

# Opening and Closing Addresses

## **1. Address by H. E. Mr. Shridath S. Ramphal, *Commonwealth Secretary-General***

Your Excellencies:

We find ourselves here confronted by a singularly happy set of coincidences. We are to start on Commonwealth Day the Ministerial working sessions of our Seventh Commonwealth Education Conference, thus celebrating the past existence of our association at the same time as we rededicate ourselves to the service of the young people who will shape its future. And we do these things in Ghana, whose choice on attaining independence of free association in the Commonwealth opened the way for our present membership of twelve African nations, and Mauritius and Seychelles too. Twenty years have gone to prove the rightness of Ghana's choice, under the leadership of the great man after whom this fine Conference Hall is so aptly named.

Those of us who have come from far away — and 31 nations are represented here — may perhaps be permitted to share with our hosts their pride in the record of those twenty years of independence. In the Commonwealth we share our problems — and we all have plenty of them. We may also, I think, share our celebrations — as I personally did last week with so many sons and daughters and friends of Ghana at the Commonwealth Institute in London in honour of that twentieth anniversary.

It is significant that the nation whose political awareness and drive led so much of Africa to freedom and dignity and inspired so much of the Third World celebrates also this week another anniversary: the golden jubilee of the foundation of Achimota School. Achimota formed Ghana's educational elite in the years before independence — and indeed since. The school is living proof of how deeply a particular educational experience can mark a nation's character. Let us think of that when in our deliberations this week we remember how radically important is the business we are about — the business of moulding the educational patterns of the future. On a more personal note, a note of acknowledgement, I should perhaps add that the Commonwealth Secretariat owes a special debt to Achimota School, since it is the *Alma Mater* of the Director of our Education Division, the Secretary of this Conference, our good friend Sam Cooke.

We are gathered in Accra to discuss issues affecting the future of every single nation of the world. There is hardly any country that is not now in the throes of the crisis in education. The crisis concerns both the

resources — without which provision of education would be greatly hampered — and the adequacy or relevance of whatever education is provided to meet the needs and problems of the society concerned. For some countries, there is crying need for skilled labour to aid their development efforts; for some the need is two-fold and covers both scarcity of resources and lack of trained manpower; for others, the crisis expresses itself in the unemployment of the educated. It is therefore my hope that this Conference will wish to address itself to these and other problems, all of them not unrelated to the planning and execution of educational policies.

As members of the Commonwealth we have particular reasons for wishing to talk to each other, and for profiting by our conversations. It is not just the facility of a shared language that makes it easy for us to work together: indeed the trend in the Commonwealth is increasingly to recognize and to exploit the fact of our cultural and linguistic diversity. Much more important, when it comes to international co-operation, is the sharing of administrative traditions and structures among Commonwealth countries. It is this administrative likeness that makes it so easy for us to pull in the same harness, and in the same direction.

This statement, however, might fairly be described as a Commonwealth cliché. We have naturally tended to emphasize our similarities, and in so far as it helps to sustain our dialogue it is a right emphasis. But it would not be right if by underlining the things that bind us together, we were to adopt a rhetoric that in fact makes our work less valuable. Behind the similarities of our administrative structures, behind the shared assumptions that make it possible for us to work together — and to be frank with each other — lie profound differences in the societies in which we live and work. They are not differences of merit or of value between human beings — we have grown out of that sort of stupidity now — but they are differences arising from the objective circumstances within our many countries. Let us not fall into the error of pretending to ignore those differences: let us face up to the diversity of the Commonwealth, and exploit it for our common good and the promotion of mutual and true understanding.

Let us look briefly at some of those realities that must affect the work of the Commonwealth in education as in all the spheres in which we operate. What is unique about our association on the international scene is that it brings together in fellowship and equality rich and poor nations alike. That is the value of our association. But the vast majority of our peoples live in the poor world, the Third World. Forty-four per cent of the citizens of Commonwealth countries live in the world's poorest countries — those with an income per head of under \$200 a year. Indeed, if you exclude the countries of the Socialist blocs, the Commonwealth contains over 80 per cent of the world's poorest people. It also contains a large number of countries that, while not classed among the poorest, live nevertheless on the brink of poverty, in imminent danger of being dragged back by the fortunes of the world — fortunes external to those countries' control — into absolute poverty. Ghana itself, although by no means among the ranks of the poorest countries of this continent, knows well how sharply can blow the winds of international economic fortune, and how delicately she must nurture the promise of prosperity for the future.

We in the Commonwealth are engaged in — were committed to by our Heads of Government in Kingston, Jamaica two years ago — the pursuit of a new international economic order in which the structures of world economic existence can be transformed. International justice in economic arrangements is an essential prerequisite if the vast gulf between rich and poor nations is to be bridged. It is essential: but it is not sufficient. Nations must win their own destiny by their own efforts. They must strive for national self-sufficiency in the essentials, and for full national viability in external trade. That is the only possible basis both for prosperity and for mutual respect and peace between the nations. We must all make the best of what we have got — however little we have got.

So where is the prime richness and resource for the future of the developing nations? First and above all, it is in their peoples — and one of the distinguishing marks of a developing nation anywhere in the world is not just that most of its people are poor, but that most of its people are youthful. Education is the key to full participation by its individual citizens in the life of the nation and by the nation in international life.

That is why I warmly welcome the fact that the title of your conference here is “The Economics of Education”. I know well that the first question implicit in that title is how to make more resources available for education, and how best to use the resources that exist. But there is, I suggest, another aspect that educators need to keep their eyes on if they are to make their fullest possible contribution to debate, and that concerns the contribution that education can make to the national economy. Our discussion of the conference theme and the other related topics of the agenda must be seen in the broader context of how education can, as well as using resources, contribute to creating new resources; to rehabilitating and transforming the rural sector of many countries; to promoting industrialization; to improving the quality of health services; and to providing the environment in which the man in the street and the man in the village can equip himself for productive involvement in a community from which poverty, disease and stagnation have been banished.

This is not to say that education is about these things alone; that it has not a nobler destiny for the improvement of man’s mind. Of course it has — that is exactly the point. It is education that produces the leaders of the future in every field of human endeavour, that helps mould the environment in which tomorrow’s authors, musicians and artists may develop their talents. But those are not things that can be achieved by focusing the thrust of education on a pre-selected elite: they are blessings that will flow from a general uplifting of the intellectual horizons of the community; they must go along in step with the raising of the educational — and therefore economic — standards of society as a whole.

And that, we may all agree, is easier said than done. There is a vast area of innovation and experimentation open before us, which is entirely in line with the new emphasis that is being given to our work in the Secretariat. Last year Commonwealth governments through their senior officials, meeting in Canberra to ensure the continuity of our work in a year which did not include a meeting of our Heads of Government, formally approved my proposals to focus the work of the Secretariat more fully on new territory of exploration rather than remaining confined to the sometimes traditional framework within which international co-

operation takes place. On the economic side of our work we have already begun that activity by setting up two groups of experts from all over the Commonwealth to explore new ideas for international co-operation for the common good. That, of course, has always been one of the functions of our Education Division in its own field, and I am sure it is a process that we shall now be carrying further.

Our work must be innovative: and it must be practically oriented. We in the Commonwealth may worry about — but we do not need to concern ourselves directly with — the higher ranges of science and its application. If the application of science, and its dissemination through the schools and the universities and the post-school sector in member countries, could lead to the invention of a better ox-cart, that would add immeasurably to the happiness of millions. That is the region of science and technology — relevant science and technology — to which we should be applying ourselves, not the pursuit of Nobel Prizes. I am delighted that the structure of our conference here this week is directed to just such practical ends, and that the work of our educators is being focused on scientific and technical matters just as the Secretariat is due to embark on its new science programme. I should add that much of the emphasis of the Secretariat's science programme is ruled by the same priorities that have, on the initiative of Commonwealth Ministers, led us to set up a new division within the Secretariat concerned with Food Production and Rural Development.

I am confident that the foundation for the work of Ministers has been well laid by officials over the past week — the flow of inspiration, I am assured, has not been at all held up by any delays there may have been in the flow of water. Certainly the great majority of recommendations that the committees are asking Ministers to endorse are down-to-earth measures designed to bring direct benefit to those young people who are at school, college or university, to those who are out-of-school, and to the people who teach or train them. The practical training element has been predominant. Seminars in book development have concentrated on the production of books, as will the regional training course in Guyana which is about to arise from those seminars. A first training course in educational administration and supervision is nearing completion in Nairobi. A workshop on science education in the Bahamas has put across techniques for producing low-cost science equipment at home instead of buying it from abroad. In Hong Kong a workshop for the Asian and the Pacific regions discussed practical ways of developing the relationships between technical education and industry. One of these relationships must be through the provision of practical training in industry to complement college and university courses and this is the purpose of one of the major schemes in the technical education area, a Commonwealth scheme that is being recommended for exchange and placement for industrial training and experience. I had the good fortune to be personally involved in one of the events that gave birth to this proposal, a seminar at Regina University. The Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan has proved a great success in practical terms, and Governments are being invited to increase the total number of scholarships to 1,500.

I look forward also to Ministers' decisions on proposals as significant as that for the establishment of a staff college for technical educators and, for the African region, the establishment of an association of polytechnics. In many ways — although I do not by any means wish to

deny the significance of the work of the universities — the task of the other institutions for post-school education is absolutely vital as a means of developing the skilled manpower that all developing countries so desperately need.

It may be of particular interest to our members here in West Africa to hear that we at the Secretariat have already held talks with the Agence de Coopération Culturelle et Technique, the body that links together many French-speaking nations especially in Africa, to see if we can help to bridge the gap between those African nations in which French and those in which English are the language of government. I am, may I say, especially glad that the Agence is among the international bodies represented here, along with Unesco, the Association of Commonwealth Universities and the Commonwealth Foundation, whose delegates are most cordially welcome.

And, finally, I would like to commend to your attention the work that is already being done, day by day, within the Commonwealth in support of education. There are of course several programmes of bilateral assistance of whose usefulness there can be no doubt. One of the valuable off-stage activities at conferences of this kind is the establishment — or more often re-establishment — of the personal contacts between parties to bilateral programmes that are essential for their efficient and humane conduct; and in this regard I would like to pay tribute to the enlightenment of those in the developed Commonwealth countries who administer such programmes.

And I am proud to say that in the Secretariat we are now able to play a not insignificant part in the promotion of economic development through education, by the activities of the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation. Experts in many fields of education have been provided to a number of countries, both as advisers and in operational capacities. Since the last Commonwealth Education Conference, in Kingston in 1974, our Education and Training Programme has increased the numbers of students whom it supports by over three times. The programme now funds over 500 projects a year. The real test of the worth of our technical assistance programmes is the number of applications for support that they attract. In that sense the Education and Training Programme is a huge success. So much so that we are now under pressure to ensure that our resources are sufficient to meet all the demands upon them.

The answer is, of course, to increase the funds available. But the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation depends entirely on voluntary contributions from all member Governments: so all I can say to Ministers is that, if you want more of the kind of help that we can provide, the answer is partly in your own hands — or that of your Ministries of Finance whom you are so skilled at nudging into progressive postures. I am aware, as are all delegates from national Governments, that these are hard times, that resources are scarce, and that the needs are almost infinite. Sharing that knowledge, and seeking ways of facing up to it, is of course, one useful purpose of an international meeting to discuss the Economics of Education. I do not suppose — I don't think anyone here supposes — that from our deliberations will emerge all the answers that we all seek. But the search, and the Conference, are open. May they prosper and be fruitful.