

Foreword by Commonwealth Secretary-General

Environmental issues have achieved remarkable prominence in the last few years. As a member of the World Commission for Environment and Development I naturally welcome this attention and hope that the concept of 'sustainable development' which the Commission promulgated in its report, *Our Common Future*, is now much more firmly established in policy making.

One of the factors which has brought environment to the centre of public debate is the succession of major disasters, some of which had underlying man-made, as well as natural, causes. Among these disasters was the inundation of the Maldives; another was catastrophic flooding in Bangladesh. Both were discussed in Vancouver by Commonwealth Heads of Government in 1987, and it was that discussion which led to the formation of this Expert Group.

Among the various threats to the world's environment, that of climate change induced by increased concentrations of 'greenhouse gases' is the most pervasive and truly global in its implications. If the earth is to warm by even the more modest of the various projections, there could be far reaching, long term implications for natural ecological systems, farming, the design of major energy and water projects and for low lying areas that could be affected by rising sea level. The inundation of the Maldives by extraordinarily high storm surges may or may not be one of the early products of these changes. It symbolises, however, the vulnerability of many low lying island states such as Bangladesh and Guyana where people live at, or even below, sea level.

It was on this set of inter-connected issues—the impact of climate change on sea level and their interaction with the problem of flooding—that I was asked to convene an Expert Group. I was fortunate in the calibre of people who were willing to put their combined experience together, to serve the Commonwealth in this way. Dr. Holdgate, the

Director-General of the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) and formerly Chief Scientist in the UK Department of the Environment was an ideal choice as Chairman. Those who were there will remember his masterly summary of proceedings at the 1989 London Conference for the Saving of the Ozone Layer and he has been in an excellent position to provide leadership in the important and fast moving subject of climate change.

This group breaks new ground in several ways. First, the membership was predominantly from developing countries. The development perspective—the concern of the poor—is kept well in the foreground. The report makes it plain that the world's poor could be the main victims of climate change but that this must not be allowed to occur; it concludes that a global strategy for controlling global emissions must permit rapid economic growth in developing countries. Second, the report is practical and businesslike in suggesting how some planned adaptation to climate change can take place. It sounds an alarm, but is not alarmist. It sketches out how a vulnerable small island state or those responsible for farming in drought-prone regions can prepare for, and mitigate, the worst consequences of climate change. And it provides a detailed guide to the kind of data collection effort which is needed for governments to monitor and analyse the changes taking place, so as to help individuals adjust to known facts.

Within the next few years, a major international initiative will be needed to establish global responsibilities for preventing unmanageable rates of increase of global temperature. This will require both technical preparation of the highest order and a great deal of political will. This report has contributed substantially to the former and helps to create a basis for the latter through a clearly formulated Commonwealth Plan of Action.

It gives me great pleasure to present this report to Commonwealth Governments and to make it available to the international community.

Shridath S. Ramphal

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