

Chapter 7

Promoting Internal Cohesion

7.1 In view of the recognised link between internal unrest and the emergence of political and military threats, the need for measures to strengthen internal cohesion is great. This is particularly true in small states.

7.2 An examination of these societies suggests that there is a range of political and institutional measures which could improve the capacity of governments in handling the difficult tasks of achieving growth and maintaining law and order, while upholding justice and democracy. This is not to imply that small states are governed any worse than larger states. Indeed the majority of Commonwealth small states seem to be well administered. While the 'paradise isle' image is perhaps overdone, the record of tranquility in small states is indeed admirable.

ENHANCING DEMOCRATIC AND HUMAN RIGHTS PROCEDURES

7.3 We are aware of the contention that democracy is not easily sustained in a very small state given the lack of anonymity, the absence of a range of strong private countervailing sectors and pressure groups, and the lack of varied levels of non-governmental institutional activity. These can make the state mechanism very pervasive, permit easy control of all aspects of life and open the way for petty tyrannies, and place undue pressures on public and judicial officials.

7.4 To guard against these risks, small states should, where appropriate, consider the advantages of regional mechanisms at the administrative and judicial levels. These could include the linking of some core elements of the administrative system on a regional basis so as to protect them from

possible abuse at the domestic level, e.g. regional elections commissions and regional service commissions for key judicial, administrative and/or security posts. The timely and voluntary use by small states of regional and/or Commonwealth observers for particular elections is advocated in situations where such a measure would bolster confidence in the election process both within a state and the wider region.

7.5 Although in the majority of states in our survey democracy is robust, there is much opportunity for improving stability by enhancing the democratic processes nationally. For countries with an elected parliamentary system, the report of the recent Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) Study on the Security of Small States¹ is timely. We feel that its recommendations on enhancing public awareness of parliament and active involvement in the democratic process, strengthening the technical support system available to parliamentarians, expanding the role of parliamentary committees and adapting the parliamentary system to indigenous custom are very relevant. We believe that much improvement is needed in access to, and the quality of, information available to parliaments. Research facilities for members of parliament, including administrative assistance, should be upgraded, particularly in respect of information on foreign policy matters.

7.6 We also feel there is a creative role for human rights agencies in small states. These could be Human Rights Courts or Commissions either at the national or regional level, or preferably at both. The record of the European Court of Human Rights is a fine example of what can be achieved and is particularly noteworthy for small states, since the European states involved have agreed to its jurisdiction, despite their existence as sovereign states for centuries, strong nationalism and the history of warfare among them. A similar mechanism should thus be a feasible option for regions of comparative harmony such as the Commonwealth areas with which we are concerned.

7.7 In the event of the establishment of a regional security agreement and/or arrangements for the peaceful settlement of disputes it might be possible, indeed desirable, to associate with it a mechanism for safeguarding human rights.

7.8 Whether or not there are human rights agencies at the official level, it would also be beneficial to encourage national and regional non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in matters in the public interest. NGOs have established their value as human rights and development agencies and help to create a diversity in sources of initiatives and ideas.

¹ The Security of Small States—Report of the Study Group of the CPA, London, December 1984.

7.9 In this last connection the Group commends the utility of a related service, the independent media, in reducing public dependence on the government for information. The national media can play a crucial role in national security in shaping the image of the country both internally and externally.

7.10 While we recognise that the scope for a varied media may seem to be limited by the size of the population and thus of the market, it is also true that much depends on what the social context permits; across the states in our survey the variety in the complexity, number and role of the media is remarkably wide.

7.11 Most small states in the Commonwealth already have adequate constitutional safeguards for the protection of humans rights, an independent judiciary and an independent media. Where these do not already exist, steps should be taken to provide them.

IMPROVING INSTITUTIONAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE ARRANGEMENTS

7.12 Administrative efficiency is clearly a major contributor to internal order and welfare. In small states, as in most others, the management of official institutions needs to be improved. Very often, development strategies are undermined by bottlenecks in implementation, and this can breed social frustration and political unrest.

7.13 There are some advantages in smallness of size such as ease of public access to and the ready centralisation of much of the administration. This does not always apply to a physically large country with a small population like Botswana and Guyana, nor to the multi-island states. In both cases the government can have difficulty in administering or even keeping control over the remoter parts of the country or the far away islands.

7.14 The cohesion of multi-island states has been partly strengthened by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea through the provisions on archipelagic states. Whereas, in the past, the islands composing such states were separated by high seas, the Convention grants to the archipelagic state sovereignty over these water equal to the sovereignty over their land areas. There remains, however, in multi-island states the particular problem of supplying component islands which have sizeable populations with core services e.g. hospitals, education, ports, airports, power stations. For example, health expenditure per person in St. Vincent, a multi-island state, is nearly three times the level of that in St. Lucia.

7.15 Small states, like all countries, need a certain minimum of services and of ministries and departments of government, but most small states are usually short of trained nationals to staff them. They have a limited capacity for the training and retention of high-priced administrative, management and technical skills. They also have higher administrative costs per head of population than in larger countries. A characteristic problem is low tax income, arising from unexploited taxable capacity due to inadequate fiscal administration. This is particularly significant for small states, given their usually narrow resource base.

7.16 Steps therefore need to be taken to better organise the limited human resources available. Towards this end public servants should be trained to do more than one task, and be skilled in development administration and management. In particular small island states need to develop bureaucratic personnel who are familiar with the problems related to the development of the maritime sector and to the uses of technology. Some of the training implications for small states are indicated later.

7.17 The general social and cultural institutional network of a state is fundamental to the efficient and cohesive working of a society. Therefore small states would do well to support and enhance the social and cultural underpinnings of the society by a variety of techniques suited to their particular circumstances.

SUPPORTIVE REGIONAL MEASURES

7.18 The more the Group looked at the situation of small states the more we became convinced that regionalism, long favoured as an option in development analyses for both developed and developing states, is particularly suited to those small states whose geographical position permits it. Most of the small states in our study belong to a geopolitical group that has some form of regional arrangements.

7.19 As most of them are also islands the maritime dimension offers both peculiar difficulties and opportunities in respect of regionalism.

7.20 We would here like to underline the necessity to continue with their regional arrangements despite the problems which have dogged them and the increased costs which they imply in some areas. We have seen that to achieve a secure society a small state can hardly rely wholly on itself and needs external assistance; the immediate region is the first circle of such assistance and regionalism should be looked upon as a form

of self-help. Regional co-operation provides a framework within which, especially in the absence of deep ideological division, member states can feel less need for military protection from major countries. Moreover, positive psychological and political advantages also come from the pooling of brain power and the enhancing of bargaining power. Caribbean states, for instance, have experienced clear examples of this in their dealings under the Lome Convention.

7.21 The three colloquia at mixed governmental and non-governmental level which we convened to assist our own enquiry were widely appreciated and there was a strong feeling that such meetings should be held regularly. In one region it was even noted that it was the first occasion at which security had been discussed on a region-wide basis. We recommend that such regional meetings, involving both governmental and non-governmental participants, should be encouraged, and receive Secretariat assistance if needed.

7.22 We were impressed by the fact that in all three colloquia there was strong support for increased regionalism and a recognition that a collective regional voice can sometimes carry weight where that of a single small state might not. In one colloquium, the point was also made that international agencies, which have so far rejected the view that small states should have a special status—and advantageous treatment—amongst developing states, would probably be more forthcoming if they were convinced that small states were themselves using their possibilities to the fullest. Moreover, in the absence of regional co-operation and integration those agencies could argue that resources were not being maximised by small states.

7.23 In security terms, a closely integrated region is less likely to be vulnerable to divisive fears, or to experience intervention, than one which is fragmented; it was in a Caribbean which had lost some of its regional unity that the Grenada crisis happened. A closely integrated region would make it easier, both constitutionally and morally, for a regional force to give military assistance to a member country facing domestic insurrection.

7.24 Operationally, regionalism is not easy and does not always proceed in a directly upward path. Apart from the technical problems there are problems of loyalty to overcome, particularly where insularity enhances the strong sense of nationalism so typical of young nations. On the other hand, it is exactly because the states are still young that the opportunities for generating public support for regional linkages are promising. We strongly feel that a co-operative regional environment provides one of the major contributions to enhancing security.

7.25 We therefore urge small states to foster regional co-operation across as wide an area of social, economic and political activities, both governmental and non-governmental as possible, particularly since the rapid advances in science and technology make such linkages both more readily achievable and more necessary.

7.26 Even in the absence of a formal regional integration movement, small states should promote the regional pooling of experts and freedom of movement and flexible conditions of work for highly skilled personnel. Experience has shown that such personnel are often lost to their countries as much because of narrow limits to their professional contacts and possibilities as because of salary levels and working conditions. The provision of jobs at the regional level can help to absorb some of the highly skilled who might otherwise leave. As a well known regionalist in the Caribbean, Norman Manley, once put it, federation would “create a larger field for ambition.” In respect of the regional use of skills, small states should avoid the ‘sovereignty trap’, i.e. the tendency to define sovereign rights so narrowly that there is an unwillingness even to share the services of experts in certain traditional areas of need e.g. auditors, legal draftsmen, surgeons. There should be open recognition of the need for experts on a semi-permanent basis rather than emphasising stop-gap arrangements under short-term technical assistance agreements. The former objective implying a steady succession of contracted personnel, would best be achieved through pooling.

7.27 Regional co-operation can also be facilitated by the offer, on a region-wide basis or to regional agencies, of services and experts, where possible in related clusters, by international bodies, the Commonwealth and friendly states. In the Pacific, the establishment within SPEC of the Pacific Regional Advisory Service (PRAS), and the collaboration of Australia and New Zealand in transport, communications, management of the seas and other areas of regional development are good examples of this.

7.28 There is increasing interest in the development of regional parliaments as another device for fostering regional co-operation and ensuring regional harmony and stability. In both the Caribbean and the Pacific colloquia there was appreciation of the possible role of such institutions in further linking the widely dispersed member states now that they have some successful experience of regional functional integration. It is recognised that such a development would have to be approached very carefully. Initially such parliaments should, like that of the European Community, start with limited functions and address issues which are non-political or non-controversial. As a first step the CPA regional meetings could be given more status and relevance.

The Training Dimension

7.29 In all the areas above mentioned the requirements for an effective functioning of small states clearly imply a need for training in various skills. Such training is of importance to the efficient working of the parliamentary and legal system and to the promotion of human rights. In the latter respect there is much scope for the developing programme of the new Human Rights Unit of the Secretariat. The role of the media is also of such importance that training assistance is indicated here too and a specific desire for training staff for regional news agencies has been expressed in the colloquia.

7.30 Throughout the public service there would obviously be much demand for training in administration, management, technical skills and the use of technology, both on a short and long term basis. This is an area in which the CFTC has long been doing admirable work and in which Commonwealth co-operation is quite extensive. We therefore need only to commend its activities and to endorse the training component of the Secretariat's Special Programme to assist island developing and other specially disadvantaged member countries. A similar need for these types of training obviously also exists in the private sector of small states.

7.31 At the regional level some small states do have access to relevant training facilities. Law and management schools are, for instance, fairly widespread although not usually equipped for training in the rarer skills e.g. legal drafting. In the Caribbean there is a School of Communication for media training as well as a Centre for Development Administration (CARICAD). We would urge that the establishment of appropriate regional training centres be treated as a priority by small states and by the international community.