth for the next two years, a crucial responsibility is vested in President Mahinda Rajapaksa to uphold Commonwealth values such as fundamental freedoms and human rights not only in Sri Lanka but in the Commonwealth. This can best be achieved by working in partnership with civil society and leading Sri Lanka in resolving its

Sri Lanka is unique in that all NGOs are required to register under the Ministry of Defence, which houses the government's NGO Secretariat. This is a continuing legacy of Sri Lanka's civil war period, which saw peace and human rights NGOs as adversaries of the government.

Change and Natural Resource Management.

The participants noted that civil society is central in the development process and called on Commonwealth Heads of State and Government to:

- a. Invest in supporting the conditions that create an enabling environment for civil society to participate in development processes more fully, proactively and effectively;
- b. Foster development processes that are inclusive, equal and just;
- c. Strengthen institutions and promote processes that support participatory governance and cross-boundary knowledge sharing;

due to closing civil society space and limitations of capacity. There is a need for a more constructive engagement between the government and civil society. Sri Lanka is unique in that all NGOs are required to register under the Ministry of Defence, which houses the government's NGO Secretariat. This is a continuing legacy of Sri Lanka's civil war period, which saw peace and human rights NGOs as adversaries of the government. This was observed when civil society participants invited to attend the People's Forum had to undergo a rigorous security clearance procedure which took many weeks for some applicants. There were several who did not receive their

problems in a manner that accords with its international obligations.

The Commonwealth People's Forum outcome statement is laid out in broad terms and applies to all Commonwealth countries. If its precepts are followed, the people of the Commonwealth will be the real beneficiaries. How Sri Lanka, holding the Chairmanship of the Commonwealth, translates the Statement into action can be an inspiration to the governments of the other Commonwealth countries. ■

What's up with the Commonwealth?

By Richard Bourne*

The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Colombo, last November, should have been about human rights. It was, and it wasn't. The outpouring of grief at the death of Nelson Mandela, a month later, was a reminder that the Commonwealth has always had human rights at its core – in struggles for democracy and against colonialism, in the fight for racial justice, in the continuing efforts to achieve equality between men and women, in the campaign to make sense of a right to development. But today's leaders shy away from applying principles to practice, when these come close to home.

Before the Colombo Summit, with the damning findings of a UN panel of experts and of human rights bodies on Sri Lanka's war crimes, there was hope that the meeting could provide an opportunity to confront the widespread human rights abuses during and after the Sri Lankan civil war. This never happened. While the international media asked questions, and the Sri Lankan government talked of establishing a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to ward off further criticism at the next Human Rights Council session in Geneva, the official Commonwealth in its communiqué remained silent. Following the Summit, President Rajapaksa will be "Chairperson" of this Association till 2015. This is of

symbolic importance even though the role lacks significance.

The communiqué had four paragraphs on human rights, encouraging national human rights institutions, and noting that it was two decades since the UN Vienna Declaration. It also set up a Group of Heads to lobby for effective development goals after 2015, and a working party of officials to try and ease visa obstacles for legitimate travellers between Commonwealth states.

More people may have heard of the Commonwealth, because of publicity about its hypocrisy, so soon after the signing of a Commonwealth Charter which aspired to better human rights for all. The Colombo Summit was attended by the lowest number of Heads in decades; only half its Member States sent their head of government, leaving one to question the significance of the Commonwealth. While the prime ministers of India, Canada and Mauritius boycotted the meeting, Britain's David Cameron used the occasion as an opportunity to visit Tamil areas in the north of the island, most affected by the war. Several inter-governmental meetings as part of the programme in Colombo were poisoned by hostility between the representatives of the main funders – the UK, Australia and Canada, all of which currently have conservative governments –

and developing States. Ironically, the Gambia had just left, because the eccentric President Jammeh thought the Commonwealth was *too* keen on human rights – especially for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community and freedom of expression.

The lasting conclusion from the Colombo Summit, going well beyond the failure to address human rights publicly when it matters, is that the Commonwealth is an organisation in desperate need of reconstruction, and fence-mending. The international scene in the twenty-first century is ruthless towards institutions which live in the past, which may have an identity but no current purpose, and demands unique answers to pressing questions.

The battle to succeed Kamallesh Sharma, as the next Secretary-General, to be elected in Malta in 2015, has already covertly commenced. The bad habit of looking to see which candidate is likely to do least, or can be pushed around most easily where opinions are divided, must be discarded. Too much of the 2013 communiqué reflected a "me-too" attitude – whatever the UN is up to, the Commonwealth will support. What then is the point of the Commonwealth?

**Richard Bourne was the first Director of CHRI* ■

Programme Highlights from CHRI this Quarter

Strategic Initiatives Programme

- In August 2013, the team wrote to the Commonwealth Secretary-General on the worrying developments on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) rights, people and activists across the African region and urged the Secretary-General to monitor the situation in Cameroon, Nigeria, Uganda and Zambia.
- The team made submissions to the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) meeting in September 2013 drawing attention to the deteriorating human rights situation in several countries including Sri Lanka and The Gambia, urging CMAG to investigate the serious and persistent human rights violations in these countries.
- In November, CHRI published its 2013 report to Commonwealth Heads of Government "The Missing Link: A Commonwealth Commissioner for Human Rights" calling for the establishment of the post of a Commonwealth Commissioner for Human Rights, in order to ensure that the organisation remains relevant to its peoples and its values.
- CHRI joined with partners in Bangladesh to prepare a submission to the September sessions of the UN Human Rights Council on Bangladesh focusing on the plight of human rights defenders operating in

the country, closing space for civil society, criminalisation of homosexuality and police accountability.

- CHRI pursued information on the India, Brazil and South Africa Dialogue Forum (IBSA) Trust Fund using access to information laws, in its endeavour to democratise the functioning of the grouping.

Prisons Reforms Programme

- A 2-day workshop was organised on (i) "Prison Visiting System" for 26 Non-Official Visitors (NOVs) from Jodhpur Division and Nagore district of Rajasthan (ii) "Bail, Bonds and Legal Aid" as part of the Legal Refresher Course on Pre-Trial Justice for legal aid lawyers of Rajasthan (iii) "Arrest and Remand" as part of the long term Legal Refresher Course on Pre-Trial Justice for legal aid lawyers of Rajasthan.
- A State Level Consultation was organised with Chief Judicial Magistrates of 33 districts of Rajasthan on implementation of the Probation of Offenders Act and Undertrial Review Mechanisms in Prisons. CHRI also conducted a 3-day training of paralegal convicts inside the Jodhpur Central Prison, Rajasthan
- CHRI expanded the Legal Aid Clinic Initiative (Shadhinota) from Calcutta to Dum Dum, Alipore and Presidency Central

Correctional Homes, West Bengal. It collaborated with the Department of Women Studies, Jadavpur University, West Bengal to organise legal awareness plays in prisons.

- An assessment process was initiated to check compliance to the Maharashtra High Court order on oversight and maintenance of sub-jails and gathered status of compliance to remand provisions under Section 167, CrPC in 75 cases from 4 courts of Mumbai, Maharashtra.

Police Reforms Programme

- The team organised a two-day regional conference on Women Police in South Asia in Kathmandu, Nepal. This conference explored the topic of women in policing which will feed into observations and learning of CHRI's Regional Study on Women Police in South Asia, to be released in 2014. Please visit www.nipsa.in to view presentations from the conference and interviews with participants.
- The team's lead for the East Africa programme travelled to Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda in November 2013 to undertake research for our regional East Africa policing report (due March 2014) and launch "101 Things That You Always Wanted To Know About the Police But Were Afraid to Ask" in Uganda

with partners HURINET-U. The document is printed in English, Luo and Luganda.

Access to Information Programme

- In September, CHRI secured a major victory in the Supreme Court of India where it argued successfully that Information Commissions, under India's Right to Information Act, are administrative tribunals and need not be packed with retired judges. The Apex Court recalled its earlier direction on the manner of appointments of Information Commissioners.
- In September the team hosted its 7th RTI Learning Programme for civil society, media and government representatives from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, the Maldives and Sri Lanka. Participants interacted with RTI practitioners in government, civil society and the Central Information Commission and also visited Rajasthan to learn first hand, India's experience of implementing the RTI Act.
- In October, the team released a study of the extent of use of the RTI Act across India based on user data published by various Information Commissions. The first of its kind, the findings of this study received wide attention in the national media and is being quoted by public functionaries in their presentations on implementation of the RTI Act.
- The Maldives adopted its RTI law in December and Bhutan

followed suit in February 2014. CHRI was closely involved with the capacity building and advocacy interventions of civil society actors demanding the adoption of these laws in both countries.

CHRI London Office

- In the run-up to CHOGM in Sri Lanka in November, the London office was engaged in a substantial round of lobbying of UK government and Commonwealth officials, both individually and in alliance with UK human rights organisations, to uphold human rights in Sri Lanka and across the Commonwealth.
- CHRI made inputs to the Commonwealth's Committee of the Whole meeting in London on 16 October, promoting a Rights-Based Approach to Development and the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) Commonwealth citizens in CHOGM discussions.
- The office organised a launch event for releasing CHRI report to CHOGM 2013: "The Missing Link: A Commonwealth Commissioner for Human Rights" on 11 November in London. Sir Ron Saunders, Commonwealth diplomat and journalist, Henry Bellingham, Chairman of the UK All Party Parliamentary Group on the Commonwealth and Richard Bourne of the Ramphal Institute led a lively discussion on the report, which was widely distributed to opinion-makers in the UK.

CHRI Ghana Office

- In February, the team at the Ghana office submitted a memorandum of recommendations for reform of the Ghana Police Service to the Appointment Committee of the Parliament of Ghana.
- In March, as part of the RTI Coalition, the team participated in a discussion with the Open Government Partnership (OGP) National Steering Committee on Ghana's OGP process and Action Plan.
- In April, the team held a workshop to review the Act for the Establishment of a Legal Aid Commission.
- In August, the booklet, "101 Things You Wanted To Know About The Police But Were Too Afraid To Ask" was launched at the International Press Center. Copies were presented to the Greater Accra Regional Commander.
- A workshop was held in November to identify and adapt proven strategies to improve Ghana's legal aid delivery system.
- The team continued its advocacy on the RTI Bill: submitted a Memorandum on the RTI Bill, 2013 to Parliament; engaged Members of Parliament on a One-On-One dialogue aimed at sensitising and soliciting support to amend the Bill before its passage; submitted a letter to the President on 28 May 2013 requesting that the RTI Bill to be represented before Parliament.

Opportunities with CHRI

Interns and Stipendary Positions in Research and Advocacy

There are frequent opportunities at CHRI to work with us at our headquarters in Delhi, our Africa office in Accra, Ghana and liaison office in London.

- Students reading law or social sciences may intern with us at any of our three offices for short-term or long-term internships of up to a year.
- Graduates in law, social sciences or other relevant disciplines are welcomed on either a volunteer basis to intern with us for periods ranging from three months to a year, or may apply for a stipendiary position as programme assistants or researchers.
- Graduates with a minimum of two years work experience may apply for programme officer positions, if willing to commit for two years or more. Salaries are local and shared accommodation (at headquarters only) may be provided to candidates from abroad, if available.
- Mid-career or senior professionals wishing to take time off from their mainstream work to do meaningful work in a new setting are also welcome to explore working on issues of accountability and transparency, as well as assisting with fund-raising, as associates or consultants on mutually agreeable terms.

We are an independent, non-partisan, international non-governmental organisation, working for the practical realisation of human rights of ordinary people in the Commonwealth. CHRI promotes awareness of, and adherence to, the Harare Principles, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other internationally recognised human rights instruments and declarations made

by Commonwealth Heads of Governments, as well as other instruments supporting human rights in the Commonwealth. CHRI believes that the promotion and protection of human rights is the responsibility of governments, but that the active informed participation of civil society is also vital to ensuring rule of law and the realisation of human rights.

There are four programme areas at CHRI – Access to Justice, Access to Information, Human Rights Advocacy and Prison Reforms Programmes. As such, our present work focuses on police reforms, prison reforms and promoting access to information. We also overview the human rights situation in all fifty-four countries of the Commonwealth, looking especially at the situation of human rights defenders, compliance with international treaty obligations and monitoring the performance of Commonwealth members of the United Nations Human Rights Council.

CHRI's work is based on relevant legal knowledge, strong research and dissemination of information to both civil society and governments. Policy-level dialogue, capacity building of stakeholders and broad public education are standard activities.

As an organisation, our endeavour is to be one of the best South-based resources on policing and access to information.

Please inquire about specific current vacancies or send job applications with a CV, statement of purpose, references and a short original writing sample to info@humanrightsinitiative.org. To know more about us visit us at www.humanrightsinitiative.org.

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