



Foreword by Mrs. Florence Mugasha, Commonwealth Deputy Secretary General

The Commonwealth recognises the important role of national human rights institutions in protecting and promoting human rights at the national level. Over the past 20 years, a large number of Commonwealth member countries have established such national institutions for the promotion of public awareness about human rights, and the protection of citizens' rights generally.

The Commonwealth Secretariat's first contribution towards institutional development of national institutions was the 'Best Practice' on NHRIs, developed on the Paris Principles and now accepted and used widely in the Commonwealth and elsewhere in relation to the process of establishment and operation of national human rights bodies. We have continued to attach great importance to the work of NHRIs, and we have devoted our efforts to assist in the establishment of strong and independent national institutions, and to support national institutions to effectively carry out their mandate.

There are over 60 such national and regional institutions in the Commonwealth at present, each with varying mandates, shapes and forms, often corresponding to the size, resources and perceived imperatives and priorities of a country. Some deal only with human rights issues; others combine a number of functions including oversight over the public sector and administrative decisions, community and race relations; while others have few powers beyond those of a traditional ombudsman.

This publication is the outcome of a request that emanated from a major gathering of Commonwealth national human rights institutions in London in February this year, to produce a comparative study on the various models of national human rights bodies and mechanisms. It is evident from the study that the existing national institutions vary in their mandates, structures, functions, and degree of independence.

I welcome the publication of the 'Study on Commonwealth National Human Rights Institutions'. The objective behind this work is to highlight the good practices of the various models in place. I hope that the various comparative models and experiences as brought out in this study would be found useful by governments and national institutions, and they can draw on the experiences and best practices of the more established and effective NHRIs, in their own endeavours to advance human rights at the national level.

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