

Preface

1. Commonwealth Heads of Government, at their Meeting in Melbourne in September/October 1981, regarded as imperative the need to revitalise the dialogue between developed and developing countries. They expressed the belief that the growing interdependence of the world economy made urgent action necessary to deal with the economic problems of both groups of countries. In the process of negotiation between North and South, nations must cast aside inhibitions and habits which had thwarted progress in the past and find new ways to talk constructively to one another, so as to reach agreement on effective joint action. Recognising that lack of progress in the North-South negotiations had resulted in part from obstacles in the negotiating process itself, they requested the Secretary-General to convene a high level group of experts to study and report on the issues involved.¹

2. The list of members of the Group is at Appendix 1.

3. The Group was requested to:

- review the negotiating process between developed and developing countries;
- examine the principal obstacles which have to date limited success in these negotiations;
- identify to what extent these obstacles are the result of shortcomings in the negotiating process itself or in the institutions for negotiation; and
- suggest improvements which could overcome or reduce obstacles to the negotiating process or problems of institutional arrangements.

1. Commonwealth Heads of Government: Melbourne Communiqué, Paragraph 53 and The Melbourne Declaration, Paragraphs 5 and 11 (Commonwealth Secretariat, London, 1981).

4. The Group held three meetings in London in February, May and August 1982 and submitted its Report to the Commonwealth Secretary-General on 27 August 1982.

5. The Global Negotiations, which we hope will be promptly launched by the General Assembly at its 37th regular session, the GATT Ministerial Meeting in November 1982 and UNCTAD VI in June 1983, among others, provide an early opportunity to make a new beginning in North-South relations with the changed attitudes and approaches essential for constructive negotiations. We think it imperative that this opportunity be seized. We believe that our Report can make a contribution to revitalising the dialogue and to conducting it with a genuine willingness to accept real and significant changes commensurate with the urgency of solving the economic problems facing the developing countries and the world.

6. We introduce our Report by touching upon the relationship between the form and the substance of the North-South negotiations. Against a background of the growing threat to the stability of the international system which would accompany failure to reduce poverty, we draw attention to the urgent need to take steps to overcome obstacles in the negotiating process. With this objective in mind, *Part I* of our Report sets out an action programme which consists of two main elements. In the first, we enumerate the basic changes in approaches and attitudes to the negotiating process which are required of both North and South. In the second, after identifying some of the most serious institutional and procedural obstacles to that process, we recommend various changes to help remedy the situation. We conclude by drawing attention to the beneficial effects which an enlightened approach to North-South issues can have in facilitating a recovery in the global economy and creating the necessary conditions for rapid and sustained development.

7. *Part II* of our Report contains the background analysis on which we have based our recommendations and proposals. The first section comprises an assessment of the development problem in the context of interdependence and international cooperation and a review of the evolution and form of the North-South dialogue. The second provides an evaluation of the results of the dialogue against the perspectives of growing interdependence and of the urgency of solving the development problem through a more rule-oriented and cooperative international economic system. The final section identifies the main impediments to progress in the negotiations arising from their form and structure, including the institutional arrangements within which the negotiations have taken place.

8. The Group wishes to acknowledge the invaluable advice and assistance it received from a number of persons during the course of its work. Among these are Mr. Kenneth Dadzie, Personal Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Special Missions; Shri K.B. Lall, formerly Secretary to the Ministry of Commerce, Government of India; Ambassador P.R.H. Marshall, the United Kingdom's Permanent Representative to the UN in Geneva; and Mr. Don Mills, formerly Jamaican Permanent Representative to the UN in New York.