



REDIFINING MULTILATERALISM: THE COMMONWEALTH AS A CATALYST FOR CHANGE

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Seminar hosted by the Foreign Policy Centre and Hill & Knowlton

Rt Hon John Battle MP

Check Against Delivery

In 1992 the former Secretary General of the Commonwealth Shridath Ramphal chaired the Commission for Global Governance which produced the report Our Global Neighbourhood in the belief that global developments post 1989 had created a unique opportunity for strengthening global cooperation to meet the challenges of securing peace, achieving sustainable development and universalising democracy. Those were the heady days of international global markets overriding petty nationalism, economic arrangements replacing politics and arms, trade increasing wealth and dictatorships inevitable going to democracies and transparent governance. The Commission's Report, now undeservedly neglected on the shelf is a significant precursor to the UK Government's recent White Paper on International Development Eliminating World Poverty: Making Governance Work for the Poor (published by D.F.I.D in July 06). Again this is a remarkably positive practical workbook emphasizing that good governance is not just about government it is also about political parties, parliament, the judiciary, the media and civil society.

It is about how citizens, leaders and public institutions relate to each other in order to make change happen "(para 2.3) and last but not least in a brief list of reports that must not be left on the shelf to gather dust, is the Commonwealth Policy Studies Unit paper Deepening local democracy in the Commonwealth prepared by Malaika Scott and published in November 2004.

Again this report is a remarkably upbeat and practical analysis of addressing the challenges of deepening democracy locally. In his preface Carl Wright states "Many governments are pushing forward the boundaries of democracy by experimenting with new forms of inclusiveness and representation, seeking to create a truly grass roots democracy. Of course in many countries the local democratic system is far from perfect. Just like central or provincial government can fall prey to rigid elites, inefficiency remoteness and indeed corrupt practices. There is however no excuse for denying citizens local democracy: what is required is the instigation of the appropriate structures of performance measurement, participation and accountability with the aim of improving and deepening the local democratic structures. There is now a growing realisation that having effective and democratic local structures is critical to achieving the Millennium Development Goals: local government provides a key vehicle for the pursuit of pro poor development strategies.

What emerges from these three key texts is a sense of meeting the challenges of a common project of developing and deepening democracy. The focus is on experimenting with the democratic process. In recent years the number of UN countries classified as generally democratic has been slipping back – particularly in Africa. But increasingly it is understood that there is no universally applicable democratic template to be superimposed on states and communities. Rather all



societies are to be engaged in a mutual project of developing democracy and increasing participation in the twenty first century. As the Secretary General put it in his forward to Restoring Faith in the Political Process a report of a CPA-UK Branch Seminar “Developing trust and confidence in political systems is both a personal and a professional challenge for all of us working in democracies”. Recently for example women from Northern Ghana working on “democratic participation” visited Leeds to help liven up and revive a tenants’ and community association on a council estate now led by women who learnt from the Ghanaian experience. The North learning new democratic practises of engagement from the South.

But we have moved on from the over confidences of “the end of history“ declarations in 1989. In the new world of the twenty first century we face entirely new international conditions. We need a global agenda to address conflicts terrorism, climate change eliminating poverty fair trade, urbanisation and the increasing role of faith communities. As Andrew Galea Debono commented on Commonwealth Day (13 March 2006);

“With members of the media constantly under fire across the Commonwealth, religious intolerance on the rise, democratic elections and political reforms being undermined, illegal arrests of those who oppose their governments and civil liberties being infringed upon by new anti-terrorism legislation, it is legitimate to feel that democracy needs more than a simple “visit to the doctor” to improve its health.”

While this comment is addressed to all our countries, it implies that we all- including politicians should be doing more to address it in the context of our brave new world.

In 1945 there were only 35 functional states, characterised by universal adult suffrage, arrange of political parties providing candidates to choose between and a transparent election procedure. Since then the number had quadrupled – though not all the 192 members of the UN today can be recognised as democratic states. Further there is not one simple democratic template to apply, nor even a single, universally accepted voting system. The plurality of election systems itself suggests that despite its early inauguration in Athens and Sparta, the demonocratic project is far from complete. It remains, locally and internationally, an organic process and one of change and experimentation in all countries.

A few years ago, visiting Ghana, I met a person working for a British NGO on developing democratic participation. She revealed that before taking up her post she had been a student in Leeds living in my constituency, but had never taken any interest in politics or elections because she felt it was all a bureaucratic waste of time. Of course there is much work still to do here in Britain to develop and deepen real participatory democracy, engaging people locally from the base upwards in budget setting and law making, but just as it not the case that democracy is burnt out in Britain, equally it is not possible to say that we have developed a fixed, foolproof system to be applied periodically at election time.

As DFID’s recent White Paper Eliminating World Poverty : Making Governance Work for the Poor spells out, while tackling corruption at all levels is a crucial task, building up democratic institutional structures is as vital. Too often as politicians we leave the basic work to NGOs and government officials. The result is often a focus on elections themselves as an end game. All their energies go on organising



registration, placing them well on Election Day, getting the ballots in the boxes properly counted. It is as if technically shepherding the voters through is the key to the system, making sure people vote properly on the paper the primary objective. Organising in political parties, arranging candidate interviewing and selection procedures, introducing campaigning methods (that include funding transparency and accountability) are often neglected.

To be fair that is a real task of solidarity for practising politicians to undertake. We need to work much closer together with other political parties, comparing notes and techniques with fellow politicians and prospective candidates, consulting on methods of deepening and extending participatory democracy and accountability. Far too infrequently whether through the IPU or the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association do we get down to the nuts and bolts of political democracy building in its fullest, most practical sense? Organisations such as the Westminster Foundation and Parliamentarians for Global Action (which is more theme-based than the IPU or CPA) can help parliamentarians get together and focus on the democratic project, but much more can and should be done to utilise the practical organisational skills and experience of our MPs and Councillors at home and abroad to put politics back into democracy building. Just as eliminating corruption cannot be left to good accountants; neither can democracy development be left to good civil administrators. Turning up to monitor the efficient administration of elections as international observers should be the icing on the cake. We need to be more involved internationally long before that time. If governance is to work for the poor we have a duty as individual politicians to contribute to democratic development rather than leaving it to others.

The environmentalist Edward Schumacher suggested in the 1970s that the current task was to “Think Global and Act Local”. It became the watchword of the ecology movement. But today’s interconnected world is far more complex. The global is now local and therefore we need to think and act locally and globally at the same time. In my own neighbourhood of inner-city Leeds, there are 27 Nationalities and at least 23 different languages. The tensions and conflicts represented across the globe are now present cheek by jowl in our terraces and tower blocks. For example the terror bombers were deeply concerned about the conflict over Kashmir (where their roots were three generations back). Our local international communities consist of many members of the 54 Commonwealth countries. Increasing urbanisations in all our cities suggests that the new focus on localism (including the local provision of goods and services) as spelt out in Deepening Local Democracy will be the crucial locus of experimentation in democratic participation. Building up local communities, deepening local democracy in the neighbourhood will be the challenging project of political social and economic activity in the twenty first century. As well as an international indeed commonwealth makeup of our urban neighbourhoods a new sense of mutual responsibilities implies caring for the sick, elderly, and children in our localities, rather than escaping behind a closed front door to watch Neighbours on TV in Australia. The aftermath of the discovery of the terror bomb factory in Leeds demonstrated the capacities of the local people who were strangers and from different racial, ethnic and religious backgrounds to take in their neighbours at that time of stress whoever they were. Fostering community support at times of crisis can be complemented by local commonwealth interchanges, visits and exchanges between ordinary people in our commonwealth countries to spell out in practise that the Commonwealth founded on respect for each member, recognising individual



national identity and differences is capable of fostering genuine practical local co-operation. Two men, one from India, one from Pakistan who walked on opposite sides of the street and never spoke for 23 years because of the differences over Kashmir, were seen together at the time of the Pakistan earthquake crisis. When asked what had brought them together, the man from Pakistan replied “I saw a truck on TV from India taking blankets and tents into Kashmir and so we have decided to call the war off here in our street because this is where we now live and are likely to die.”

So far from being an old fashioned club of aging parliamentarians who get together for ceremonial occasions, the Commonwealth is actually a lively subversive organisation at ground level characterised by a wide range of informal groups and contacts between peoples. The commonwealth is a structure of integrated good communications, common languages, legal and administrative organisations but it is also a network of informal personal interactive relationships. It is today a complex interlinking network not only of intergovernmental organisations, sub-official agencies and personal family and friends networks. It is an International web of relationships, alliances and contacts across 54 Countries that cut across the old bloc politics of geo-political attitudes of the past

The Commonwealth now includes the world’s largest democracy, thirteen of the world’s fastest growing economies and the fastest uptake of IT and ecommerce and mobile telephony. It includes centres of the financial systems in London, Sydney and Toronto; it includes over 1 billion Christians and half a billion Muslims and most of the world’s Hindus. Young people travel regularly – or migrate to deepen the familiar connections. The question today is whether the Commonwealth can use and develop its existing networks, formal and perhaps more significantly informal to expand its ambitions and activities, to deepen its reach and move forward the mutual project of developing democracy. It could be a catalyst for the international democratic sustainable future. The Commonwealth network could be the response to Professor Stephen Hawkins pessimistic advice that for people to survive on this planet some of us will have to move to other stars. We could prove in practise , globally and locally that we can still live tigher here and can join together to spell out the deep meaning not just of the common good but of a shared “ common wealth”.

ENDS

Rt Hon Don McKinnon, Commonwealth Secretary-General

Check Against Delivery

I am delighted to accept my second invitation this year from the Foreign Policy Centre – proof, I hope, that I said at least some of the right things when I attended their seminar on ‘Enhancing the Rule of Law in Africa’ in May.

I have always appreciated the Centre and its work, even from the months before my election as Secretary-General when in 1999 you published an excellent pamphlet on ‘*Reinventing the Commonwealth*’ by Kate Ford and Sunder Katwala.

I remember one line in particular: ‘there should be nothing shocking about debating the idea of Nelson Mandela as the next Head of the Commonwealth, or considering



Delhi or Lagos as the seat of the Secretariat.' I remember with a smile that many of the old guard were asking just 'where do these people come from?'

So thank you to Stephen Twigg and the FPC, and also to Hill & Knowlton, well known to many of us as one of the world's top communications agencies.

Thanks too to John Battle, such an energetic Chair of the UK All Party Parliamentary Group on Overseas Development, whom I also remember as a very committed Minister on our Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (which I'll come on to discuss).

Now there aren't too many situations in British national life where we can safely say that 'Leeds United' is in the vanguard of solving our problems... but in the world of development we certainly *do* expect great things from him (the MP for Leeds West), and from Hilary Benn, who as well as being the UK Secretary of State for International Development, is MP for Leeds Central.

Our starting point today is UK Prime Minister Tony Blair's address at Georgetown University in Washington on 26th May, the third of a series of foreign policy speeches.

Introducing how we could meet global challenges, the Prime Minister asked us first of all to acknowledge that we do indeed live in a truly globalised world where a challenge or a crisis for one is a challenge for all. Second, he asked us to acknowledge that we do indeed share the same global values of liberty, democracy, tolerance, justice – values which unite nations, faiths and races; values which can inspire and unify. In the context of combating terrorism – but widening his message to address all the issues of our time – issues of poverty, of climate change, of world trade – Mr Blair was unequivocal: 'the answer', he said, 'is the universal application of global values'.

Mr Blair in fact rightly questions whether we all understand the same things by those values, and whether we all want to go down the same collective route to reach them. Today isn't the time to debate those values. All I say now is that yes, these *are* absolutely the values which I and the Commonwealth espouse.

He went on to look at what we call the 'architecture' of international organisations which hold the keys to safeguarding and delivering on those values. He made big proposals:

First, on reforming the UN. Making the membership of the Security Council more representative, giving the Secretary-General more power, streamlining and strengthening humanitarian and development operations. I completely concur. I am also interested in his further suggestion that we need a UN Environment Organisation.

Second, on reforming the World Bank and the IMF – de-politicising the latter and making its decision-making more geographically representative; keeping the former focussed on poverty. Again, I concur.



Third, on establishing a multilateral system for the safe enrichment of nuclear energy; and fourth, for the G8 continuing to meet as the G8 + 5, with China, Mexico, India, Brazil, and South Africa (two Commonwealth countries in there...). I concur with both.

So do I promise you total concurrence today? No.

My first query is with the Foreign Policy Centre's preamble for this seminar. It talks of, quote, 'growing calls for a reformed United Nations system' as if they will neither be heeded nor work. They simply *must* work. The UN is the only place in which the world can come together as one, and make change for the better. It is the world's stage. Period. We are agreed that we want to update and improve the institutions of 1946, to allow them to meet the needs of the world of 2006.

You also talk of, quote, 'the increasing irrelevance of the World Bank in meeting today's global development challenges'. Not so. Under Jim Wolfensohn, the Bank completely reoriented itself towards meeting development challenges. Under Paul Wolfowitz it remains the foremost development agency, ahead of any of the UN agencies, the EU and any bilateral programmes. Again, it *must* work – we must make it work.

I can safely say that I believe in almost all of these multilateral and regional organisations. Only a month ago I was in Brussels lauding the EU for its development work, and telling it where I think it could do better. I give the same reasoned messages to the African Union, CARICOM, SADC, the Pacific Forum, and more.

Which brings me, in a necessarily roundabout way, to our topic today: the Commonwealth, its own brand of multilateralism, and how it might catalyse change.

Here, I stress that the Commonwealth can catalyse change in others – but it has no wish, or capacity, or indeed 'right', to supersede them.

So my purpose today is to tell you more about how we in the Commonwealth 'do' multilateralism.

Here are four ways in which multilateralism is the centre of our being. I would go as far as to say that it is the source of our authority. That is not the authority of raw power – military or financial. No, it is better seen as the moral authority of 53 states which have come together and committed themselves to defined values.

First, multilateralism gives us the power of the combined voice.

Take just one example: on the eve of last December's WTO Ministerial in Hong Kong, the 53 Commonwealth countries spoke as one on the subject of multilateral trade and the need for a true 'development' outcome to the Doha negotiations, to let poor countries trade their way out of poverty. The result was the Valletta Statement that individual countries used in their own regional discussions in the WTO



Second, our multilateralism is enhanced by the fact that we speak the ‘same language’. Not just English as the agreed working language: I mean the shared language of institutions, parliaments, legal and education systems.

Third, it’s the multilateralism which gives voice to those who are not often heard. 32 of the 53 are officially ‘small states’, all burdened with typical problems – environmental degradation, crime, under-development, isolation, lack of critical mass, and more.

As I said, in the Commonwealth, Tuvalu has every bit as much of a platform as India. We are all freely and equally associated: Britain is as important as billion-strong India and 10,000-strong Tuvalu.

Fourth, it’s the multilateralism deriving from the power of family – of people who have come together almost by accident – who may, in family parlance, have sibling rivalries and barely thought-about distant cousins, but who still feel bound to an organisation, its beliefs, and its opportunities.

So how does this Commonwealth multilateralism manifest itself? Again, here are four ways.

First, the Commonwealth works by invitation not intervention, and we have built up our reputation as a trusted partner as a result. Never more so than in what we call my ‘Good Offices’, carried out by me or a small group of my Special Envoys, who are invited into situations where the future of democracy in a particular member state, for a variety of possible reasons, has come under threat. In highly sensitive situations, access is often granted to the Commonwealth, where it’s denied to others.

We have deployed our Good Offices in the last year in Cameroon, The Gambia, Guyana, Kenya, Swaziland, Tonga, Maldives. As a result, in the last year or so Swaziland has adopted a constitution, Guyana has held peaceful elections, and Cameroon is about to adopt an independent elections commission.

Second, we have the unique forum of a biennial retreat for Commonwealth Heads of Government. It was Pierre Trudeau in 1971 who got Heads to agree that they would never come to Meetings with prepared speeches, nor with any civil servants. It’s a hot-house for business: I mentioned the Valletta Trade statement which was hammered out in a lively debate among the 53 leaders at the Malta CHOGM last November

Third, we hold each other accountable, to the principles which we formally committed to Singapore in 1971 and Harare in 1991 – those global values of the Blair Georgetown speech. Just as the Heads of Government Retreat is one of the oldest types of peer review mechanism, so too is what we call the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group, or CMAG. Unlike the UN Security Council it meets at ministerial, rather than officials’ level. All decisions are made by consensus. CMAG can suspend members from the Councils of the Commonwealth: it has been prepared to do so, and those sanctioned have not taken this lightly.



In Nigeria, for instance, where suspension was followed by a return to democracy. Likewise in Fiji and Sierra Leone, where un-constitutional breaches in governance were followed, after great effort, by a return to democracy and order. CMAG currently has one country on its agenda: Pakistan. By virtue of its continuous review and monitoring, the Commonwealth is perhaps the key international political organisation actively involved in working for a return to full democracy in Pakistan today.

Fourth, we are far more than a Commonwealth of Governments. We are a Commonwealth of peoples, and very specifically of civil society organizations, who tend to be the most natural representatives of peoples' interests. You will know how some 90 civil society organizations worldwide bear our name. You will know that alongside our Heads of Government meetings we hold a People's Forum, with literally thousands of civil society organizations present and in active debate – not least with Heads of Government and ministers themselves.

These, then, are the elements of our Commonwealth multilateralism from which others can perhaps learn. I repeat the word 'consensus': all of our decisions are communally reached. Consensus is sometimes painful, and sometimes the places we reach are lowest denominators, not highest multipliers. But when our 53 countries take decisions they do not vote – they reach consensus. And it is our consensus decisions which have also seen the Commonwealth's fundamental values defended and extended, CHOGM by CHOGM.

We are in general passive with our multilateralism. It's for others – not ourselves – to say that we're a model and a replicable one at that.

But let me end by recounting how we do, sometimes, actively take our views on multilateralism directly to others within the international community.

Take the UN. A powerful research project coordinated by the Commonwealth Policy Studies Unit led us to make a bold statement on the need for UN reform at the last heads of Government meeting in Malta. Our argument was the same as Tony Blair's: it's just that ours had 53 countries behind it.

Take the whole global aid architecture. We presented a paper to Commonwealth Finance Ministers in Colombo in September. It asks: how can current ways of delivering aid and debt relief to developing countries work better? How to handle increasing aid volumes (which by 2010 will have doubled in 15 years to \$130 billion) and the hundreds of financing mechanisms (for instance there are 90 global health funds alone) through which they are delivered? How to build on the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness of April 2005 – signed by bilateral and multilateral donors, recipients and NGOs alike – and improve the way international aid programmes are aligned with national Government priorities, and coordinated amongst themselves?

We had run regional workshops in London, Bangladesh and Cameroon to find out. We looked at ways of shifting more aid out of bilateral programmes into multilateral;



and empowering recipient governments by giving them more comparative information about which donors to do business with, and which to avoid.

Take the European Union. I mentioned the constructive criticism I have offered the EU recently: above all wanting it to focus on poverty – not politics – in its aid programmes, and to use more local knowledge and sensitivity when it does so.

Take the regional organizations - the institutions of multilateralism - like the African Union, Pacific Forum and Caricom. We have built up their capacity: we have Commonwealth advisers in each.

Take the WTO, as the multilateral rules-based organisation which we think should protect and police world trade. We have placed trade experts in regional organizations and individual developing countries which are trying to get into the WTO. We carry out this project alongside the EU and La Francophonie.

Take the World Bank. We have worked well alongside both Jim Wolfensohn and Paul Wolfowitz – for example in encouraging them to take up the mantle of small states, and getting them to endorse our official measurement Indicators for youth development programmes. We were also the first to lobby them over the need to embrace the concept of multilateral debt write-off in the early 1990s, some years after it was us again in the Commonwealth who first launched bilateral debt cancellation through the HIPC initiative.

So we are not shy about preaching the gospel of multilateralism, Commonwealth-style.

I end where I began, with Tony Blair's global values which are at the root of all our global attempts at multilateralism. 'Liberty, democracy, tolerance, justice – values which unite nations, faiths and races; values which can inspire and unify.'

Those views are seriously under threat at the moment, as much in the Commonwealth as anywhere. Blair's speech, remember, was essentially about the response to terror, which so many now equate with religious fundamentalism.

We in the Commonwealth feel that fundamentalism is not confined to any one religion or any ideology. All of us – wherever we are – have multiple identities, which go *far* beyond faith. We believe that the roots of terrorism can be found in many things – in faith, ethnicity, culture, nationality, poverty, economic and political causes, and more.

It's this Commonwealth spirit of our multilateralism which makes us look at the principles by which societies and communities do and don't function. Not just the way people of different faiths and ethnicities sit side by side, but also people of different wealth, or sexuality, or politics, or more. We ask how true cultural integration works, even in the smallest ways.

So I leave you with the news that I shall leave this meeting at 5:30, and go and launch the new Commonwealth Commission on Respect and Understanding – an

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extraordinarily talented team, boasting two Nobel Laureates and under the chairmanship of Professor Amartya Sen – which we are asking them to show us *which* Commonwealth communities have found ways to bridge all the divides – and *why*, and *how* – and then *how* we can replicate those models within our 53 nations, and beyond. Heads of Government requested this of us at CHOGM Malta in November 2005; and we will report back to them at CHOGM Uganda in November 2007.

Again – in the words of the title of today’s event – this new Commission sees the Commonwealth ‘redefining multilateralism’ and ‘catalysing change’. Because it’s only through multilateralism, and organizations like the Commonwealth, that we can achieve global cooperation and action to face together the challenges of our common future.

Thank you.

ENDS