Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative

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Inside

The Commonwealth at the UN Commission

- Margaret Reynolds
Former Chair, International Advisory Commission, CHRI

It is easy to dismiss the importance of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights when it is unable to reach consensus on human rights abuse in many parts of the world. Failure to agree on the naming of specific country abuse and inevitable disagreement about priorities for action is certainly frustrating for human rights advocates and those governments determined to raise standards of compliance with international law. Yet there are good reasons for persisting with the possibilities of attitude change and reform within this international forum.

The 60th Commission certainly reflected the highs and lows of the international human rights debate. There were the standard presentations by government leaders whose speeches seemed to suggest that all was well in describing their own country's compliance with international standards. One of the major problems within the Commission is a failure of countries to acknowledge their own imperfections and to assume that human rights abuse only occurs elsewhere.

While we know there are extreme violations in specific countries which must be the prime focus of concern, all governments need to recognise the ongoing need for human rights education and monitoring in all states if there is to be a genuine acceptance of the fundamentals of human rights worldwide. As the Commission's debate developed over the six weeks, the agenda revealed a wide divergence between policy and practice. The all too brief NGO speeches reminded all that many citizens' rights are not protected and indeed it is the failure of government policy that leads to arbitrary denial of rights.

It is timely to ask why Commonwealth countries are not united in the goals articulated in the Harare Declaration and CHOGM Communiqués.

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Should your Opinions Jeopardize your Citizenship?

Murray Burt

Member, CHRI's International Advisory Commission; and representative, Commonwealth Journalists' Association

The right of citizenship usually looms largest when it is challenged, as it was recently for a Canadian family of Pakistani origin who had, by their own declaration, an association with terrorism.

A mother and her teenage son returned to Canada from their native Pakistan this spring, and the family's background and public utterances generated a firestorm of comment and controversy in the media. Much of it challenged the family's right to citizenship. Much of it defended their right to it, in the belief that freedom of belief and expression is guaranteed fundamentally and by the constitution. The latter was the government's decision and the position taken editorially in most major newspapers. But letters to the editor described the family as treasonous, forsaking their right by their irresponsibility in supporting a jihad.

The Khadr family had left Canada to return to Pakistan and Afghanistan to help the "cause" they believed in - defence of their faith. One version described their role as humanitarian. Other versions linked them with action against coalition troops in the post-Taliban era, including efforts to blow up Canadian soldiers. The father was subsequently killed in a shootout with authorities and a son was arrested in a bombing incident. Another son was taken by U.S. forces in Afghanistan for indeterminate residence in Guantanimo Bay. A third son (the black sheep of the family who told all on Canadian television) is a runaway from an al-Qaeda training camp. The youngest son, a 14-year-old, was wounded in a gunbattle and is paralyzed from the waist down, pending hospital care. And a daughter, who proselytizes suicide bombings, says Osama Bin Laden has been misunderstood by Canadians.

At issue with the critics is whether the Khadr family's behaviour and sentiments so strongly contrary to received wisdom in Canada should force forfeiture of their citizenship. It is a view shared by some in their Mosque in Toronto in the belief that with citizen rights come responsibilities. One angry newspaper letter-writer said: "Their sons were properly trained by al-Qaeda...and they led their sons by example in fighting against Western democracies. As such, they violated the oaths they took to become Canadian citizens. By supporting this family the Canadian government has insulted every responsible law-abiding Canadian citizen, and degraded the value of the Canadian passport."

The official position disagrees. The word from the capital is that mother, son and daughter are entitled to their views and expressions of them, notwithstanding reports of actions of others in their family. Is such a view fundamental to all citizens of democracies? Could the Commonwealth embrace it?

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Leaders have committed to democracy, the rule of law and human rights. Yet there is no evidence that the Commonwealth is assuming a leadership role at the Commission on Human Rights.

Any casual observer would note that Commonwealth countries vote according to national and regional loyalties. The issues debated as priorities at successive CHOGM meetings could be prioritised for action within this international forum where a block vote by Commonwealth nations would show unique leadership. Issues like small arms control, poverty, the right to information, the Millennium Development Goals... These have all gained specific commitments from Commonwealth Heads of Government.

The Commonwealth has a special opportunity to work across the regional and cultural boundaries which create division at the Commission on Human Rights. It is time for CHRI to take a bold step in trying to cross this barrier and bring some unity of purpose to the Commonwealth's participation at the Commission on Human Rights in 2005. ■

Needed: More Effective Human Rights Commissions in India

Mandeep Tiwana
Access to Justice Program, CHRI

The establishment of India's National Human Rights Commission in 1993 resulted from the culmination of a number of national and international factors. Internal conflicts in Punjab, Jammu & Kashmir and the North-Eastern states escalated in the 1980s and early 1990s and were dealt with by the government with a heavy hand. The media, civil society organisations and the general public increasingly expressed concern about police and security forces' actions in tackling insurgency and the culture of impunity within the government - basic human rights were being ignored in the name of national security. The international community also continued to remind the government to fulfil its international obligations to establish mechanisms for protecting human rights.

In this context, the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993 was enacted, which enabled the establishment of the National Human Rights Commission in Delhi and 14 state human rights commissions around the country. The Act lays down a broad mandate for human rights commissions, which includes: inquiries into instances of human rights violations by public servants; research; supporting efforts to increase awareness about human rights; and inspecting police lock-ups, prisons and juvenile homes where people are interred. While human rights commissions have contributed greatly to human rights in India, it is debatable whether they can currently do more, considering the structural and practical limitations that are faced.

Structural limitations

The structural limitations largely relate to the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993 and include:

Recommendations only: Commissions make recommendations to government, which include: payment of compensation to the victim or to her/his family; disciplinary proceedings against delinquent officials; the registration of criminal cases against those responsible; instructions to take particular action to protect human rights and/or to refrain from actions that violate human rights.

However, they can only make recommendations, without the power to enforce decisions. This lack of authority to ensure compliance has unfortunate consequences:

- *Outright rejection of a recommendation:*
  Governments often ignore the recommendation completely or furnish a long bureaucratic discourse on how compliance with the reommendation is not in the public interest (read governmental interest).

- *Partial compliance:*
  An example of this is a failure to release the full amount of compensation. Another example is to take action on only one recommendation when there were actually dual recommendations, such as to pay compensation and take disciplinary action.

- *Delayed compliance:*
  While recommendations usually obligate governments to take action within 4-6 weeks, compliance is rare within the stipulated time and sometimes action is so delayed that it becomes meaningless.

Composition Criteria: The Act requires that three of the five members of a human rights commission must be former judges but does not specify whether these judges should have a proven record of human rights activism or expertise or qualifications in the area. Regarding the other two members, the Act is vague, saying simply: "persons having knowledge and experience of human rights." Commissions therefore

sometimes become post-retirement destinations for judges, police officers and bureaucrats with political clout.

Time - bar: Under the Act, human rights commissions cannot investigate an event if the complaint was made more than one year after the incident. Therefore, a large number of genuine grievances go unaddressed.

Bar on violations by Armed Forces: State human rights commissions cannot call for information from the national government, which means that they are implicitly denied the power to investigate armed forces under national control. Even the powers of the National Human Rights Commission relating to violations of human rights by the armed forces have been restricted to simply seeking a report from the Government, (without being allowed to summons witnesses), and then issuing recommendations.

Practical limitations

Structural limitations apart, the work of human rights commissions is also being hampered by cultures that exist within governmental spheres. Some of the practical difficulties faced by human rights commissions include:

Non-filling of vacancies: Most human rights commissions are functioning with less than the prescribed five Members. This limits the capacity of commissions to deal promptly with complaints, especially as all are facing successive increases in the number of complaints.

Non-availability of funds: Scarcity of resources - or rather, resources not being used for human rights related functions - is another big problem. Large chunks of the budget of commissions go in office expenses and in maintaining their members[1], leaving disproportionately small amounts for other crucial areas such as research and rights awareness programmes.

Too many complaints: A common problem faced by most human rights commissions is that they are deluged with complaints. In the year 2000-2001, the National Human Rights Commission received over 70,000 complaints. State human rights commissions too, are finding it difficult to address the increasing number of complaints.

Bureaucratic style of functioning: As human rights commissions primarily draw their staff from government departments - either on deputation or reemployment after retirement - the internal atmosphere is usually just like any other government office. Strict hierarchies are maintained, which often makes it difficult for complainants to obtain documents or information about the status of their case. The presence of security guards, armies of peons and office attendants creates barriers for ordinary people to personally meet officials in regard to their complaint.

AREAS REQUIRING INTERVENTION ADVOCACY

There is an urgent need for civil society and defenders of human rights to immediately advocate for changes in the structure and functioning of human rights commissions to improve their functional efficiency as protectors and promoters of human rights. The National Human Rights Commission in fact submitted to the national Government in March 2000[2] a set of proposed amendments and has reiterated these in successive annual reports. Sadly, as yet no action has been taken to bring about this reform.

Suggested proposals

If human rights commissions are to truly protect and promote human rights in India, changes must be made to enable them to become more effective institutions. Some suggested proposals are:

More teeth: The effectiveness of human rights

[1] Members of the National Human Rights Commission receive the same conditions as Supreme Court Judges. Conditions of state commission members are commensurate with that of High Court Judges.
[2] This followed a report prepared by a high level Advisory Committee headed by a former Chief Justice of India regarding amendments to the Protection of Human Rights Act.

commissions will be greatly enhanced if their decisions are immediately made enforceable by the government. This will save considerable time and energy as commissions will no longer need to either send reminders to government departments to implement the recommendations or alternatively to approach High Courts through a cumbersome judicial process to make the government take action.

Commissions must also have clear and well-defined powers to proceed against government departments furnishing false reports. This will assist in preventing the many instances where the departmental version of events is more often than not a white-wash, particularly in those cases where the police has been accused of violations.

Including armed forces in their ambit: A large number of human rights violations occur in areas where there is insurgency and internal conflict. Not allowing commissions to independently investigate complaints against the military and security forces only compounds the problems and furthers cultures of impunity. It is essential that commissions are able to summons witnesses and documents, rather than the present situation where the National Commission is restricted to seeking reports from the national Government.

Commissions' membership: As non-judicial member positions are increasingly being filled by ex-bureaucrats, credence is given to the contention that commissions are more an extension of the government, rather than independent agencies exercising oversight. If commissions are to play a meaningful role in society, they must include civil society human rights activists as members. Many activists have the knowledge and on-the-ground experience of contemporary trends in the human rights movement to be an asset to the Commission.

Independent recruitment of staff: Human rights commissions need to develop an independent cadre of staff with appropriate experience. The present arrangement of having to reply on those on deputation from different government departments is not satisfactory as experience has shown that most have little knowledge and understanding of human rights issues. This problem can be rectified by employing specially recruited and qualified staff to help clear the heavy inflow of complaints.

Separate agency to investigate police-related complaints: Complaints regarding police excesses and misbehaviour take up most of the time of human rights commissions. It is perhaps time to think about an alternative agency, dedicated solely to civilian oversight of the police. Here we can learn from international experience: the UK, for instance, has an Independent Police Complaints Commission; South Africa has an Independent Complaints Directorate; and Brazil has Police Ombudsmen offices is some provinces to deal exclusively with police complaints.

While it may be an accepted fact that these proposals would help bring about qualitative improvement, the challenge lies in moving the government to accept these and other progressive ideas. Governments across the world are only too keen on maintaining the status quo. Governments often put in place inadequate accountability mechanisms as their presence helps to silence public demands, without overly diluting government power.

Civil society groups therefore need to mobilise people across the nation through targeted advocacy strategies. Reform initiatives can only bear fruit when ordinary citizens take an active interest in good governance and human rights.

For more information about the National Human Rights Commission of India, please visit their website:http://nhrc.nic.in

There are 18 national human rights institutions across the Commonwealth - their websites are listed on the links page of CHRI's website.

The Inside Story: An Overview of Prison Overcrowding

Junie Wadhawan
Consultant, CHRI

Overcrowding in prisons is widespread across the globe. In some countries, overcrowding has reached severe crisis levels interfering with effective administration and straining existing meagre resources, leading to abysmal conditions. Overcrowding also intensifies prison staff's focus on discipline and order leading, to unnecessary and unmitigated harshness and control.

From Brazil and Venezuela in South America to Alabama in the North and across the Atlantic to Europe and Asia, it is a similar story. According to Human Rights Watch, many penal facilities in Brazil hold 2 to 5 times more inmates than they were designed for. "The densely packed cells and dormitories in these places offer such sights as prisoners tied to windows to lessen the demand for floor space and prisoners being forced to sleep on top of hole-in-the-floor toilets."[1] In Venezuela, prisons house over 24,000 inmates in facilities designed for just over 15,000, forcing inmates to sleep 2 or 3 in a bed, in hammocks and in passage ways.[2] The Morgan County Jail in the US state of Alabama built for 96 prisoners now crams in up to 250 prisoners. A federal judge toured the jail and declared the conditions "uncivilized, medieval and barbaric", adding "the sardine can appearance of its cells more clearly resemble the holding units of slave ships during the middle passage of the 18th century than anything in the 21st century."[3]

Overcrowding and substandard facilities cast a gloom over many prisons in Asia. The PJ prison in Phnom Penh, Cambodia was described as a "public disaster waiting to happen" with overcrowding causing prisoners to virtually sit shoulder to shoulder in dimly lit cells with a pervading stench of human waste.[4] Sri Lanka has been battling this problem for decades, caused by delays in bringing offenders to trial; long sentences; and inability to expand the accommodation in line with the rapid growth of the prison population.[5] All prisons in Pakistan also hold inmates far in excess of what they were designed for.

Though burdened by increasing overcrowding, Hong Kong's prisons are generally in good shape and well maintained, providing a change from the otherwise grim scenario in the region.[6] Favorable standards of sanitation and hygiene exist, helping the prisoners to maintain a certain dignity.

In India, many prisons were built in the 19th century and are dilapidated and overcrowded. In the early 70s, the Shah Commission reported that 15 out of 27 states and union territories had an actual prison population that far exceeded the sanctioned number. This was then inflated by the thousands that were added by the "Emergency"

[1] "Behind Bars in Brazil": www.hrw.org/reports98/brazil/Brazil-02.htm
[2] "Punishment Before Trial": www.hrw.org/advocacy/prisons/venez.sm.htm
[3] Judge U.W. Clemon on April 21, 2001
[4] Physicians for Human Rights (1994): www.phrusa.org/research/prisons/
[5] Overcrowding of Prisons and Non-institutional Treatment of Offenders, Sri Lanka
[6] Hong Kong: Prison Conditions in 1997: www.hrw.org/research/hongkong/hk-sum.htm

period.[7] Prisons in Himachal Pradesh still lack basic amenities like proper barracks, kitchens and lavatories. Inmates in prisons like Shimla, Chamba and Kulu are packed in dingy, damp and ill-maintained barracks situated in crumbling buildings, not conforming to standards laid down in the jail manual.[8] A report of Seraikela Jail in Bihar revealed inhumane conditions: "due to overcrowding, a number of prisoners have to spend nights actually sitting up…Quite often the prisoners are ordered to lap up the [food] which overflows onto the floor. For vegetable, the prisoners are fed with wild grass and roots…For 400 to 800 prisoners there are just 8 latrines and prisoners therefore defecate in the drains."[9]

In the state of Madhya Pradesh (MP), prisons are holding up to 29,189 prisoners, compared to the sanctioned 17,047. Projections for 2006-2007 calculate an increased capacity of jails to 18,877, but that the prison population will shoot up to 38,654, leading to 200% occupancy.[10] In certain places it is even higher: the Ujjain prison lodges about 1670 prisoners, instead of its maximum capacity of 450. Prison factories and sheds are being closed to make space for lodging prisoners which, combined with the shortage of raw material and absence of profitable markets for products made in jails, is making it difficult to extract work from prisoners sentenced to rigorous imprisonment and pay them standard wages. Jail inspections carried out by the MP Human Rights Commission have revealed not only appalling conditions but also that little had changed in the two years between inspections.

Developed countries have a different interpretation of prison overcrowding measured in terms of minimum floor space, cubic content of air and ventilation. For developing countries, these criteria to judge overcrowding is considered a luxury and instead the lack of essential facilities is used, such as sleeping space and the number of toilets are used.

It is obvious that easing overcrowding would go a long way to reducing and even eliminating certain problems in the system. Many countries are debating alternatives to institutionalized incarceration, such as community-based house arrest programmes and monitoring home confinement through electronic equipment. Whether building more prisons is an answer to the crisis is questionable. Those in favour say it will ensure an offender serves the required sentence leading to a decrease in crime; while opponents claim this only adds to expense while not leading to rehabilitation and instead money could be better utilized in counseling, treatment centres and education programs.

In India we have seen that constructing more prison buildings in MP without a proportionate increase in infrastructure meant they were unused – not only a waste of money, but facilities were vandalized due to lack of security. Suggested solutions for prison overcrowding in the India context include: reducing the undertrial population by conducting speedy trials, fast track courts and jail courts, putting convicts on parole and probation, processing bail applications on time and introducing more open prisons. Only then may we see some genuine improvements. ■

[7] Jails in India: An Investigation by Raman Nanda, www.pucl.org/from-archives/81nov/jails.htm
[8] What's wrong with our prisons? A Tribune survey.
[9] Economic and Political Weekly, July 1978
[10] Statistics given by the Prison Department, Madhya Pradesh

Waging Peace in a Violent World:
The Need for Commonwealth Intervention in Tibet-China Negotiations

Carole Samdup
Programme Officer, Rights & Democracy, Canada

Both the official and unofficial Commonwealth have long recognised the value of exchanging ideas and best practises regarding human rights. The Commonwealth's membership – spanning the continents and diverse political and economic conditions – provides a unique framework for such exchanges. Its experience with difficult issues related to decolonisation, conflict-resolution and democratic development further situates the Commonwealth as an advocate for peoples and nations still struggling for fundamental rights and freedoms.

One deserving case study is the struggle for self-determination in Tibet. For the past 50 years the Dalai Lama, spiritual and temporal leader of the Tibetan people, has led a tireless campaign for peace in his homeland. Although his campaign is committed to non-violence and seeks a negotiated settlement with Chinese authorities, it has been largely ignored by the international community. Commonwealth leaders, having committed themselves to such principles, are uniquely placed to support the Dalai Lama's efforts.

The case of Tibet is appropriate for Commonwealth intervention given Britain's active engagement in Tibet since the 1700's. In fact, British authorities in India succeeded in negotiating bilateral treaties with Tibet, aimed primarily at opening trade routes but also to limit what they viewed as the impending presence of China and Russia. Unfortunately the treaties, which include the Anglo-Tibet Treaty of 1904 and the Simla Convention of 1914, had the concurrent effect of stirring China's determination to assert its control over the strategically-located plateau.

British diplomat Hugh Richardson served for nine years between 1936 and 1950 as the head of the British Mission in Lhasa. In his internal report entitled "Tibetan Precis", Richardson lamented the effects of Britain's policy in Tibet. He described it as demoralizing to the Tibetan government and as inadvertently opening the doors for China to assert its influence where its presence had "almost reached the vanishing point".

Occupation and Uprising

Chinese troops first entered eastern Tibet in 1950. Annexation of the previously independent state was formalized in 1951 by the "Seventeen-Point Agreement" between representatives of the Dalai Lama and Chinese authorities. The Agreement ceded control of Tibet's external affairs to China while guaranteeing that internal governance, cultural and religious systems and institutions would remain under Tibetan administration.

The agreement was later rejected by the Tibetan government on the grounds that its representatives had been coerced into signing it. Although Chinese authorities maintain that the agreement is still valid, all its provisions have been violated and the guarantees of autonomy have proved illusory.

By March 1959, the situation in Tibet resulted in a full-scale revolt which was brutally suppressed by Chinese forces. The Dalai Lama, followed by 80,000 Tibetans, fled across the Himalayas and was given sanctuary in India where he initiated a non-violent campaign to negotiate a settlement with Chinese authorities. That campaign continues and has been acknowledged by international peace awards including the Nobel Peace Prize awarded to the Dalai Lama in 1989.

The Dalai Lama's Peace Proposals

The Dalai Lama has put forward two proposals for negotiations. On September 21st, 1987, speaking to the US Congress, he presented his *Five Point Peace Plan for Tibet*. It includes: transforming Tibet into a zone of peace; abandoning China's population transfer policy; respect for human rights and democratic freedoms; restoring and protecting Tibet's natural environment; and negotiations on the future status of Tibet.

On June 15th, 1988, at the European Parliament in Strasbourg, the Dalai Lama elaborated on the *Five Point Peace Plan* and presented the *Strasbourg Proposal* in which he suggested that China could maintain responsibility for Tibet's foreign policy and a restricted number of military installations in Tibet for defence purposes. This "Middle Path" approach calls for genuine autonomy for the six million Tibetans – but significantly, not for the restoration of Tibet's status as a fully independent state.

While the Dalai Lama's Middle Path position is seen by many as pragmatic and tailored to a negotiation process, it has led to a certain amount of dissent within the Diaspora. The dissent centres on the issue of independence versus autonomy and the strategy of non-violence itself - which many view as weak and ineffective. Nevertheless, the Middle Path position remains the basis of the Dalai Lama's and his government-in-exile's current efforts to establish Tibet-China negotiations.

Shifting Political Winds

This is a time of renewed hope for the Tibetan people and for world leaders seeking to promote human rights and negotiation as alternates to violence.

In 2002, representatives of the Dalai Lama traveled to China and Tibet and re-established contact with the Chinese leadership for the first time since 1993. The delegation, headed by the Dalai Lama's "special envoys", was officially received by government representatives and was permitted to travel to the Tibet Autonomous Region where talks were held with Chinese and local Tibetan officials.

In May 2003, the Dalai Lama's envoys returned to Beijing for follow-up meetings and a visit to the eastern Tibetan province of Kham (ch. Sichuan). Permission to travel to a Tibetan area outside the Tibet Autonomous Region is significant as it implies that all of historical Tibet, not just the Tibet Autonomous Region, could potentially be under discussion. In November 2003, Premier Wen Jiabao told the Washington Post that the "door to communication between the central government and the Dalai Lama is wide open".

A Role for Commonwealth leaders

While many world leaders have given lip-service to Tibet-China negotiations, none have stepped forward to actually make them happen. Their inaction stimulates dissent within the Tibetan community and threatens increased tensions in the politically-sensitive region of Central Asia. It also sends a message that non-violent struggles will be ignored by the international community.

In Canada, more than 160 Members of Parliament from all parties have written to their Prime Minister urging him to actively support the negotiation campaign. During the Dalai Lama's recent visit to Ottawa in April 2004, public support for Canadian involvement was overwhelming and there were two subsequent parliamentary hearings. These resulted in a resolution urging the Government of Canada to take action.

While a specific Canadian initiative has yet to be announced, its success would require the participation and support of like-minded governments. The Commonwealth provides an appropriate framework for collaborative action in support of the Dalai Lama's peace proposals. In taking up this challenge, Commonwealth leaders will demonstrate that they are indeed committed to building a more peaceful world.

Rights & Democracy (the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development): www.dd-rd.ca. Rights & Democracy is a member of the Commonwealth Human Rights Network (more information on the CHRN can be found on page 13). ■

Around the Co

Collated by **Adithi Ch**
& **Clare Doube**, *Adv*

The Gambia

Six armed men recently entered the building holding the printing press of The Independent, an independent newspaper in The Gambia, and set the press on fire. They also reportedly tried to lock employees inside the burning building.

Of particular concern is that this was the second such incident in six months - in October 2003 the newspaper's main offices were set on fire. Senior newspaper staff have also received death threats, apparently caused by the newspaper's critical coverage of the government.

Deteriorating press conditions in The Gambia can also be seen by the National Media Commission Act which creates a regulatory agency to oversee the mandatory registration of journalists and media organisations and can create a code of conduct that the media must follow. The Commission can also demand that journalists reveal their sources and can impose fines. The Commission has been opposed by the independent media, which argues that the requirement for all journalists and media outlets to be registered goes against international legal standards on free expression.

United Nations

Louise Arbour is the new UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, succeeding Sergio Vieira de Mello who was killed last year in Baghdad. Ms Arbour is a Supreme Court Judge from Canada, and an ex-prosecutor of United Nations war crimes tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda.

Kiribati

The small island state of Kiribati in the Pacific is to be congratulated for ratifying the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women on 17 March 2004.

Maldives

A Human Rights Commission has been
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Bangladesh

Bangladeshi journalist, Manik Shaha, was murdered in mid-January when attackers stopped his car and threw a bomb at him. Mr. Shaha was known for his investigative reporting on drug trafficking, gang activity, and the Maoist insurgency. He had reportedly received several death threats on prior occasions. The Director-General of UNESCO Koichiro Matsura, condemned the murder, calling the killing: "a tragic illustration of the need to secure the rule of law in the interest of democracy." This is one of a number of recent cases of intimidation and violence against journalists in Bangladesh.

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handrashekar, *Intern,*
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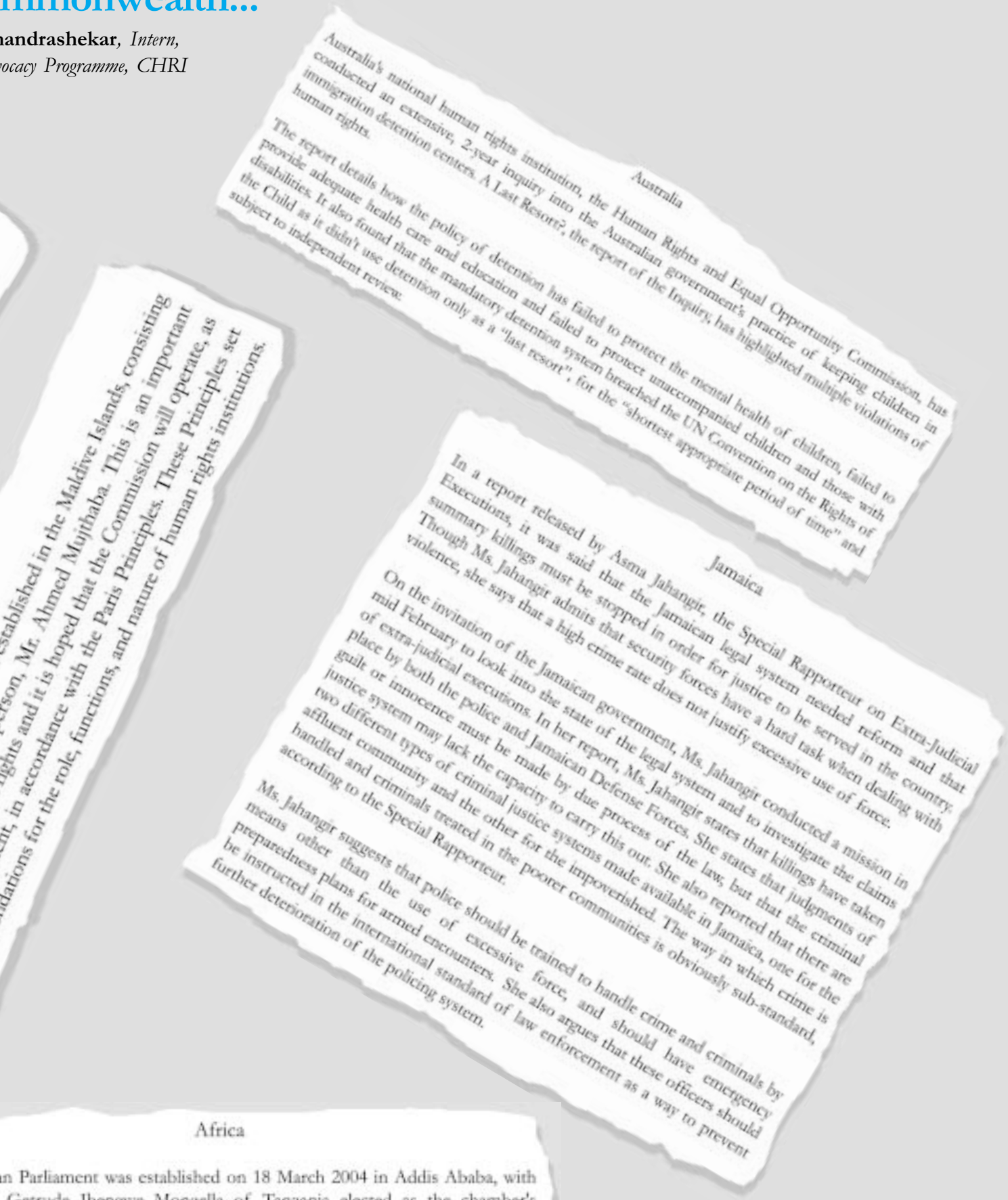


Australia

Australia's national human rights institution, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, has conducted an extensive, 2-year inquiry into the Australian government's practice of keeping children in immigration detention centers. A Last Resort?, the report of the Inquiry, has highlighted multiple violations of human rights.

The report details how the policy of detention has failed to protect the mental health of children, failed to provide adequate health care and education and failed to protect unaccompanied children and those with disabilities. It also found that the mandatory detention system breached the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as it didn't use detention only as a "last resort", for the "shortest appropriate period of time" and subject to independent review.

Jamaica

In a report released by Asma Jahangir, the Special Rapporteur on Extra-Judicial Executions, it was said that the Jamaican legal system needed reform and that summary killings must be stopped in order for justice to be served in the country. Though Ms. Jahangir admits that security forces have a hard task when dealing with violence, she says that a high crime rate does not justify excessive use of force.

On the invitation of the Jamaican government, Ms. Jahangir conducted a mission in mid February to look into the state of the legal system and to investigate the claims of extra-judicial executions. In her report, Ms. Jahangir states that killings have taken place by both the police and Jamaican Defense Forces. She states that judgments of guilt or innocence must be made by due process of the law, but that the criminal justice system may lack the capacity to carry this out. She also reported that there are two different types of criminal justice systems made available in Jamaica, one for the affluent community and the other for the impoverished. The way in which crime is handled and criminals treated in the poorer communities is obviously sub-standard, according to the Special Rapporteur.

Ms. Jahangir suggests that police should be trained to handle crime and criminals by means other than the use of excessive force, and should have emergency preparedness plans for armed encounters. She also argues that these officers should be instructed in the international standard of law enforcement as a way to prevent further deterioration of the policing system.

stablished in the Maldive Islands, consisting
rson, Mr. Ahmed Mujthaba. This is an important
ghts and it is hoped that the Commission will operate, as
, in accordance with the Paris Principles. These Principles set
ndations for the role, functions, and nature of human rights institutions.

Africa

n Parliament was established on 18 March 2004 in Addis Ababa, with Getrude Ibengwe Mongella of Tanzania elected as the chamber's he oath taken by the Pan African Parliamentarians commits them to they can to ensure that human rights are effectively promoted and is is part of a series of positive regional advances for human rights over years, which also includes the adoption of a protocol on women's rights olishment of the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights.

Institutionalised Racism and the Commonwealth: Are we Redoing our Wrongdoings?

Adithi Chandrashekar
Intern, CHRI

"When a policeman puts his uniform on, he should forget all his prejudices. If he cannot do that, then he should not be doing the job because that means one part of the population is not protected…"

Neville Lawrence, Father of Stephen Lawrence.

This April, human rights activists in the Commonwealth, and throughout the world, honoured the memory of Stephen Lawrence, a young man who was a victim of a battle in which he had not enlisted. The war against racism is not unique to the United Kingdom, where Stephen Lawrence lived with his family: racism is a disease that has plagued the entire world with its devastation spreading like a cancer, and Commonwealth inhabitants have not been excluded from the list of sufferers. While Stephen Lawrence's story is not unique, it has brought the issues of institutionalised racism and xenophobia to international attention.

Stephen Lawrence was only 19 when he was killed. He and a friend, Duwayne Brooks, were waiting for a bus at about 10:30 in the evening in South London. Stephen walked down the road a little way to see if the bus was approaching when a group of white teenagers crossed the road and surrounded him. He was stabbed twice, in a matter of seconds, and the group quickly vanished – like a tornado leaving its mark in ruins. Duwayne saw the incident from the bus stop and called out to his friend to run up the street. Stephen was able to run over 100 yards before he fell. The stabbing had severed major arteries and caused his lung to collapse. Stephen bled to death in the middle of the street.

The rest of Stephen's story goes beyond adding insult to injury. The Metropolitan Police Services' (MPS) investigation following the murder was an ambush of justice and was not only an extreme desecration of the memory of Stephen, but was also undeniably disrespectful to the other victims involved – Duwayne Brooks, and Neville and Doreen Lawrence, Stephen's parents.

There is a lot to be said about the courage of Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence, considering that to say that the police bungled the investigation would be a laughable understatement. The MPS showed obvious signs of dereliction of duty and discriminatory practices when they did not gather evidence and interview witnesses appropriately. The MPS failed to document vast quantities of information on the initial investigation of the murder. There was no log of any decisions made or actions taken by the police after the murder, which shows their disorganisation, and therefore indifference. The problems, however, go beyond a disregard for justice, and the questionable police activity following Stephen's murder is far more malevolent than just an oversight. With the understanding that a darker sentiment guided the MPS investigation, Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence and the British Home Secretary worked to organise an inquest into Stephen's murder and the botched investigation that followed.

The MacPherson Inquiry uncovered the root problem in the MPS investigation as institutionalised racism. The Inquiry report defines the problem as "the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people." What that boils down to is a conscious or subconscious negligence on behalf of those in power that alienates a large population of people, and leaves them vulnerable to crime because they are less protected than other communities. It also stimulates fear, anger and resentment within that populace and creates distrust of the law enforcement officials.

Animosity towards the police is especially dangerous because of its implications. If people are afraid to turn to the police for help, whom will they turn to? Will crimes go unreported and victimization increase because of the prolonged suffering resulting from an inherently prejudiced police force and, therein, a defunct justice system?

There are mechanisms that are supposed to address and eliminate racism, both institutionalised and otherwise, in both the UK and the international arena. Since the McPherson Inquiry there have been undertakings to reform the police force in the UK and improve community relations with the police. The recently amended Race Relations Act includes a section on Public Functions and outlines the illegality of imposed discrimination by any public authority in carrying out its specified functions. Law enforcement activities were among the most recent additions to the Act.

Internationally, there has been work done to check and monitor race relations by the United Nations. The UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination in 1963. It stipulates that any doctrine or government policy based on or fuelled by racial superiority or hatred violates fundamental human rights and is considered dangerous. The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination was set up to monitor and investigate any infringement of the Declaration. The States that are party to the Declaration must obviously follow its guidelines, and if there is any violation both individuals and groups can file complaints with the Committee.

The Commonwealth also has a doctrine that protects its members from racism. The Lusaka Declaration of the Commonwealth on Racism and Racial Activity issued in 1979 is an affirmation against racial prejudice and its outcomes, and encourages international cooperation in ending discrimination based on race.

Those in power are therefore aware of the consequences of racism and there has been some legal effort made to curb such behaviour. Yet, institutionalised racism is still visible and no amount of law-making has changed that. There are still reports of police brutality and discriminatory arrests based on race, religion, creed and caste from around the globe, developed and developing nations alike.

The question that is begging to be asked, then, is: what else can be done to stop institutionalised racism? There are several changes that could be made. The first is to institute sensitivity training courses for the police and other public officers. This step has already been taken in many states, but continuing to develop such initiatives, as well as insisting on mandatory attendance, is key. Additionally, recruitment of law enforcement workers from ethnic minority communities will provide such community members with fair representation in the system. With any luck, and a great deal of patience, this can rebuild the trust of community members in the police and allow those working in the justice system to get to know people from the varied communities they are supposed to be protecting. Ideally, this will help to create a more positive regard for ethnic minorities. ■

COMMONWEALTH HUMAN RIGHTS NETWORK

Remember the Commonwealth Human Rights Network that was launched at the inaugural Commonwealth Human Rights Forum in Nigeria in December 2003?

In the last six months, the Network has grown and grown - and now has well over 200 members in more than 35 countries. You too could be one of these members and receive CHRN's regular email briefings on human rights issues and events around the Commonwealth. Recent examples include a profile on the human rights situation in the Maldives, details regarding sending submissions to the Commonwealth, funding opportunities, and statements on human rights and civil society in the Pacific.

Membership is free - just email chrn@humanrightsinitiative.org for more information.

And remember, Human Rights are our Common Wealth...

The India-Naga Conflict: A Long-Standing War with Few Prospects of Imminent Solution

Katherine Phillips
Intern, Commonwealth Policy Studies Unit, London

The recent Gulf War notwithstanding, modern conflict occurs more frequently within countries than between them. The hills of the China-India-Myanmar border region have seen a fifty-six year conflict described - according to one's standpoint - as terrorism or a fight for independence. In this region the Government of India (GoI) is in conflict with the indigenous Naga Peoples who have inhabited the region for thousands of years. Estimates of the numbers killed in this civil war / struggle for independence vary - some claim it may be as high as 200,000. Precise figures are hard to calculate since the very conservative statistics on the South Asian Terrorism Portal's website only go back to 1990 and calculations are likely to vary greatly depending upon whether they include indirect deaths which commonly result from the social upheaval of modern warfare and associated problems of drugs and arms trafficking.

This combination of statistics - of duration and possible high numbers of fatalities - is unusual for a relatively unreported conflict. Most civil wars are bloody but rarely last for such prolonged periods of time; most indigenous peoples are in dispute – occasionally armed – with the governments under whose rule they find themselves in the post-colonial era, yet rarely with such effective long-term organisational capacity.

The Origins of the Conflict

The India-Naga conflict is considered by India to be an internal civil war and by the Nagas to be the self-defence of an independent people against an external aggressor. Historically the Nagas were head-hunters which may have contributed to their independence throughout the waves of colonialism. The present conflict has its origins - as much as any historical event can be said to originate at one point or as a consequence of one specific event alone - in the post-colonial settlement between Britain and India. The Nagas were handed from one power (by whom they claimed never to have been fully conquered) to another, which until that point they had had limited contact.

Understanding conflict is essential to any peace process. This conflict may be seen as a clash between nations where both sides see the claims of their opponents as a threat to their continued existence. The Nagas fear that acceptance of Indian sovereignty might lead to assimilation and the destruction of their identity - being swallowed up by their monolithic neighbour. The Nagas argue that they have a separate history and identity from the rest of India. Previously animist, most are now Christian and the region has been isolated historically and presently, not only by its geography, but also psychologically from the administration in New Delhi – overshadowed as it is by the India-Pakistan dispute. Two World Wars and participation with British and Japanese forces, both in Europe and Asia, generated a political consciousness and identity which the Nagas have proved willing and capable of defending, by military as much as by conventional political means.

Past support of Naga militants by both China and Pakistan has given the conflict elements of proxy war between India and these neighbours. The equally longstanding dispute with Pakistan over the Kashmir region is the better known challenge to Indian sovereignty. Both China and Pakistan are countries with which India is either presently or has been in the past in direct conflict, which from India's perspective places the Naga conflict close to the heart of the most serious threat to its security. There are also many armed insurgent groups within India, some of which have secessionist ambitions, both in the Northeast and elsewhere in the country. The Naga conflict is therefore only one of the internal and external

challenges to India's sovereignty and security – a complicating link between issues of foreign and domestic policy, which may partly explain the duration of the conflict.

Peace Process & Pacification

The pacification policies of the GoI in the Northeast have caused as many problems as they have solved and have further complicated possible peaceful resolution. The creation of Nagaland for example, in 1963, failed to meet Naga demands for self-determination not only because statehood is a far cry from autonomy but also because Nagas inhabit a much wider geographical area – including in Myanmar – than that encompassed by the boundaries of the state. It would not be too fanciful to describe this step as a further partition of the Nagas. The signing of the Shillong Accord in 1975 with individuals who were not only said to be unrepresentative of Naga interests but to have limited freedom of action - some were at the time in detention - was a cause of further conflict rather than a step forward in the peace process.

More recently a ceasefire and peace talks have got underway between the GoI and the National Socialist Council of Nagaland. As yet they have failed to produce concrete results. Parodied by one anonymous analyst as 'low intensity discussions,' their longevity matches that of the conflict. They have proved to be yet another area for conflict between the parties partly due to divisions among Naga leaders and accusations by both sides of contravening the ceasefire.

The peace talks have so far lacked outside mediation, which has been essential in other peace negotiations. This is an area where the Commonwealth can provide expertise. More external involvement will throw greater light on alleged human rights abuses such as those that took place during Operation Bluebird carried out in 1987 by the Indian army, and the impunity with which the Indian military operate in this troubled region, due to the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958 and other repressive government legislation.

Progress also requires Naga acceptance of the legitimacy of India's security concerns in an unstable region, and steps which meet the demands of nationhood for the Naga people will not bring peace unless they take account of the rights of other ethnic groups in the region.

Given the enduring nature of the conflict generated by the colonial experience it is impossible to use the term post-colonial without a tinge of irony. A legacy of conflict was generated by the colonial process, many states being left with divided communities. Governments also often seem unable to escape from a cycle of policies that divide communities in order to control them better. Diversity has sadly often been perceived to threaten national security rather than enrich society.

Further information see:

http://www.cpsu.org.uk/downloads/Dr_R_Vas.pdf – paper on the Naga-India issue presented at a CPSU Indigenous Rights in the Commonwealth Project conference Delhi March 2002

http://www.nagaland.nic.in – the Government of Nagaland official website

http://www.nscnonline.org – official website of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland

http://www.unpo.org – Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation ■

Introducing the New Chair of CHRI's International Advisory Commission...

Following the meeting of CHRI's International Advisory Commission in Delhi in March, we are delighted and honoured to announce that the new Chair of the Commission is Mr. Sam Okudzeto from Ghana.

Mr. Okudzeto is a highly-esteemed lawyer who has represented the Commonwealth Lawyers Association on our Advisory Commission since 2000. His commitment to the objectives of CHRI has already been shown by his close involvement with the foundation and development of our Africa office, having served as the Chair of the Africa office's Executive Committee since its establishment.

Mr. Sam Okudzeto (r) at the launch of Open Sesame, Abuja, December 2003. Pictured with Justice Emile Short, Commission on Human Rights & Administrative Justice of Ghana.

As well as working as a private legal practitioner in Ghana for over 40 years, Mr. Okudzeto has held a number of public positions. Recent responsibilities in the legal arena include: President of the Ghana Bar Association (1995-1998), member of the General Legal Council (1974-76, 1990, 1995-1998), and the Judicial Council (1995-2000). He was also a Senior Lecturer at the Ghana Law School for eight years.

Mr. Okudzeto is also a former Member of Parliament who spent three years as the Shadow Attorney-General of Ghana. During this parliamentary career, he was Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee of Parliaments, as well as a Member of the Council of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. More recently he has also served as a member of the Prisons Service Council of Ghana (1993-2000)

As well as over 40 years of commitment to human rights, good governance and the law in Ghana, Mr. Okudzeto's expertise has been sought at an international level. Positions include as a member of the Commonwealth Observer Team to the Rhodesia elections of 1982, and on a fact-finding mission to Liberia. He has also been involved in a number of Rotary International Peace Conferences, and is currently a Director (2002 – 2004) and Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Board of Rotary International.

In his time away from his civic and work commitments, Mr. Okudzeto enjoys spending time with his wife, Priscilla, and six children and is active in his church. We thank him for taking on this added responsibility and look forward to working with him during the five years of his appointment. ■

Civil Society and Human Rights in the Pacific

Clare Doube

Advocacy Programme, CHRI

As with all regions in the Commonwealth, the Pacific is facing considerable challenges in human rights and governance, challenges that if not effectively dealt with immediately, will grow to a magnitude where change becomes an empty, unachievable hope. Fortunately, both governmental and civil society activities are taking place. Civil society is active across the region and is admirably developing new initiatives, replicating tried and true interventions, and acting where needed as either a critical watchdog of government or a valued implementation partner.

Considering the strong role of civil society, it is particularly gratifying to see how this has been recognised by the Leaders of the Pacific Islands Forum. When the Eminent Persons' Group, which was established to review the Forum, published their report in April 2004 they recognised and articulated the importance of civil society's involvement in the work of the Forum: "Although the Forum is intrinsically a government-to-government process, it is desirable that ways are found to draw on the knowledge, policy views and grass-roots connections that many civil society groups possess." They went on to recommend that a mechanism be developed to enable civil society to associate directly with the Pacific Islands Forum's annual meeting, such as a Pacific Civil Society Forum.

It is gratifying to note that when the Pacific Islands Leaders met to discuss the review, they agreed and on April 6th 2004 committed themselves to strengthen Forum engagement with civil society. They noted in their statement that: "The Secretary General could be asked to discuss options for this with representatives of regional civil society. One option could be for civil society to organize a forum just prior to the Leaders' meeting with a report conveyed to Leaders via the Secretary General." This is crucial for enabling the Forum's meeting to be not just a space for government views but inclusive of the perspectives of the of the region.

Another important decision for the promotion and protection of human rights was also made at the Leaders' Retreat – to "encourage the development of national human rights machinery." Currently only Fiji, Australia and New Zealand have national human rights institutions, although earlier this year the Government of the Solomon Islands also announced its decision to establish such an institution. It is hoped that other governments will follow their example.

Civil society, government and national human rights institutions from sixteen countries in the region welcomed these decisions at a Pacific Human Rights Consultation held in Fiji in June. Their concluding statement, includes welcoming: "the decision by the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders' Retreat held in Auckland on the 6th April 2004 to strengthen Forum engagement with civil society and look forward to the implementation of this recommendation in consultation with civil society".

The time has come for this to become reality. The 35th Pacific Islands Forum session will be held in Apia, Samoa in August -and civil society are keen to find out what steps have been taken towards developing mechanisms for engagement and hope these draw upon suggestions that have been forwarded by civil society organisations to the Secretary General. The Pacific Islands Forum is to be congratulated on their recent efforts to be inclusive and civil society looks forward to developing more productive relationships to ensure that human rights are better protected and promoted in the region.

The statements of the Eminent Persons' Group and the Leaders Retreat, plus more information about the work of the Pacific Islands Forum, can be found on the Secretariat's website: ***www.forumsec.org.fj*** ■

IFIs Accountability to the South

Nawel Maryam Hamidi
Intern, CHRI

Since the 1980s, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have provided assistance to Commonwealth African countries for development plans and the promotion of economic stability in the global economy. Their Structural and Poverty Reduction loans have imposed a set of commitments and conditions on African States, which extend into domestic governance and legislation.

These International Financial Institutions (IFIs) address concerns that were in the past dealt with at the level of national government. Today, due to their policies and institutional framework these institutions affect the daily life of a wider range of families, workers and organisations within each country. The question that arises is whether these international institutions, through their incursion into state governance, are accountable to the citizens whose lives they shape and affect. Accountability can be partly measured through: a) the concept of representative governance; and b) the effectiveness and application of access to information policies.

Representative Governance

Democratic institutions and government are based on the fundamental principle of elected representation. The citizen, through his/her choice, mandates the designated person to represent and promote the economic, social and environmental issues which affect the citizen's day-to-day life. With a lack of representation, often these vital matters do not find meaningful solutions. It must also be noted that a culture of secrecy within any governing structure undermines their duty to be responsible and answerable to the stakeholders for their decisions. Accountability to citizens would mean proportional representation on the institutions' principal bodies, and transparent and open practices.

Despite the efforts of IFIs to reform their internal composition, it has been recognised that unfortunately a democratic deficit - expressed through a lack of representation and transparency - still exists.

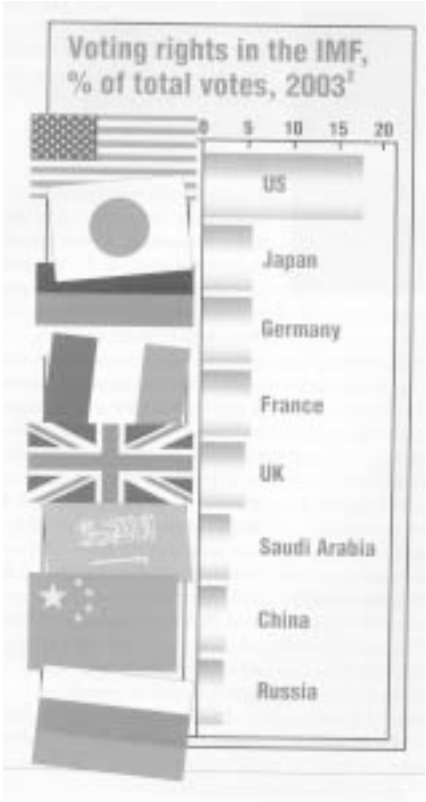
The World Bank and IMF each have 184 members of the Board of Governors, from developed and developing countries, which carry ultimate decision-making power. The Board of Governors delegates 24 members (the Board of Executive Directors) representing countries and groups of nations, who are responsible for the approval of loans and for policy decisions affecting the institutions. The 46 sub-Saharan African countries have only two Executive Directors representing them at the World Bank and IMF, while eight northern nations (the Group of Eight) have an Executive Director each.

Decision-making in the two financial bodies is far removed from the principle of one country-one vote. Directors from countries of the Group of Eight (G8) now control more than 60 % of votes at the Bank and Fund. The United States is the largest single shareholder, with 16.41% of votes at the Bank (as well as veto power over any extraordinary vote) and 17.14 % at the IMF, followed by other developed nations. Percentage of votes is reflected in the graph opposite. The rest of the shares are divided among the other member countries, with 46 African countries sharing just 7.05% and 6.35%. The 16 African Commonwealth countries hold merely 2.68% and 2.87% at the Bank and IMF respectively.

The Articles of Agreement (the establishing documents of the World Bank and the IMF) do not specify the nationality of the President, but by custom the United States' Executive Director has been nominated to the office of President of the World Bank Group. The IMF is usually headed by a European and recently, in April 2004, a new Managing Director - Mr. Rato a former Minister from Spain - was appointed to head

the IMF. Finance ministers from the Group of 24, which operates as an association of minority shareholders within the IFIs, alleged that Mr. Rato had been chosen "through an opaque series of back-room negotiations" among European nations, who control one-third of the voting shares in the IMF.[1]

Consequently, the under-representation of African states in the decision-making processes of these institutions; the unequal influence exercised by the largest market-shares on the decisions affecting primarily the developing countries; and the lack of transparency governing the recruitment process significantly magnify the gap in the Institutions' accountability and transparency to Africa's states and to Africa's people.



Access to Information Policies

Any citizen who wants to inquire about the functioning of their representative bodies, who needs to make inputs into the decision-making process affecting them or who wishes to evaluate the effectiveness of the institution, must have comprehensive access to the information often kept jealously by governing structures. Without the ability to use these details and facts, there is almost no means to hold the main designers of the citizens' future responsible for their actions. Fortunately, the IMF and the World Bank disclosure policies have broadened significantly over the past decade and the procedure for the release of information have been clarified and updated. However, many key documents are still subject to concealment and confidentiality.

In 2003 the World Bank drafted a set of principles included in a document called "Issues and Options for Improving Engagement Between World Bank and Civil Society Organizations: A Discussion Paper". These are designed to improve the ability of civil society to participate in the design and implementation of their programmes. The main concern, as highlighted by the non-governmental watchdog, the *Bank Information Center*, is that the Bank procedure only allows the engagement of civil society organisations *after* internal Bank strategies, policies and other key direction-setting initiatives have been decided. Therefore, it denies the disclosure of comprehensive project descriptions in draft form and supervision documents during project implementation. This therefore limits the effective monitoring of project implementation by those most concerned.

The IMF has also made changes to its own transparency. The Fund publishes most of its research and a substantial amount of documentation regarding work with each country is on the website. However, it is still difficult to access the reports and documents touching the internal and independent evaluation of the Fund's work and activities, as the majority of these are not published or made publicly accessible. Therefore, civil society – the main stakeholder - has almost no tools to evaluate the performance and accountability of the institution and to apply pressure for reform subsequent to any evaluation.

The IFIs are public institutions formed by government representatives elected by the citizens of each state. They have to respond to the same democratic criteria governing their member states, and therefore they have the duty to be representative, transparent and accountable.

Considering states' domestic sovereignty and the direct impact of development strategies on the common citizen, there is a vital need to establish effective and more transparent rules and mechanisms within IFIs. These would enforce the right of citizens and organisations to hold not only their own government representative accountable, but also the whole international economic system, which shapes their daily existence. ■

[1] www.globalinfo.org/eng/reader.asp?ArticleId=29656(accessed June 18, 2004).

[2] Information from www.imf.org
Graphics from *New International List*, March 2004 (www..newint.org)

CHRI Calendar

CHRI Headquarters

March, 2004

Presented a worshop on "Right to Information & Governance" at the CIVICUS World Assembly in Botswana.

CHRI's International Advisory Commission annual meeting in New Delhi.

April, 2004

Release of a report on the background of candidates contesting Parliamentary elections in Chhattisgarh, conducted in collaboration with Chhattisgarh Citizen's Initiative.

Supported and facilitated Election Watch activities in Madhya Pradesh & Orissa during the Parliamentary elections.

May, 2004

Police training and sensitisation programme conducted in Raipur, Chhattisgarh.

Community Policing training programmes conducted at two police stations in Chhattisgarh.

Submission to Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group on human rights issues in Pakistan, Fiji Islands and Zimbabwe.

Training of Trainers Programme on Combating Torture, Tamil Nadu.

CHRI London Office

March, 2004

Participated in the post Abuja Civil Society consultation organised by the Commonwealth Foundation, including discussion on the Commonwealth Foundation's 2004-2008 Draft Framework for Action on Maximising Civil Society's Contribution to Development and Democracy.

Conducted a mini conference *'Zimbabwe and the Commonwealth: what now for the promotion of human rights'* at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies.

Represented and presented on behalf of the Human Rights sectoral group at the Coolum Committee, Commonwealth Secretariat.

CHRI Africa Office

April, 2004

Orientation for new Africa Office Coordinator at CHRI Headquarters.

May, 2004

Participated in National Peer Review meeting in Ghana for the African Peer Review.

The Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) is an independent international NGO mandated to ensure the practical realisation of human rights in the Commonwealth. It was launched in 1987 and is currently constituted by the Commonwealth Journalists Association, Commonwealth Trade Union Council, Commonwealth Lawyers Association, Commonwealth Legal Education Association, Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and the Commonwealth Press Union, Commonwealth Broadcasting Association. The funding organisations felt that while Commonwealth countries had both a common set of values and legal principles from which to work, they required a forum from which to promote human rights. It is from this idea that CHRI was born and continues to work.

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