

## FOREWORD

It is a fact of societies throughout the Commonwealth - and so throughout the modern world - that violence against women and child sexual abuse are at or near the pinnacle of contemporary social concerns. Almost universally, violence against women is at wholly unacceptable levels, and inevitably it falls to the police to cope with its difficult and delicate aftermath. About levels of child sexual abuse it is difficult to be categorical. Wherever public debate on the issue has been generated, the incidence of child abuse - both past and present - has been shown to have exceeded by far all previous estimates of it. Again, where such incidents are reported it falls to the police to handle situations in many ways even more delicate and even more difficult than those of violence against women. Because it is so difficult to handle these cases, because the investigatory process can actually compound their effects, and because the problems are so serious, Ministers of Women's Affairs have quite properly placed them high on the agenda of our Women and Development Programme.

It is comfortable to relegate violence against women in particular to the category of failures in communication between the sexes; very often between husband and wife. It is rather less comfortable to view the problem as a structural issue - as arising out of social-cultural beliefs that women are by nature inferior to men, and so are undeserving of equal respect. Seen in this way, violence against women is more than a matter of an assault by the physically stronger on the physically weaker. Rather it can be seen as an ultimate weapon which actually prevents a woman from developing her true potential, and from contributing to society to the best of her ability.

In the past four years the Women and Development Programme has shown a consistent commitment to the issue of violence against women. In 1984, the first Meeting of Commonwealth Officials for Women's Affairs here in London directed the Programme to prepare a pan-Commonwealth compendium of approaches on the issue for the benefit of Commonwealth Ministers of Women's Affairs for their first meeting in Nairobi in 1985. Ministers mandated the Programme to hold an Expert Group Meeting on Violence against women. This was held in September 1985. Its conclusions formed the framework of the Manual "Confronting Violence", which was published before the Second Meeting of Ministers for Women's Affairs in Harare in 1987 and which has been received with acclaim in Commonwealth capitals.

Both Ministerial Meetings and the Expert Group recognised that training of personnel intimately connected with the issue of violence against women - lawyers, social workers, medical professionals and police - was crucial in any strategy to confront such violence. Such training has already begun. During 1986, Staff Sergeant Robert Holmes of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police conducted training sessions for police in Malaysia and Singapore, while in May 1987, an Expert Group Meeting was convened in London to prepare appropriate curriculum materials for the teaching of Commonwealth law students.

These initiatives were continued at a pan-Commonwealth Police Training Workshop on Violence Against Women and Child Sexual Abuse which was organised by the Women and Development Programme in June 1988. It was attended by senior police officers from sixteen member governments. They endorsed a variety of measures for responding to victims of violence, including the provision of centres for treating victims of rape. It is hoped that this Manual, which is based on the conclusions of the workshop, will enable police officers throughout the Commonwealth to provide more effective assistance to women and children who are victims of violence and sexual abuse.

M. MALHOUTRA  
Assistant Secretary General