

Foreword by the Commonwealth Secretary-General

When they met in New Delhi in October 1983, Commonwealth Heads of Government were deeply concerned about the precarious state of the international situation. They reflected this concern in their Goa Declaration of International Security. But, while their anxieties encompassed the global situation, they were at the time acutely aware of the peculiar vulnerability of small states which had been brought so dramatically to the world's attention over the preceding month with events in Grenada. It was against this backdrop that they called for a study of the special needs of small states, including their security needs.

Since the New Delhi meeting the international situation has not improved significantly, in terms of world security. More particularly, small states continue to be buffeted politically, economically and socially from both internal and external forces, with the world community taking little heed of their special needs. That this is so is hardly surprising: recent years have not been propitious ones for a creative internationalism. In fact, the level of international co-operation over a wide field has actually declined. The problem of developing countries, once high on the global agenda, has lost its agreed primacy as the interest of developed countries has waned in the post-decolonisation period. The upsurge in bilateralism and 'spheres-of-influence' politics has been at the expense of international institutional development. Taken all together, for dozens of small states, the global environment into which they emerged over the past twenty years has worsened steadily through stages of bemusement, indifference, neglect and disadvantage.

Yet the last two years have seen, particularly at regional levels, an emerging awareness of the reality of small states and some recognition of their special needs. This has resulted both from the initiative of small states themselves and from the policies of countries in their respective regions. These developments reflect, for the first time, a serious and growing concern with security. Among both the Caribbean and the Pacific island states, for instance, serious thought is being given currently

to regional security 'arrangements'. Significant new alignments and commitments, both bilateral and regional, are emerging. The time of 'innocence' of the world's smallest states is quickly passing. For the small states themselves this has also brought awareness that the primary responsibility for security rests at the domestic level, and the development of a new realism and emphasis on self-reliance. This too is hardly surprising. When recognition of vulnerability parallels a decline in internationalism, the need to be scrupulous about 'security' arrangements is both obvious and urgent.

I was specially pleased, therefore, that in responding to the mandate of Commonwealth Heads of Government at New Delhi, it was possible to bring together such an impressive group of Commonwealth personalities who had substantial personal experience of the issues involved, either within small states themselves or at the highest levels of international affairs. As is traditional with Commonwealth consultative groups, members prepared and signed the Report in their individual capacities and not as representatives of the governments, countries or organisations to which they belong. The publication of the Report does not imply that it necessarily represents the views of Commonwealth governments.

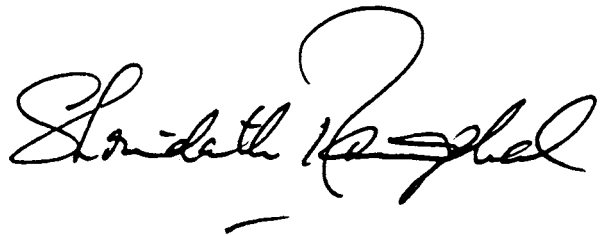
The Group has made a particular point of examining the economic underpinnings of security and has stressed the link between deprivation, vulnerability and defencelessness. In recent years, Commonwealth consultative and expert Groups have produced a number of studies focusing on various aspects of the world economic situation and it will be noted that the findings of this Report mesh well with, and support the conclusions of earlier studies. The recommendations, if implemented in this respect alone, could have significant effects in enlarging the security of small states and strengthening confidence among themselves, in their regions and in the wider world community.

It is particularly true of small states that many of the special measures which they need cannot be undertaken by themselves acting in isolation. International co-operation, starting at the regional level, is crucial to the process of reducing their vulnerability. Small states are as equal and as sovereign as larger states and every effort must be taken to ensure that they are not given a second class status in world affairs. Indeed, over the past two decades, a significant number of small states have assumed their full role in world affairs and have made individual contributions of much distinction to important international issues. They have demonstrated that they have a valid part to play in the evolution of world society. It is therefore imperative that the international system be so organised that these states are enabled not only to exist, but to prosper and themselves to contribute to international harmony. In the pursuit of that goal of enhanced international co-operation there surely must be progress

towards strengthening the global system of collective security. It would be fitting if the 40th year of the United Nations could be marked by a series of steps which ensured a safer and more prosperous future for the smallest members of the world community.

The members of the Consultative Group set themselves practical and manageable objectives and have produced a Report with proposals which are achievable. They have envisaged goals for action at the national, regional and international levels including, of course, the Commonwealth. At the national level they have placed a particular emphasis on the need for small states to adopt measures that are appropriate to their actual economic and military security requirements; at the international level they have stressed the need to bolster the role of the United Nations as a guardian of the weak; they have given pride of place to the regional level as being the arena most suitable for enhancing the security of small states. In all this, they have remained faithful to the mandate of Commonwealth Heads of Government that their examination of the special needs of small states should be “consonant with the right of sovereignty and territorial integrity that they share with all nations”.

It is my hope that this Report will be of assistance in the evolution of the views of Commonwealth governments and will be of value to the wider international community. I commend it to the consideration of Commonwealth countries and the attention of all states—small and large.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Shridath S. Ramphal". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large, prominent loop at the end of the name.

Shridath S. Ramphal