

ADDRESS BY H.E. MR. DONALD MIDDLETON
BRITISH HIGH COMMISSIONER TO PAPUA NEW GUINEA

The phrase 'the living Commonwealth in action' is not a new one, but it can certainly be used with accuracy today to describe this meeting. We are here, representing as the delegates do, many different and widely scattered nations, to share knowledge and experiences, and in a sharing, co-operative venture to learn, and to produce new ideas. This type of non-competitive, non-point-scoring consultation, be it in the field of education, law, technology or the arts, is taking place all over the Commonwealth, almost every week of the year, and is proof of the purposeful, practical value of this special link between English-speaking peoples with common aims.

I should like to observe that although the subject of this particular meeting is scientific, and although it is being held in a university uniquely devoted to scientific studies, it is good to see that not all of us here are scientists! It is so obviously right to emphasize the need for school boys and school girls, and students of tertiary institutions, to have a basic knowledge of our present scientific world, that it is difficult to understand why we have been slow to meet the requirement. Why have we allowed science and technology to become a province of the favoured few - teaching these specialized skills as though they were endowed with a mysticism beyond the comprehension of the ordinary person? One reason has been the belief that scientific knowledge could be acquired only with the help of complicated, delicate and above all expensive teaching aids. Thus, for generations in many parts of the world (including my own country) only a minority of pupils have been able to benefit from science teaching - in the main those attending well-endowed, large schools or colleges where the cost of laboratory equipment could be afforded.

The very fact of this workshop shows the recognition of the problem and a determination to solve it. The international composition of the gathering will ensure that suggested solutions are critically examined from many viewpoints. The attendance of teachers - those actually facing the problem - will prevent the 'experts' from having it all their own way! Above all, the cumulative experience of the Commonwealth Secretariat will be available to point the way.

Words of thanks will be properly spoken at the end rather than at the beginning of a meeting such as this. But it would be unwise from the start not to appreciate our indebtedness. First, to the Commonwealth Secretariat for focussing our attention on these matters and being ready to organize the workshop. Secondly, to the Papua New Guinea Department of Education for sponsoring a conference which is intended to give help to many peoples throughout the Pacific. Thirdly, to the Council of the University for providing so suitable a venue. Fourthly, to the thinkers who will present their ideas and lead the discussions.

A fundamental precept, which is wisely emphasized by the Government of Papua New Guinea, is the value of self-reliance. Without pre-judging the outcome of this workshop, I feel able to suggest that improvisation and simplicity in the use of materials for science teaching, is a theme which is closely related to self-reliance. It seems therefore especially appropriate that this conference should be taking place in Papua New Guinea, a delightful country in which I am privileged to be living and working.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, distinguished representatives and delegates, I have much pleasure in formally declaring the workshop open.