

Foreword by the Commonwealth Secretary-General

At their Melbourne Meeting in October 1981, Commonwealth Heads of Government were concerned about the stalemate which had developed in the North-South dialogue especially in view of the crisis in the world economy and the fact that prospects for many developing countries had become particularly grim. They stressed the global character of the problems facing the contemporary world and the need for domestic policies to be supplemented by collective action and a global approach.

Commonwealth leaders regarded as imperative the need to revitalise the dialogue, expressing their own belief that it should be conducted with a genuine willingness to accept real and significant changes commensurate with the urgency of global economic problems. They made a number of decisions to facilitate progress on substantive issues; but, recognising that lack of progress in the North-South negotiations resulted in part from obstacles in the negotiating process itself, they requested me to convene a high level group of Commonwealth experts to study and report on the matters involved. The Report that follows is the work of that Expert Group.

Since Melbourne, there has been a further deterioration in the world economic situation. The economic crisis and its accompanying economic distress have led to growing recognition that bold international action must be part of the solution and have given added significance to the need to improve international economic cooperation. I am pleased, therefore, that in responding to the request of Heads of Government, it has been possible to bring together a most distinguished group of Commonwealth experts whose members have had substantial involvement in the North-South negotiating process, many of them at the highest level.

As is traditional with Commonwealth expert groups, members prepared and signed the Report in their individual capacities and not as representatives of Governments, countries or organisations to which

they belong. The publication of the Report does not, therefore, imply that it necessarily represents the views of the Commonwealth Governments, nor does it commit them individually or collectively to its recommendations.

I share the conviction of the Group of Experts that if their recommendations are carried through, it will have a catalytic effect in building confidence and demonstrating to both North and South the mutuality of interest which characterises North-South relations.

In focusing on the negotiating process itself rather than on the issues under negotiation between North and South, this Report breaks new ground. Against the backdrop of the unique experience of the Experts themselves in international negotiations, their recommendations offer practical ways of enlarging the prospects for agreement. The North-South dialogue remains stalled and the world drifts into a deepening economic crisis. People everywhere expect their countries to do better nationally and internationally. Global cooperation for world economic recovery and development has become critical — perhaps to the survival of millions. This Report does not avoid the difficulties inherent in the issues themselves, but its recommendations offer hope that our chances of overcoming them may be increased if we improve our ways and means of trying to reach the higher common ground.

The need for new relations between North and South is now most urgent. It is my hope that the opportunities offered by the forthcoming negotiating conferences such as the GATT Ministerial Meeting, UNCTAD VI and the prospective Global Round for initiating a more constructive and productive dialogue will not be missed. I have great pleasure in making this Report available as a Commonwealth contribution to the dialogue on international economic cooperation.

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