



This communique was prepared and endorsed on 8 November 1999 by the 220 participants who attended the Third Commonwealth NGO Forum, organised by the Commonwealth Foundation and the South African NGO Coalition (SANGOCO) and held at the Holiday Inn Durban, from 6 to 8 November 1999.

### **Preamble**

1. A woman with an infant and two small children is selling fruit on a sidewalk. Her husband is dead from AIDS; her children have malaria. A farmer stares at his rotting produce, under-sold by foreign imports. A disabled boy says he is tired of being hungry and beaten. A group of women escaping domestic violence wish they had access to a place of safety. Poverty is still the reality for most people of the Commonwealth. More and more citizens feel alienated from their governments who are often only seen at election time, and not seen to be addressing people's most significant problems. Globalisation not only disempowers, it also further impoverishes the many whose daily life is a daily struggle to survive. This is the reality of the people of the Commonwealth today. Urgent action is needed in the new millennium, now only 50 days away.

2. Citizens of the Commonwealth, speaking through the Commonwealth Foundation's Citizens and Governance report, and civil society organisations, meeting in the third Commonwealth NGO Forum, call on Commonwealth Heads of Government to respond urgently to the basic needs of the people. It is these people in their hundreds of millions that make up the mainstream of Commonwealth society. They also desire association for common good and participation in governance.

3. To meet these urgent needs we propose not just good government but good governance, a joint enterprise between elected governments, their citizens and their organisations. Governance, therefore entails a meaningful partnership between the state, civil society and the people who comprise it, and the private sector. Governance entails, especially, the state sharing with civil society the responsibility for policy making and implementation and all the partners being accountable to their constituencies, to each other and to the society as a whole.

4. Citizens and CSOs work in pursuit of a sustainable environment, human rights and gender, racial, and cultural equality. CSOs also seek to advance the interests of women, children and youth, the elderly, indigenous peoples, HIV/AIDS victims and the disabled amongst other socially excluded, marginalised and vulnerable groups. CSOs also work to promote a more humane society and good government itself. This work is now being assailed by the negative effects of globalisation, of large transnational corporations and certain international financial institutions.

5. We call on the 1999 CHOGM and the international community to work with civil society and the corporate private sector to put in place international, regional and national frameworks which will constrain the negative effects that globalisation and international capital have on the lives of our peoples.

6. We commit ourselves and call on other civil society organizations and their partners in government and the corporate private sector to engage in the highest levels of public accountability and ethics, as well as full transparency in all their activities.

7. We urge the corporate private sector to develop codes of conduct that reflect an ethos of social responsibility.

8. We recognize that these demands embody a new consensus and a new model of development, requiring serious changes in perspectives and values, and the need to confront powerful existing

forces.

9. Given the 1991 Harare Commonwealth Declaration, other previous declarations of CHOGM, the theme for the 1999 CHOGM, which focuses on people-centred development, we put forward these recommendations, together with a plan of action, confident that the Commonwealth Heads of Government will rise to the challenge.

### **Recommendations**

10. The Third Commonwealth NGO Forum urges Commonwealth governments, civil society organisations, including NGOs, community-based organisations, people's organisations, grassroots groups, and citizens to:

- ensure practical realisation of the social, cultural, economic, and political development of Commonwealth citizens, with particular reference to the need for gender equity;
- develop new models of responsive, consultative, participative, and democratic governance, which actively facilitate citizen action and which accept dissidence as a vital ingredient of a healthy democracy;
- develop mechanisms that facilitate individual and collective citizen action in governance, with adequate resources, to enhance the participation of citizens in their communities, with particular reference to poverty reduction;
- develop meaningful partnerships among civil society organisations and between civil society, government, and the corporate private sector;
- seek to ensure that states implement their international obligations both to their citizens and to people in other countries, to promote and further human rights and social justice, and to create a climate of mutual tolerance, acceptance and respect;
- urge governments to engage with the corporate private sector, citizens and civil society to deal with the harmful effects of globalisation.

11. In particular the 1999 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) is urged to:

- endorse the above recommendations and to call for reports from governments and the Commonwealth Foundation on the progress of civil society development at the 2001 CHOGM.

### **Action plan**

The third Commonwealth NGO Forum recognised that the achievement of 'good societies' requires citizens, civil society organisations (including non-governmental and community-based organisations), national governments, and inter-governmental organisations working individually and in partnership with one another. It urged the following actions by them.

### **Citizens**

It is the responsibility of citizens:

- to take action wherever they can to improve their own economic, cultural and social development, and to promote self-reliance;
- to model civil behaviour by acting with integrity, sharing with others, caring for others, promoting sound values, paying taxes, following just laws, and guiding the next generation;
- to participate actively in affairs that affect them by acting in association with others, building on values of mutuality and solidarity, to create resources, facilities, and vibrancy in their communities;
- to build leaders in their communities by identifying and nurturing people to play roles where they can take responsibility for themselves and others;
- to re-engage with public issues, and learn and where necessary reform the tools of the trade of politics by taking part in public forums, citizens can pursue their self-interests, challenge injustices, and help to create responsive governance;

- to engage in public affairs, to debate and to negotiate, and thus to obtain some of what they want from politics.

### **Civil Society Organisations**

It is the responsibility of all civil society organisations:

- to affirm the centrality of citizens' actions in creating a good society and to educate people in issues relating to active citizenship;
- to play a central role in making citizens aware of their rights and responsibilities and prepare citizens to exercise those rights and undertake those responsibilities;
- to build community leadership through access to information, training, and technical assistance;
- to play essential key roles in promoting a strong, capable and responsible civil society able to work in partnership with an active and responsible state;
- to develop effective means of accounting to their constituencies.

### **Governments**

In view of the unequivocal obligations taken by all States under universal human rights instruments and the Harare Commonwealth Declaration 1991, it is the responsibility of governments to:

- uphold just constitutions and assure that fundamental human rights are guaranteed and observed so that citizens can participate effectively in governance through freedom of expression and the media, freedom of association and assembly, and the right to information in all its forms;
- ensure the full practical realisation of human rights including economic, cultural and social rights of all people and distributive justice, with particular attention to historically disadvantaged groups such as women, children and young people, indigenous peoples, minorities, human rights defenders, older people, environmental rights and sustainable development and the right of persons with disabilities and those living with HIV/AIDS and other life-threatening diseases to fully participate without discrimination in all aspects of life within their societies;
- accept primary responsibility for meeting basic needs for all and for poverty eradication and education recognising that poor people are in the majority in the Commonwealth which entails social mobilisation as the centre piece for all poverty eradication strategies and provision of resources of support mechanisms, independent of governments, to foster broad based organisations of the poor;
- foster peace and security at all levels of society by pursuing policies of denuclearisation, demilitarisation and conflict resolution, from the domestic through to the international levels;
- work with civil society organisations and citizens to ensure equal opportunities and even distribution of resources and to deal with the ethnic and religious conflicts which owe much to unequal distribution of resources and power;
- work with citizens, civil society organisations and the corporate private sector to manage sustainably, the natural resources that are central to the economic, social, cultural and spiritual well-being of all current and future Commonwealth citizens;
- recognise that all peoples of the Commonwealth, including those living in non-independent territories, form an important component of the Commonwealth family and that their participation in Commonwealth events should be secured;
- sustain physical, natural, and human resources, and invest in infrastructure, including roads, transport, irrigation, electricity, and other factors that enable citizens to develop culturally-appropriate economic and social ventures;
- create an enabling legal and political environment for the smooth functioning of civil society organisations;

- work with civil society organisations as respected and equal partners in policy formulation and implementation, monitoring, evaluation and by providing independent funding for civil society organisations;
- develop and implement new measures which involve civil society organisations and citizens to curb and stamp out corruption and ensure transparency and credibility;
- devolve power but only with appropriate resources and where it meets the aim of citizen participation in local governance;
- involve citizens in governance. Strategies, structures, and systems to share information, consult people, and encourage debate need to be implemented. Public leaders and officials need to be visibly accountable for their actions;
- support for citizen action in the community;
- value, encourage and facilitate such action wherever possible by cutting 'red tape' and providing finance as appropriate.

### **Inter-governmental organisations**

It is the responsibility of intergovernmental (including Commonwealth) organisations to:

- support efforts to enhance citizen participation and action, and achieve greater cooperation between citizens, governments and intermediary organisations, through the provision of technical assistance, information and finance;
- review existing models of good practice. Support or help to build new ones through the development of selected pilot projects;
- champion good governance and people-centred development at all levels. Support the development of strategies to minimise the deleterious effects of globalisation, including those resulting from the policies of international financial and trade organisations and multinational companies.

### **The Corporate Private Sector:**

- Good governance is the joint responsibility of players in the public sector, the corporate private sector, and civil society, on national, international, multinational and multilateral levels. All these actors should accept some responsibility for ensuring that the corporate private sector develops and implements codes of conduct that reflect an ethos of social responsibility. At the national level, this would also create an environment conducive to building partnerships between civil society, the state and the private sector.