

FOREWORD

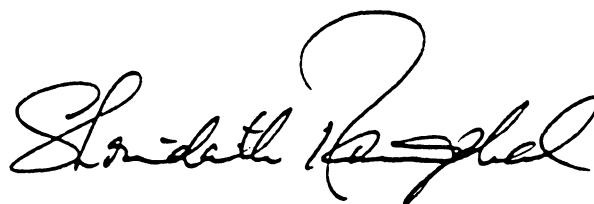
The importance of cane sugar to the economies of a large number of Commonwealth countries who are members of the Lomé Convention, the continuing significant role played by Commonwealth sugar producers in supplying the United Kingdom market and the interdependence between cane growers in these countries and workers in the United Kingdom cane refining industry make sugar a commodity of special interest to the Commonwealth. Any disturbance either to the present ACP supply arrangements or to the size of the United Kingdom refining capacity would damage the chain linking growers and users and could do substantial harm to many Commonwealth economies.

Concerned at the major problems likely to face the sugar industry in the 1980s, a group of trade unionists employed in United Kingdom cane refineries proposed to the developing Commonwealth cane sugar exporting countries that they meet in London to exchange views. As a result a four-day seminar was held last April under the title "The Challenge to Cane Sugar in the 1980's". The participants were drawn from governments, sugar brokers, trade unions, cane farmers, industrial consumers, academic institutions and non-governmental organisations, and came from eleven Commonwealth countries. The importance of the occasion and of the issues at stake was highlighted by the presence of Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, Prime Minister of Fiji. For Ratu Sir Kamisese this represents the continuation of a distinguished role in ACP matters and in particular in representing the Commonwealth cane sugar industry.

As the summary of proceedings by Dr. Vincent Cable makes clear, there was a large measure of agreement that the Sugar Protocol of the Lomé Convention must continue in its present form. This was agreed not only by the cane sugar exporting countries, the United Kingdom cane refining industry and its employees, but also by representatives of industrial consumers and, most importantly, of the European Commission and the United Kingdom beet industry itself. The main threat was conceived to be not a major attack on the Protocol as such, but rather a steady if gradual erosion of cane sugar interests in the EEC. There were four main sources of anxiety. First the continued growth of the Community beet sugar surplus caused by the excessively protected price granted in respect of a high level of production; secondly the competition from substitute sweeteners, encouraged by price instability and the alleged health hazards of excessive sugar consumption; thirdly the uncertainty about future cane refining capacity in the United Kingdom; and fourthly the intensified supply problems facing the ACP as a result of the effects of the world recession.

Yet all was not gloom at the seminar and positive ideas for the future also emerged. It was felt that in renegotiating the Lomé Convention, the ACP must take the initiative to submit proposals where these were thought to be justified, for example on pricing and quotas, but also to seek out common ground with beet sugar producers, for instance on artificial sweeteners and stabilising the world market. Beyond Lomé there were wider possibilities, for example developing new markets through regaining the ground lost to artificial sweeteners or fostering intra-developing country trade or creating new products, and perhaps by establishing an international sugar research and promotion organisation.

These were only some of the interesting ideas which were discussed by participants. But I trust they give the flavour of a seminar which attracted considerable interest and attention. In responding to an approach by the Organising Committee therefore, I agreed it would be useful in relation to Commonwealth interests, to bring together and publish the papers presented to the seminar and a résumé of the ensuing discussion. This will give the wider public an opportunity to become better informed of the underlying issues of concern to both sides of the cane sugar industry, particularly in the context of the forthcoming Lomé renegotiation. Beyond that, however, I believe the report also makes a contribution to wider North/South cooperation by taking up a major commodity trade issue - the renegotiation of the International Sugar Agreement. Finally, I wish to congratulate the British trade union movement and Commonwealth exporting countries for their unique cooperative endeavour in arranging the seminar, and to recognise the great contribution made by its sponsors and supporters, as well as all who helped to ensure its success.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Shridath S. Ramphal". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, looping initial 'S'.

Shridath S. Ramphal
Commonwealth Secretary-General
August 1983