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# CHRI'S PREVIOUS REPORTS TO CHOGM

# Open Sesame: Looking for the Right to Information in the Commonwealth (2003)

Open Sesame demonstrates the value to democracy and development of ensuring that people have a guaranteed right to access information held by government and other powerful institutions as well as the urgency of enabling that right. The international standards, practice and lessons expounded in this report offer a practical solution to the all too evident systemic governance problems that beset most Commonwealth countries today through the neglect of this fundamental right.

# Human Rights and Poverty Eradication: A Talisman for the Commonwealth (2001)

The Talisman report shows how poverty is an abuse of human rights. It advocates the adoption of a rights-based approach to eradicating the large-scale poverty that continues to exist in the Commonwealth. It points to the gap between the rhetoric the Commonwealth espouses and the reality of people's lives. The report urges member governments to cooperate to fulfil the many solemn commitments made at successive CHOGMs or risk the Commonwealth losing its relevance.

## Over a Barrel - Light Weapons and Human Rights in the Commonwealth (1999)

Over a Barrel exposed a tragic contradiction in the modern Commonwealth in that although human rights are recognised as central to the Commonwealth, millions of light weapons flow freely, jeopardising safety, development and democracy. The report outlines urgent recommendations to the Commonwealth for curbing the reach of light weapons in member countries.

# The Right to a Culture of Tolerance (1997)

This report focused on two themes: ethnic and religious intolerance as an urgent problem throughout the Commonwealth; and freedom of expression/information as a crucial element of a democracy. The report noted that the norms and political values of the Commonwealth compel the association to act to promote tolerance in member countries and the report made recommendations for achieving this goal.

# Rights Do Matter (1995)

Rights Do Matter explored two themes: freedom of expression and the need for major reform in prisons. The report placed this discussion in the context of the transition from authoritarian to democratic political orders and the economic transition from planned to market economies.

# Act Right Now (1993)

Act Right Now was an assessment of the progress of human rights in Commonwealth countries since the Harare Declaration and was made with reference to the United Nations World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in June 1993. It called for the Commonwealth to play a lead role in supporting the long, complex process of moving towards real democracy in transitional countries.

### **Put Our World to Rights (1991)**

Put Our World to Rights was the first independent overview of the status of human rights in the Commonwealth. It provides practical guidance on how to use international machinery for redress.

# CHRI PROGRAMMES

CHRI's work is based on the assumption that for the realisation of human rights, genuine democracy and development to become a reality in people's lives, there must be high standards and functional mechanisms for accountability and participation within the Commonwealth and its member countries. Accordingly, as well as a broad human rights advocacy programme, CHRI advocates access to information and access to justice. It does this through research, publications, workshops, information dissemination and advocacy.

# **Human Rights Advocacy:**

CHRI makes regular submissions to official Commonwealth bodies including the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group and Commonwealth member governments. From time to time CHRI conducts fact finding missions to investigate human rights concerns in member countries and since 1995, has sent missions to Nigeria, Zambia, Fiji Islands and Sierra Leone. CHRI also coordinates the Commonwealth Human Rights Network, which brings together diverse groups to build their capacity and collective power to advocate human rights issues in the Commonwealth. CHRI's Media Unit also ensures that crucial human rights issues are in the public consciousness.

### **ACCESS TO INFORMATION**

## **Right to Information:**

In promoting the right to information, CHRI catalyses civil society and governments to take action, acts as a hub of technical expertise in support of strong legislation, and assists partners with implementation of good practice. CHRI works collaboratively with local organisations and officials throughout the Commonwealth, building government and civil society capacity as well as advocating with policy makers to ensure that laws reflect the real information needs of the community. CHRI is active in South Asia, most recently supporting the successful campaign for a national law in India; provides legal drafting support and inputs in Africa; and in the Pacific, works with regional and national organisations to catalyse interest in access legislation.

### **Constitutionalism:**

CHRI believes that constitutions must be made and owned by the people. Towards this end, it has developed guidelines to inform the making and review of constitutions through a consultative process. In addition, CHRI promotes knowledge of constitutional rights and values through public education programmes. It has developed web-based learning modules for the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association aimed at informing legislators of the value of human rights to their work. In the run up to elections, CHRI has created networks of citizen's groups that monitor elections, protest the fielding of criminal candidates, conduct voter education and monitor the performance of local representatives.

### **ACCESS TO JUSTICE**

### **Police Reforms:**

In too many Commonwealth countries the police are seen as oppressive instruments of state rather than as protectors of citizens' rights, leading to widespread human rights violations and denial of justice. CHRI promotes systemic reforms of police organisations so that they may act as upholders of the rule of law rather than as instruments of the current regime. In India, CHRI's programme aims at mobilising public support for police reform. In East Africa and Ghana, CHRI is examining police accountability issues and political interference.

### **Prison Reforms:**

The closed nature of prisons makes them prime centres of human rights violations. CHRI aims to open up prison working to public scrutiny. This programme is sharply focused on ensuring that the near defunct lay visiting system is revived. CHRI examines prison visiting and undertakes capacity building programmes for visitors.

## **Judicial Colloquia:**

In collaboration with INTERIGHTS, CHRI has held a series of colloquia for judges in South Asia on issues related to access to justice, particularly for the most marginalised sections of the community.

In too many countries, governments are failing in their primary duty to provide the public with an honest, efficient, effective police service that ensures the rule of law and an environment of safety and security. Membership of the Commonwealth is premised on countries being democratic - and this requires democratic policing. The only legitimate policing is policing that helps create an environment free from fear and conducive to the realisation of people's human rights, particularly those that promote unfettered political activity, which is the hallmark of a democracy. As CHRI advocates in its report to the Commonwealth Heads of Government, police reform is now too important to neglect and too urgent to delay. This report calls on the Commonwealth to explicitly acknowledge that police reform is needed in many countries of the Commonwealth and to lead the move toward better policing. CHRI urges the Commonwealth to develop Commonwealth Principles of Policing based on its core principles and international standards.



### COMMONWEALTH HUMAN RIGHTS INITIATIVE

B-117, First Floor, Sarvodaya Enclave New Delhi - 110 017, INDIA Tel: +91-11- 2685-0523, 2686-4678 Fax: +91-11-2686-4688, E-mail: chriall@nda.vsnl.net.in

Website: www.humanrightsinitiative.org