

ADDRESS BY MR. REX. E.O. AKPOFURE
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Mr. Vice-Chancellor, your Excellency, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. It is my privilege today, in responding to the Opening Address, to bring you on behalf of the Commonwealth Secretary-General H.E. Mr. Shridath Ramphal greetings and good wishes from the Commonwealth Secretariat. This workshop and our presence here so far from London are a concrete expression of the practical concern of our Commonwealth for the development of our member states - spread, as we are, right across the globe. It represents our belief in the value of interaction and mutual co-operation by countries which include the wealthiest and the poorest, the highest and the lowest populations ranging from 600 million to only a few thousand and from the most developed and advanced to the merely developing. In that sense therefore, the Commonwealth today is as relevant to our search for a better life as any of man's global associations. For that reason also our modest contribution to that global effort wherever it is made must merit attention. That on this occasion such an effort is taking place here in Papua New Guinea is no accident; rather it is the result of a belief that the search for solutions to problems can best be pursued in the context where they exist. At the same time it is comforting to know that these problems are shared to a greater or lesser degree in common, throughout our member states.

This workshop is the third in a series of such efforts designed to get to grips, at regional level, with the thorny question of producing low-cost science equipment in our countries, given the scanty resources of men and money and the clamouring demands made on those resources by all sectors of the economy. Yet it is more than that: it is to deal with the issue at once of effective science education and development education. The Commonwealth Secretariat is not the only, or even the most important organizer of workshops and seminars in these fields. Its distinctive characteristic lies in its motivation: it responds to needs clearly identified (whether in Education or Science or Finance or Economic Affairs) by our member states themselves as priorities for action through co-operation.

In this workshop, for the next twelve days, we shall be concentrating, on 'Training in the Production and Use of Science Teaching Equipment' in our schools and colleges. In recognition of how wide-spread is the problem throughout the developed and developing Commonwealth, we have at this workshop representatives of this Region - including Australia and New Zealand - as well as one inter-regional representative each from the Caribbean, Asia and Africa. In all of the countries involved the critical importance of low-cost equipment to the teaching of effective science has long pre-occupied the planning and provision of education and its curriculum.

At the same time, there is an emerging recognition of an important principle. It is the need to develop to a greater degree than ever before a measure of self-reliance in dealing with problems. The first is to re-emphasize in practice that science lives and abounds all around us and needs to be imported from no other country: that the air we breathe and heat and light, the rivers and forests, rocks and soils, the flora and fauna all these may be studied without foreign exchange considerations provided science is taught by means of nature all around us. In this sense, education and development are inevitably bound together; and if we learn and teach science through the environment the development process cannot be too far away! The present series of workshops of which this is the last is organized as an attempt to accelerate that process of natural growth and development, through self-reliance.

Mr. Chairman, the Commonwealth, through its Secretariat and in this case through the CFTC, encourages and fosters co-operation in many fields and especially in Education, Health, Law and Legal Drafting, Government and Administration, Economic and Industrial matters. The extent of our effectiveness is determined largely by the support given by each member state whether in the form of financial contribution or through the hosting of regional meetings, seminars and workshops. Yet, such meetings and workshops would be of little value if their recommendations and proposals ended up on the dusty shelves of pre-occupied departments and ministries or in musty archives or libraries of our countries. It is the existence of the will to implement proposals which have relevance in our countries that makes such meetings worthwhile. That will, is an important, indeed critical form of support to Commonwealth action.

It is for such support therefore, that I wish today to express the appreciation of the Commonwealth Secretariat. We would not be here today, but for such support. We would be unable to share experience and the possibility of renewed insight into familiar problems without such support. Indeed, our experts and specialists would have little hope of contributing outside their own countries but for such support, from our member Governments. This, Mr. Chairman, is the essence of the modern Commonwealth Association both on the regional and the inter-regional levels.

Our thanks must go, first, to the Government and people of Papua New Guinea for their generosity in hosting this workshop for the Pacific Region. Already, we recognize how critical to its success will be the facilities and resources it has put at our disposal. To you, Mr. Vice-Chancellor, we bring our appreciation for opening your gates to us and placing so freely at our disposal the specific technical and professional requirements we need from your University. I assure you that we will leave you no room to doubt that they will be fully utilized.

To you, your Excellency, for undertaking to perform on behalf of the Government of this country, the official opening of this workshop, we also express our appreciation. You have demonstrated once more your country's abiding support for the Commonwealth and its objectives - a support on which we have learnt to depend.

I cannot neglect Mr. Chairman, the opportunity to express our thanks to our observers from other agencies i.e. the UNDP, Unesco and the British Council who have found time to be associated with us in this undertaking. The Commonwealth Secretariat, in its relatively short existence, has always attached considerable importance to inter agency co-operation and we value today your affirmation of your organizations reciprocity in this regard.

Finally, I must also thank our consultants from the United Kingdom and Nigeria for coming all this distance, particularly at rather short notice, to assist us at this workshop. I have already assured them that in the next few days we intend to 'milk' them fully. To all of you who have come to this ceremony today and all who in your various ways have already assured us of your support and services, I must end with thanks for your assistance and co-operation. With such auspicious and encouraging beginnings, we are confident that the problems with which we are trying to grapple cannot but diminish in their terror.