

Preface

"I represent the official Commonwealth, the Commonwealth primarily of governmental contact and co-operation. You are an example of the unofficial Commonwealth, of that tremendously varied collection of organisations that enrich the life of the Commonwealth at the unofficial or non-governmental level. As the chief servant of the Commonwealth, I pay tribute to the enormously valuable contribution these unofficial organisations make to the vitality of our association, by bringing the Commonwealth together at the level of its people, by improving understanding and promoting friendship across national frontiers through contact and practical co-operation in a miscellany of fields.

"At first glance, it may appear that we work at levels—the official and the unofficial—that do not impinge on each other. I am convinced, however, that our activities at our different levels can and, in the larger interests of the Commonwealth which we all serve, must be made to reinforce each other."

These are the words of the Commonwealth Secretary-General in a speech to the Victoria League for Commonwealth Friendship in London, in July 1976. They reflect the consensus of opinion which has characterised discussions on the role of non-governmental organisations in the Commonwealth and, in particular, on the relationship between the official and the unofficial Commonwealth, over the last two years. In the light of this, and with the encouragement of the Canadian Government, the Commonwealth Secretariat has published this handbook of organisations which are active in the Commonwealth. Its purpose is to meet the growing need for information about the extent of non-governmental activity in the Commonwealth, and to promote co-operation among unofficial organisations with related interests and between them and the official Commonwealth.