

THE COMMONWEALTH YOUTH DECLARATION

OCHO RIOS 1977

On 9 May, 1977, at their first meeting in Ocho Rios, Jamaica, youth leaders from thirty-one Commonwealth countries and four Associated States of the Eastern Caribbean unanimously approved the following Declaration:

1. In the Commonwealth of Nations over thirty out of the thirty-six independent countries have populations of which more than half are under the age of twenty-five. We believe that the resources of such a vast section of Commonwealth peoples must be enabled to play its full part in the affairs of Commonwealth countries, including in particular their social and economic development. We therefore consider it essential that the youth of the Commonwealth must participate in decision-making in the institutions within our societies and internationally if national development and the construction of a new social order based on economic and social justice are to be achieved for the mass of our peoples.
2. We believe that increased participation by youth leaders, officials and young politicians in a united effort, within local, national and international institutions, is imperative for hastening the pace of development and for combating the intolerable evil of unemployment which so extensively pervades the ranks of youth and most directly affects their right to equality of opportunity. We therefore as youth leaders, officials and young politicians dedicate our energies and efforts to the full involvement of the young in decision-making at all levels in our countries so that social and economic development can more rapidly be achieved. We believe that it is our prime responsibility to seek to broaden the franchise in some of our countries so as to facilitate increased access by young people to parliaments and to local and provincial councils. We also seek the continuing democratisation of national institutions including political parties, trade unions, schools, colleges and universities and in all national political structures.
3. We believe that the need for participation and leadership, mobilisation and motivation of the masses of youth towards achieving the social and economic targets we have set necessitates emphasis being assigned to the role of political education in awakening the consciousness of youth to their national responsibilities and to their individual rights.
4. We believe that the quest for peace in our communities and the struggle against racism, class divisions, bigotry, urban deprivation and rural impoverishment can be accelerated by the mobilisation and motivation of Commonwealth youth towards practical action. The achievement of peace at the roots of our communities is not only a prerequisite for peace in our nations, but also for the eventual establishment of peace in the world.
5. We believe that young people in Commonwealth countries are primarily concerned with the political and economic emancipation of the people. We also strive to achieve mental liberation, especially from those psychological factors which negate our cultural development. In those of our nations whose economies and histories have been dominated by class divisions, we recognise the emergence of new political forces especially amongst the young. We therefore are convinced that in the search for

justice the aspirations of youth in these societies depend equally on the mobilisation and motivation of the young and in the encouragement of effective leadership.

6. We believe that the youth of the Commonwealth can exert a growing influence in reorientating those international policies which are repugnant to national sovereignty and human dignity. We believe that Commonwealth youth can mobilise public opinion in our respective countries against policies which offend the ideals of youth and are violations of basic human rights. The urgent need to establish a new international economic order; the elimination of colonialism, neocolonialism and the imperialist influences of multinational corporations where such exist; racism; the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons; and the need to protect the ecology and our environment; are examples of issues upon which Commonwealth youth wish their voices to be heard. The relationships which we can foster and extend within the Commonwealth can increase understanding amongst the youth of our countries. The Commonwealth as a multi-national association provides an international platform from which youth can denounce oppression, and in unity can join with those in other countries of the world in the vanguard of the campaign for the establishment of justice and world peace.

7. Our experience at this first meeting of young leaders from the Commonwealth countries compels us to record our belief in the advantage we would gain from the establishment of suitable and permanent arrangements for on-going dialogue among youth leaders, officials and young politicians, under the umbrella of the Commonwealth Secretariat's Youth Programme. Hence in order to generate greater momentum at all levels towards achieving the targets of this Declaration, we feel it is appropriate to direct the following recommendations to our respective Governments and to the Commonwealth Secretary-General who administers the Commonwealth Youth Programme.

8. TO GOVERNMENTS

(a) Youth Participation in decision-making

We recommend:

- (i) That the Governments of the Commonwealth should encourage and facilitate youth representation in all national political and social institutions to allow youth effectively to participate in the decision-making processes in all sectors of our societies so as to realise the objectives of social and economic justice in their countries.
- (ii) That, in those countries in which they do not exist national youth organisations be established.
- (iii) That, in all cases, such national youth organisations be fully integrated with and representative of the broad mass of young people.
- (iv) That Governments should examine the need for legislation to be enacted to facilitate participation, where necessary, in national, political and social institutions at all levels.

(v) That Governments should not only support the principles of youth participation, but should also ensure that adequate financial, human and technical resources are made available for this purpose, including the creation where necessary of a Ministry of Youth and a national policy in each Commonwealth country.

(b) Education in preparation for mobilisation and leadership

(i) That where necessary Governments should take immediate steps to restructure their education systems so as to provide wider opportunities for community service and participation as an integral part of the learning process.

(ii) That Governments should democratise their education systems so as to ensure that students, teachers and the community have their rightful share in the decision-making processes.

(iii) That Governments should provide free and universal education at the primary level and expand and reorientate existing facilities to make them available to all sectors of the community.

(iv) That Governments should provide greater opportunities for political education in the broadest sense of the term.

(v) That Governments should encourage wider participation by youth in political parties at both membership and leadership levels.

9. TO THE COMMONWEALTH SECRETARIAT

(a) That recognising through experience the importance of this meeting, we recommend through the Commonwealth Secretary-General to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting that provision be made for the specific inclusion of meetings of young Commonwealth leaders within the Commonwealth Youth Programme and that such meetings should take place every two years preceding the Heads of Government Meeting in order to discuss areas of general concern.