

OPENING CEREMONY

Address
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Commonwealth Assistant Secretary-General

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Prime Minister, Honourable Ministers, Your Excellencies, Colleagues and Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Although I have not been to this delightful country before, I already feel so much at home here that I confidently extend to you all a most cordial welcome, and especially to the Seminar participants who have come from places as far apart as Trinidad and Tonga, Malta and New Zealand, Hong Kong and the Bahamas. I suppose I feel at home here, not only because of the warmth and friendliness which I have experienced since my arrival, but also because, being an islander myself, it is not difficult to sense a certain indefinable quality which gives to life in communities such as this an air of buoyancy and of optimism. Indeed, Mr. Chairman, like the participants, who not surprisingly have so quickly become attuned to this environment, I share with you a feeling of kinship and of belonging which I am told is peculiar to island peoples.

As you know, the Commonwealth organises many meetings. These are at different levels, ranging from those attended by Prime Ministers, through specialist ministerial conferences, to seminars and workshops of a mainly professional kind. Their purposes are varied and their achievements of no mean order, although, as is natural, not all meetings have fulfilled the total expectations held for them - especially by those who look to the Commonwealth for solutions to some of the most intractable problems facing the world. I have a feeling, however, that this particular meeting which we are about to begin is of special significance and that it carries with it a potential for much good, breaking as it does new ground in that very difficult area of human relations, as nations strive to achieve an identity and an integration whereby they might enhance the quality and ennoble the lives of all their citizens. It would be foolhardy to suggest or to expect that our achievements here will be monumental, but even if we gain no more than a few painful inches on a rather difficult climb and from that point secure a few more insights into the complexities inherent in this field, the effort would have been worth it. Pluralism and Development in Island Communities, the subject of this Seminar, is a many faceted theme. No one will deny that it is emotive. But it is live. It is of direct and immediate concern to millions of people throughout the world today and in newly independent countries, particularly island states, where, as seen through the polaroids of the tourists, there still dwell the "hewers of wood and drawers of water" of today's world.

In such countries - regarded by some as the backyards for the world's primary products - where tremendous efforts are being made in the development field - the concepts of development promulgated by my

economist friends are seriously being called into question. I should like to indicate that as Gross National Products rise, in many instances greater social fragmentation takes place, nations become divided among themselves, cleavages occur and lines harden, as language, culture and ethnicity are correlated, or are perceived to be correlated, with differing social strata. Governments faced with a multitude of problems press forward with plans aimed at ensuring higher standards of living, only to find that their problems have increased as the by-products of such plans result in unexpected social upheaval, frustration and disenchantment. Much of this accentuates plurality at a time when national consciousness and national identity are so eagerly sought after. It is hardly surprising that in the mottoes and anthems of many of our island communities, we find such expressions as "Out of many, one people" or "To dwell together in unity" or "Forward together - upwards and onwards". Are these not a recognition of the existence of plurality and of the constraints which pluralism can impose on development? Are they not prayers, waiting to be answered?

Mr. Chairman, I said earlier that this was, in my view, a meeting of some moment. It is not a learned seminar, nor is it merely an academic exercise. It is indeed an unusual gathering and of necessity so. Among the participants the so-called "youthful sector" is strongly represented. Present, too, are the less young in the shape of politicians, administrators, the clergy, professional lawyers, sociologists and technologists, for we believe that it is not right to isolate youth and treat it as a separate and distinct part of society requiring special attention. Youth is a part - a large part - of contemporary society and in most of the countries here represented some sixty per cent of the population is under twenty-five years, so we are in fact talking about the majority. At the same time, let it be remembered that youth per se is not a qualification and the fact of being young, or for that matter the fact of being old, does not of itself give anyone a prerogative on truth or wisdom.

We hope the mix is right, for many nettles will have to be grasped firmly and for this task perhaps the more calloused hands of the not-so-young will show less the bruises and weals and stings. And in place of the nettles, hopefully flowers will grow and blossom in these corners of God's garden, tended by the young of today and, if I may remind them, by the young of tomorrow. I am convinced that what we strive after is achievable and that within the context of the Commonwealth real progress can be made. For what better forum can there be than this voluntary association of nations, which cuts across continents and regions, as well as the great divides of race and colour and creed, and which reflects also the full spectrum of economic levels?

As representative of the Commonwealth Secretary-General, on his behalf and on behalf of my colleagues in the Secretariat, I should like to record our gratitude to the Prime Minister and his Government for the very generous contribution which this country has made to Commonwealth endeavours, not the least of which has been to the recently established Commonwealth Youth Programme, under which the present Seminar is being held. The officials of your Ministry of Youth and Sport have done a superlative job and so too have the University authorities in accommodating us, at considerable dislocation to themselves. Indeed, Sir, without such help it would not have been possible for us to meet here today and I know we can count on your continuing support and assistance.

May I also here acknowledge our indebtedness to the lead speakers, the Hon. K. Jagatsingh, Professor L.E. Braithwaite, Mr. G. McRobie and Mr. O. Napier. We are confident that they will assist us through the rough paths which we must inevitably tread.

It has been said that if it is in the minds of men that war begins, it is in the hearts of men that the defences of peace must be built. I would submit that if we are to move from the rhetoric to the reality we shall need to immunise both the hearts and the minds of the young against what has been called in the Commonwealth Declaration of Principles "a dangerous sickness". I refer to racial prejudice and to discrimination on the grounds of creed or colour.

Mr. Prime Minister, it was your esteemed friend, President Kaunda of Zambia, whom you are shortly to receive as a guest, who started us off less than two years ago in the Commonwealth Youth Programme. It was his view that such a programme could expand human understanding and co-operation among nations, that it could assist in the elimination of discrimination and in the strengthening of personal liberty. It is certainly gratifying to us that you can today, despite your onerous duties, carry us further along that road by gracing this Seminar with your distinguished presence. You, as one of the stalwarts of the modern Commonwealth, held in such high regard in your own country and abroad, have done us a tremendous honour this morning, and I am privileged on behalf of the Secretary-General to request you to declare open this meeting on Pluralism and Development in Island Communities.