COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE

on

FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE AND TRADE

SEMINAR

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CANBERRA

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The Commonwealth of Nations in the 21st Century

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[9.38 a.m.]

CHAIR—I extend a very warm welcome to you all and officially declare open the proceedings this morning. As you would know, the proceedings are being recorded by Hansard so there will be a *Hansard* record of our discussions when they are concluded. I would like to in particular welcome each of our guest speakers, including Mr Malcolm Fraser, former Prime Minister of Australia. A number of high commissioners and representatives of foreign governments are here, and we extend a welcome to you and other distinguished visitors.

This is one of a series of public seminars that have been held in the parliament, some under the auspices of our committee. The recent 'A New Beginning' seminar was held in conjunction with the United Kingdom. We were not involved but others were. It is a way in which we hope to promote general interest in foreign policy and defence subjects, and perhaps give them a publicity which otherwise they would not attract.

This particular subject, the future role of the Commonwealth, was of course addressed by a committee of the House of Commons in Westminster not so long ago. It is one which does affect Australia and all members of the Commonwealth in that we need to look at it to determine to what degree the Commonwealth is an important organisation for Australia in the aftermath of its remarkable success in having played a major role in ending apartheid in South Africa.

The seminar format does have some limitations, but I think it does provide a venue for discussion and debate. Hopefully, it will enable us all to get a cross-fertilisation of ideas, from which it will be our intention to produce not only the *Hansard* record but perhaps also some recommendations which can go to the government and be presented to the parliament. We are very pleased that other members of the parliament are here and, as I said, a special welcome is extended to members of the diplomatic corps.

The Prime Minister, John Howard, and Alexander Downer, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, have each sent their express apologies. Unfortunately, neither will be participating. Also, regretfully, neither former prime ministers Keating nor Hawke have been able to join us, although they were invited to participate in presenting Labor government views on the Commonwealth.

What I hope will happen is that we can have a fairly wide ranging debate, and as a result look at the Commonwealth in all its different dimensions. I know numbers of you are here from some of the different dimensions. David Tonkin is here, after having been ill for a little while. It is great to see you back, David. I know that others of you represent different dimensions of the Commonwealth, and I am sure that the discussions will be worth while.

The committee wants to explore certain issues. First, of course, is the relevance of

a Commonwealth in this post-Cold War period. I think it is particularly so at a time of globalisation, with the extent to which there are other international fora within which debates occur. I think it is also worth asking if the notion of a Commonwealth of Nations is out of date and, to the degree we now have members of the Commonwealth who are not former members of the British Empire, is that a way that we should go? It is worth while also asking how wide the network that the Commonwealth represents should be, and how Australia can best participate in that network.

The Commonwealth has changed in many ways. It was originally the British Commonwealth. The expanding membership has raised a number of important issues about the nature of the ties of the organisation and its future direction. I think all of us are interested in the CHOGM meeting in Edinburgh and in decisions on future membership, including that of Fiji.

For the current 53 members, representing one-quarter of the world's population, the Commonwealth is unique. Of the 53, 32 member countries are republics, 16 are constitutional monarchies which recognise the Queen as their head of state, and five have national monarchs. Member countries range across the spectrum in terms of their size, economic development, political outlook and affluence.

It is with great pleasure that I welcome Malcolm Fraser as our first speaker. Malcolm, as we all know, was a very distinguished Australian Prime Minister. He certainly needs no introduction to anybody in Australia or, indeed, overseas. He has extensive experience, and not only with the Commonwealth. In his present role as head of CARE he has a unique perspective to put on the provision of international aid and some of the exigencies that have drawn the United Nations and others into reactions, peacekeeping and otherwise. As a member of the Eminent Persons Group he has been, and still is, involved in many affairs of the countries of Southern Africa. It is with a great deal of pleasure that I invite the Right Honourable Malcolm Fraser to speak on the subject 'The Commonwealth: an overview.' Welcome back to the House in which you played such a distinguished role for so long.

[9.43 a.m.]

THE COMMONWEALTH: AN OVERVIEW

Mr FRASER—Thank you very much, Mr Chairman. High commissioners, excellencies, members of parliament, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for the invitation to take part in this discussion.

Talking about the future of the Commonwealth is in one way difficult, because it is an enormously pragmatic organisation and it adjusts to whatever the circumstances happen to be at the time, but I think it is important to understand the way it has changed. It is important to understand what it has been able to achieve, as that gives a good idea what it

might be able to do in future years.

The transition from an empire to an association of equals is really an extraordinary one. Some countries, when they first became independent, wanted to tear up everything that reminded them of the past; but in the Commonwealth, former parts of the empire did not want to do that. They wanted to preserve the Commonwealth connection, and that itself says something about the earlier empire relationship.

One of the first tests for the Commonwealth came quite near the beginning, when India was determined to be a republic. How can you be a republic and also in the Commonwealth? There is the problem of the Queen: what is the status of the Queen? There were furious arguments about this, and no clear solution for quite a while. Then there was a very pragmatic solution. India is a republic, and everyone recognises Her Majesty as head of the Commonwealth: a quite simple solution and a very adequate one. Many other countries have followed that path in the years since, and maybe Australia will in one of the years to come.

South Africa posed another major problem. Whether there had to be or not, there was a break with the past. As originally conceived, those in the old white Commonwealth would have said that the internal affairs of any country were not a matter for general discussion and not a matter for broad based Commonwealth decision; but apartheid in South Africa put that principle to the test. That particular principle fell by the wayside and other principles, more important to the survival and to the strength of the Commonwealth, took its place. Again, that shows how the Commonwealth can adjust; how it can change.

You can ask what is the theory and what is the practice of the Commonwealth. I do not really think there is much point in talking about the theory, because the practice will adjust to the circumstances of the time. I believe that over quite a long period now the Commonwealth has shown that it can act reasonably, sensibly and on a basis of principle. In some ways, the Commonwealth reminds us of Chesterton's paradox when he talks of things that cannot be, but are.

When I first became Prime Minister, the most common question was: 'Why pay any attention to the Commonwealth? It is an anachronism. It has something to do with empires; it has got nothing to do with today.' I think that question is asked less often now than it would have been asked in the middle seventies.

At the beginning, consultation would have been regarded as an adequate reason for the Commonwealth to exist. I do not think that is an adequate reason now. On many occasions the Commonwealth has shown, and the majority of members have shown, that they want to have some sort of action following from the consultation if it is an important and a substantive issue. I would expect that to continue to be the case in future years.

There is one country in the Commonwealth that has a unique role, compared to all

the rest of us, and that is Britain. In Britain there has been a very difficult argument, which probably should not have been difficult: do they choose the Commonwealth or do they choose the European Union? In relation to the European Union they seem, with all respect, not very able to make up their minds with clarity and precision, and that same murkiness has involved their attitudes to the Commonwealth over recent years. That is partly because too many people have looked at it as a choice, when if you look at it from a different perspective you see that there did not have to be a choice. It does not have to be a choice for Britain.

In many ways, Britain's role in the Commonwealth can be stronger if they are a strong and active member of the European Union than if they are not. In the European Union, I am sure Britain as a significant member of the Commonwealth would carry greater weight than a Britain without the Commonwealth. For members of the Commonwealth itself, easy access to one of the major states is obviously an advantage; and easier access to a major state playing a great role in Europe, if Britain ever decided to do that, would be an even greater advantage than easy access to a Britain with a very equivocal attitude. So looked at from a different perspective, I would see Britain playing a more vigorous role in Europe as being indeed of greater benefit to the Commonwealth, and both associations would be strengthened if they were both operating with some kind of vision and some kind of strength.

There is a very significant value to the United Kingdom in the Commonwealth membership. It is access to member states—access which a lot of other countries, including the United States, would envy. In pretty well every Commonwealth country, the British High Commissioner would have access over and above other foreign representatives. In addition to that, there are many practical advantages. Britain's trade with the Commonwealth as a whole gives Britain a very healthy trade surplus. Britain's trade with the Commonwealth countries of Africa also provides a very healthy surplus. When people were talking about Britain's trade with South Africa being a reason why Britain did not want to support sanctions, Britain's trade with the rest of Africa, and especially with Commonwealth Africa, was of much greater significance than Britain's trade with South Africa itself.

What is the legacy? What are the common threads? The first, of course, is language. That has been punctured a little with Mozambique becoming a member of the Commonwealth, and it may be punctured further if other countries which are not former British colonies were to join the Commonwealth, as some would like to. But for countries like Nigeria and Papua New Guinea, English is the only common language which makes it possible for members from different tribes and groups within those countries to talk to each other. It is the beginning of communication between different regions of Nigeria and different tribes in Papua New Guinea, and that is a significant thing. At any rate, it has been significant up to now. When Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings are held, there are no translators. The character of the Commonwealth would be changed quite significantly if you got to the stage where you had to have half-a-dozen translators for

people speaking many different languages.

While sometimes it is honoured far too much in the breach, rule of law is another common characteristic of many Commonwealth countries. Democracy is also a common characteristic—more common today than it was 10 or 15 years ago. The Commonwealth has a stronger capacity to promote democratic values in countries where democratic values are weak than perhaps it has had. But we need to remember also that India, as the world's largest democracy, despite many difficulties has clung to the democratic principle with fervour, with vigour and with passion. That probably would not have happened if it had not been for the previous 400 years. In a sense it is a major achievement within the Commonwealth and is to the great credit of India that India has, despite many economic difficulties over the years, clung to democracy so firmly.

The Commonwealth is unlike most other international organisations, and maybe unlike any other, because at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, heads of government spend some time getting to know each other. There is value in that. If you know a person you can overcome problems, you understand how he thinks and how he will react to certain issues, and all of that promotes a closer degree of cooperation. It is something that does not happen in the United Nations organisation, for example. It probably happens in the G7 or the G8, if that is what it now is, but in other major international organisations it does not happen in the same way it does within the Commonwealth.

But what I have just said has to be qualified, because in the last meeting, or maybe the last two meetings, the whole period for the meeting was shortened; and the retreat, which was the time when informal discussions took place and people really got to know each other, has also been shortened very significantly. I think that is a retrograde step. In a moment or two I will mention one or two positive examples where things could have gone seriously wrong if Commonwealth leaders had not known each other and had not been able to speak to each other across the oceans from a point of view of understanding and trust.

The 1971 principles remain as valid today as they did when they were first adopted. The first was to promote representative government institutions and freedom under the law. I am not using the exact words; I am summarising the words. The second related to fighting racial discrimination; the third was to take actions to diminish the gap between rich and poor; and the fourth concerned international cooperation to promote peace, tolerance and justice within the Commonwealth and beyond the shores of the Commonwealth. Those principles are just as relevant, just as important and need their advocacy and support today just as much as when they were first adopted in 1971. The circumstances and the application of the principles in terms of countries and geography will obviously differ, but they are important things to remember.

Perhaps I could say a word or two about how some of this has worked out. The

first example or case study is Rhodesia. Margaret Thatcher, very shortly after she became Prime Minister, was due to go to Tokyo and then come south to Australia. Lord Carrington, as Foreign Minister, was due to come with her. He rang me from Tokyo and said he was going to leave me with Margaret Thatcher alone. He was not coming as he had some business to do in Hong Kong. I said, 'But you are going to be needed.' He said, 'No, I am not going to be needed because Mrs Thatcher will never change her mind if there is more than one person in the room, and if I am there, there are going to be at least two people in the room.' He knew my mind on the subject and I knew his. He said, 'If you are going to have any influence, you want to kick the notetakers and other people out of the room and have a discussion.'

When Mrs Thatcher got to Canberra and the old corner office in Old Parliament House—the Prime Minister's office—that is exactly what we did. We had a discussion for about two hours. We agreed on half-a-dozen principles which had been written and explained in different cases which were relevant to Rhodesia. At some point in that discussion I said, 'If you want to do that, you are going to have to pull your entire army out of Northern Ireland and send them to Rhodesia. If you want to enforce a decision which is unacceptable to the participating parties, the only way you can enforce it is to fight it, and I do not know if you have got enough divisions to do it.' But she did not want to do that. She did not even want to send a single policeman. So she started looking for different solutions.

In the end, she accepted, most important of all, that you would not have a solution—and she certainly wanted one—unless you had something which all the parties could agree to. That of course was the first step in being able to build on agreements at Lusaka. But after two hours in getting to this point, I said, 'Will we call in our people and get them to write down what we have agreed?' Then I made a serious mistake. I said, 'Well, Prime Minister, would you like to tell our people what we have agreed?' She went right back where she was two hours earlier, and it took another two hours to get her back to where she had been two hours earlier.

Then she went out and made a speech at the National Press Club as though none of that conversation had taken place—bullets and ballot boxes—and I did not mind that at all. The press all wrote that the discussions with Mrs Thatcher had changed, and her views obviously had not changed. But we had it on record by that time, so I did not mind what she said publicly.

There was another example in relation to Rhodesia. When the elections were taking place, the information coming to me through our observers, led by one of our most able diplomats ever, McSharne, was that Mugabe was going to win on a canter. When he went around, he would ask a simple question: 'It has been difficult in the last few years, but has there been anyone who would ever help you if you were really up against it?' The answer was, 'Oh, yes, the local Mugabe man.' When you go to village after village and that is the only answer you get, the result in the ballot box is going to be pretty obvious.

But then there was a fair bit of dirty pool. This had so disturbed one or two African leaders that they very nearly condemned the elections before they took place and said they would have to be aborted. The dirty pool consisted of using government helicopters to side very much with one of the parties in the poll and to do other things using the defence forces and the official apparatus to try and sway the ballot in one particular direction. Messages were sent by various means, and it was possible to get that stopped.

I told the African leaders, principally Julius Nyerere from Tanzania, that if the poll went wrong I would join him in condemning the poll after the result. I said, 'Why condemn it when the result is going to be what you want it to be, and what it will be if it is a reasonably free and fair election?' But if I had not known Julius Nyerere, if we had not been at some meetings together and met informally, there was no way I could have had that conversation with him. I knew it was totally in confidence, and he did, too. He also knew he could rely on it. Messages were got to the British to stop the dirty pool. They did not know we knew about it, but when we do not get told things at the top, we have lower level contacts who do find out what is happening. That is always important in a relationship between a smaller country and a larger one. But I do not think that kind of relationship can be established in any other organisation worldwide.

In South Africa, while the Commonwealth group in 1986 and 1987 failed in its primary task of achieving a negotiation at that time, it did set out the principles and actions that both the ANC and the government would have to take before negotiations could begin: the things that both sides would have to do to establish that minimum level of trust without which negotiations cannot take place. If you look at those principles somewhere in our report called *The negotiation concept* you will then find that that is precisely what the ANC did and precisely what the de Klerk government did at a later point to establish confidence between the parties.

Another significant success for the Commonwealth was Namibia, which we do not hear very much about; but since independence it has governed itself as well as anyone could have expected, and maybe better than many people expected. It is a country that is very definitely an independence success.

I am not sure that the actions the Commonwealth took in relation to Fiji were really justified on the merits of the case. I understand why they were taken, and I think it was necessary because of India's position, but I very much hope that now, with the constitutional changes that have occurred in Fiji, the Commonwealth will show some generosity of heart—which I expect them to—and warmly welcome Fiji back to the fold. It would have been better if that issue could have been handled without going to the lengths of expulsion or suspension of membership.

In all of these examples, especially over Rhodesia and South Africa, feelings at times between different heads of government got quite strong—quite acute—but one of the

remarkable things about the Commonwealth was that no matter what was said, no matter how obstructive sometimes they might have thought the British government was being, nobody ever wanted to leave the Commonwealth. It could have been something over which the Commonwealth would fall apart. That demonstrates that heads of government at least believed that the Commonwealth was an association of value, not just in helping to resolve the problems of Rhodesia/Zimbabwe or South Africa, but over the longer term; and nobody wanted to prejudice its longer term survival by saying, 'Unless this happens I am going to walk out of the Commonwealth.' Nobody ever said that, to my knowledge, and it would have been contrary to the way people behave within the Commonwealth context.

Over the years, during various trade negotiations, the Commonwealth has done more to help developing countries, especially developing countries in Africa, than the specialist United Nations body designed to help them, UNCTAD. If anyone wants to save a bit of international money, UNCTAD could be abolished and nobody would feel the difference. On earlier occasions, the Commonwealth had been of very significant assistance to developing countries in trying to help them through very difficult world trade negotiations. That help and assistance has never been adequate, because the developed world still discriminates very heavily against trade from developing countries, especially Africa. Even in the last round, a lot of those problems were not addressed.

The Commonwealth has aid programs and technical cooperation programs which would all benefit from extra resources being made available. We live in a time when foreign aid has been continually reduced over the last 15 years, especially by all English speaking countries, so the prospects of the Commonwealth being able to expand its own programs probably look pretty remote. But the programs are good, they are helpful, they are economically run; and if there was money, it would be worth putting it in their direction.

The question of new members has been mentioned. This again says something about the strength of the Commonwealth. There is Mozambique—not an English speaking country—and there is Cameroon. If the Commonwealth threw its doors open, quite a lot of countries would want to join. I certainly do not and would not advocate that path, because we want to look very carefully at proposals that might mean that we had to have interpreters all around the room. I think keeping the value of a one-language discussion, a one-language weekend for the retreat and whatever, is well worth while.

Mr Chairman, you asked me in particular to say something about the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings. The agendas are very carefully worked out, with the secretary-general visiting most countries well beforehand to try and work out an agenda which has the approval of the majority of Commonwealth countries. The time which is going to be devoted to the meeting is also determined well ahead on that basis. I have already said I think it is a pity that time has been cut down. I hope it will not be further cut down.

The Commonwealth in the past has had great and important issues in front of it: Namibia, South Africa and Rhodesia, for example. I do not think it has to have great issues to be a very worthwhile and a very useful organisation. You never know when major issues will not arise. They can sometimes occur quite quickly and unexpectedly, and then the Commonwealth needs to be able to react. It is capable of influence.

You will remember the Auckland meeting was just a day or two after some people had been fairly summarily tried and executed in Nigeria. At the Auckland meeting, Nigeria was shocked at the treatment that it was given; and for a few weeks after that meeting, Nigeria really believed that that sanctions might be placed upon it and it might have to change. But then the impetus for change died away, as Nigeria came to realise that the Commonwealth had had a good rugged meeting, but nothing further was going to happen. That is probably a pity; and there are other Commonwealth countries where I believe the Commonwealth should take a firmer view of how the governments are run.

The Commonwealth has taken a view in relation to what was Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe. It has taken a view internally in relation to South Africa. There are other countries where it ought also to take a view—countries where even if there is an occasional vote, it does not necessarily mean very much. There are now two or three countries which are very close to the edge. One of the reasons they are close to the edge is that not sufficient international pressure, not sufficient donor pressure, has been placed upon them to make necessary changes.

When I was in government we began regional meetings of the Commonwealth, which the party of my good friend Barry constantly opposed and ended when they had a chance. But I still think those regional meetings served a useful purpose. The region covered the Pacific, South-East Asia and South Asia. My rationale for having that meeting, which was warmly accepted by all the participants, was that in the major meetings the very small Pacific island states in particular—there are small states in other parts of the world that also belong to the Commonwealth—do not really participate very much in the debates. The kinds of issues they are concerned with are different from the ones that will be on the global agenda of the Commonwealth, and therefore they are present but do not really take part. So to have a forum which will have issues related to their needs and concerns I thought was important. Also, I thought it important that they get a better chance to meet some other people from South-East Asia and South Asia so they could see how vigorously Malaysia and Singapore had grown and developed, and they could learn a little bit by association, something more of the things that need to be done if they are themselves to make progress.

Those meetings were ended but there is one lasting result from them: there is a representative office in New York which enables those small island states to have representation and to be told about things that are on the agenda of the United Nations. Before that office was established, they had no representation at all and they could not afford it. Some of them probably could not afford to send even one person to the UN for

even a couple of weeks. A number of people helped to pay for that office initially. I have obviously got out of touch with how it is paid for now, but Australia paid a significant part of it in the early days. I know that that office is now very highly regarded by South Pacific countries.

A reasonable amount of good work is done within the Commonwealth by non-government organisations and I think more could be in the future. Perhaps the most notable, which we do not hear very much of in Australia, is the Royal Commonwealth Society for the Blind. The work it has done in Africa is pioneering and enormously important. Commonwealth youth exchanges—it is always good to have youth exchanges and it would be very useful to have more, to have the program expanded. The Royal Commonwealth Society for the Blind seeks to promote knowledge and understanding of different Commonwealth countries and within the Commonwealth as a whole.

The Commonwealth Press Union and the Commonwealth Journalists Association try to promote principles of a free press and how a free press ought to be run within the Commonwealth. They are not always successful. After the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting here in the very early 1980s, a couple of African countries came to me and said they were just going to allow free press in their countries but, having been in Australia two weeks, they had seen how the free press operated in Australia and there is no way their countries could survive a free press. So seeing a free press in action did not win many admirers on that occasion.

The Commonwealth could play a greater role in education. People do not learn very much history at school, and I suspect history of the Commonwealth is something which is not taught too much anywhere. If curriculum were developed which taught about the Commonwealth, its evolution and what individual countries have done and been able to achieve, you could write the curriculum so that each country was the centre for itself. It might lead to a better and to a wider understanding of what the Commonwealth does and what it can achieve because you are certainly not going to learn that through the newspapers in any country. There are a few journals that write something useful about the Commonwealth but it is generally people who have practical experience of the Commonwealth who know and believe that it is something of value.

The continuing role to promote democracy is important. A role to promote better use of the environment is important because, for many Commonwealth countries, a degraded environment is a very serious and expensive problem. To promote better population policies is also a matter of major importance. I suppose the problem is not only an African problem. It is a problem in many parts of the world, but rapid population growth in many parts of Africa has resulted in decreased output per head because the population has been growing at three to four per cent while GNP has not been growing as much as that. It is still a major problem and in most of these countries there is a very serious problem of inadequate women's rights which could be much more strongly promoted. In too many countries they still cannot sign contracts and they cannot own land.

In Africa I think women do 60 per cent, or maybe 70 per cent, of all the agricultural work, but in many of those countries they cannot own a farm, they cannot sign a contract and they cannot sign a business deal. That is unreasonable and if we are prepared to break, as we have broken, the principle about not interfering in the affairs of other countries on major issues like apartheid, I would have thought the rights for women was also a major issue.

From time to time great issues will occur and the Commonwealth has, up to this point, been able to adopt a principled stand which I think has been useful, but continuing the daily business of the Commonwealth is a rationale which makes sense in itself.

One thing which I should have mentioned earlier is that the Commonwealth does have a very useful role—and I think fulfils the role much better than any other organisation—of monitoring elections in certain countries that ask for that to be done. I have been involved in one of these exercises in the recent Pakistan elections. I accepted the task only because the secretary-general was prepared to broaden the terms of reference and they were not the traditional terms of reference in relation to the Pakistan elections. I said I would only be interested if the group was able to make recommendations that might lead to the more effective operation of the newly elected government. It really gave us open slather to say anything we liked about the way Pakistan operated.

We obviously wanted to have some degree of effect and so we were reasonably tactful in the way we put things, but Pakistan was a country which had not shown any respect to its own parliament. Prime ministers had governed by decree, getting the president to sign documents instead of debating bills through the parliament, so the whole culture needed changing if democracy was really to operate effectively and as, in theory at least, many Pakistanis would have wanted it to operate.

Nearly everything we put under the expanded terms of reference was adopted about six or seven weeks into office by the new prime minister, so I hope that will set a standard for future ventures where there are things that can very clearly and obviously be done with a little outside support to give those who want reform a little more encouragement.

That is about the past. I think in many ways the future is a continuation of the sorts of things the Commonwealth has been able to do and to do well. It is an organisation which clearly I believe to be one of significant value. It ought to be supported.

CHAIR—Thank you very much, indeed, Mr Fraser. There is no doubt that few have had the insight into the operations of the Commonwealth that you have enjoyed. From that, your perspective really is particularly helpful. I have a range of issues that I would like to raise out of what you said, but I thought perhaps we might open it up. If anyone at the back would like to make an input, please do so. There are two microphones available there. Do any of the others sitting around the table have any particular question

they might like to ask?

Perhaps before we do that, I might just put forward one of the things that has always interested me. In your opening remarks you referred to the attitude of Britain and the quandary as to whether she was going to become more a participant within the European Community or within the Commonwealth. It seems to me that one of the very close links we used to have were the Commonwealth preferences. I remember that when you and I were involved in the international trade negotiations, the Americans always used to find it rather hard to accept that there was a lingering Commonwealth preference.

The role of the Commonwealth now has moved far from that type of Commonwealth preference. Yet it seems to me that the world has also been taken over by bodies, whether they be APEC, NAFTA, AFTA, the ASEAN Free Trade Association, or Mercosur in the southern American countries. There is a similar body in the SADAC countries. There are more and more regional groupings looking at that preferential system of trade.

I wondered whether you might perhaps have some observations about how you have seen the emergence of the Commonwealth, which seems to me to be more involved in politics and sport, in broad categories and perhaps in aid and traditions of freedom of press and the rule of law. Before I pass it to the floor, I wonder whether you would like to offer any observations on that subject.

Mr FRASER—I do not think a trade association has to be confined by geographic boundaries. Most are, and for very obvious reasons. But if APEC, for example, is to be successful in establishing an outward-looking trade association that lowers barriers for trade between its members and also between its members and the rest of the world, there is no reason why other people could not sign on to that. I think a number have indicated that they would like to. But if APEC does achieve that objective, it will be the first trade association that is not restrictive in terms of outsiders.

The North American Free Trade Association is no more a free trade association than the man on the moon. I do not know about other Commonwealth countries, but it has certainly led to tighter restrictions on Australian trade both to the United States and to Canada, which, of course, we were told earlier that it would not do, but we knew it would.

Africa, above all, is the continent that has been bypassed in free trade negotiations. Africa has not had a powerful enough voice of its own. With all respect to my European friends, the Lome convention, which covers a lot of Africa, former French colonies in different places and the Caribbean and a number of members of the Commonwealth, is a very restrictive and narrow arrangement. Where under principles of free trade you might have total access to European markets, the Europeans say, 'We will give you a market that is 5,000 tonnes of this or 10,000 tonnes of that.' They have made countries feel grateful for it.

Some of the absurdities are as follows: Africa buys more sugar from Europe than Africa is allowed to sell to Europe; Africa buys more meat from Europe than Africa is allowed to sell to Europe; you are allowed to sell cut flowers if they do not interfere with cut flower production within Europe during the European season, so there is no competition; and under the rule of origin, you can make a beautiful boat in Nigeria and if you used American glue, it would not be eligible for importation into Europe because Europeans say that all the non-Nigerian materials have to be European. If they had used European glue, it could have got in. But they used American glue because they thought it was better. They are all positive examples and I think they are all still relevant.

I think UNCTAD has totally failed. There is room, and if there were resources, for the Commonwealth to expand its role and to argue for better access for countries that have pretty inadequate access. I basically believe in free trade, but I do not believe in unilateral free trade. It has got to be a reciprocal arrangement. That has not been the view of Australia for most of the last 15 years anyway. So that is one area. If it was the Commonwealth moving forward, that might be difficult because Britain would find it very difficult with their European relationship. But if you can work through APEC and if other members of the Commonwealth from South Asia or even Africa were prepared to abide by the rules, why shouldn't they be members?

CHAIR—Any contributions from the floor?

Mr BARRY JONES—I would like to ask you about the relationship of Australia and India in the Commonwealth context. I apologise for my late arrival. I listened very carefully to what you said and you mentioned many countries, but India was not one of them.

CHAIR—In defence, he did very early. But please continue.

Mr BARRY JONES—I am sorry. When you reflect that in terms of population India is easily the most populous of all the countries and that, as the old joke says, there are the three Cs that appear to be in common but which in fact prove to be barriers in some way—common language, cricket and the Commonwealth—why is it, do you think, that under the previous government and I think, indeed, under your own government there was more emphasis on pursuing links with China rather than with India? While superficially you would think there were very strong reasons why we would have tremendously strong linkages with India because the democratic system is far more advanced than in most other places in the Asian continent, yet somehow we have not really reached as close a relationship with India, I would think, as we have with China. In other words, has the Commonwealth played any role at all in helping to bring countries like Australia and India closer together?

Mr FRASER—I think quite definitely yes, because in the Commonwealth regional meetings that were held in Australia, India was one of the members and India was very

deliberately asked to be one of the members for some of the reasons you mentioned. It is the most populous democracy. But then when you looked at some of the problems of development of a small Indian village, they were not unlike some of the problems of development of a small Pacific island, but in India the whole thing was magnified thousands of times, of course. I think Australia's relationship with India has been pretty good.

Mr BARRY JONES—Compared to China?

Mr FRASER—I will tell you another story. In the Heads of Government meeting held in Melbourne, Aborigines were campaigning, probably against the Commonwealth Games to be held in Brisbane, and I thought at some point that somebody would say something about it in the conference because everyone was being bombarded with a lot of written material as well as requests for interviews and whatever. Tupuola Efi of Samoa raised it on the closing session.

Before I had a chance to say anything, Indira Gandhi said, 'Before our chairman replies, I would like to say something.' She said she had read the documents that had been given to her, she had had her people ask questions of the relevant people in Australia about Australia's programs in relation to Aborigines and she really felt it was similar to problems that India had with hill people, where they had special programs for some people not so able to fit into the generality of Indian society. Then she cited two or three African countries where similar problems existed. She said, 'In all our cases, we have special programs designed to try and help and to get rid of disadvantage.'

She had looked at the programs that Australia had in place and thought they were the best of any country that she had mentioned, including India. She said, looking at me, 'Have I described the problem accurately, Mr Chairman?' She had been just waiting. She had obviously prepared herself and she had not wanted me, as chairman, to be embarrassed and also because I had a good relationship with her.

I think at different times India and Australia have had a close relationship, but it has not been worked at consistently, as I believe it should have been. I think we have both missed out as a result. If the regional meetings of the Commonwealth had not been abandoned, the closeness of the relationship probably would have been continued.

Mr GEORGIOU—Mr Fraser, I may have missed something. Did you give people an insight into how the retreats worked in terms of the dynamics and structure?

Mr FRASER—Only very briefly. The Secretary-General goes around earlier with ideas about the agenda, or writes initially and says what he is thinking. You reply to that. Then he comes around and talks about it, with a draft agenda, and then the agenda is pretty well agreed as worked out. In the formal sessions, you just work through the agenda in the normal way, unless an emergency issue arises, as the Ogoni killings in Nigeria did

at the Auckland meeting. The whole agenda will be put aside until they have dealt with it. If there is a particularly difficult issue, where one or more heads of government are being difficult or hard to get on with, that issue will be put aside for the retreat. There will be private discussions involving different groups and different points of view on the issue in an effort to try to get agreement where there had not been agreement.

Mostly those attempts work. It is probably a compromise. But on the occasions when that has been difficult, it has worked adequately. There were two occasions that I was involved in. One was the Gleneagles meeting, which came to an agreement on sporting relationships with South Africa. A couple of countries were refusing to go any way down the track of having sporting sanctions but, in the end, they went along with them.

The other was Lusaka, where there was obviously some difficulty in getting agreement on how the issue would be handled post-Lusaka, and some difficulty in getting agreement on what would be in the agenda, and what Mrs Thatcher would or would not accept in the agenda. But, in the end, there was enough in the agenda to point the way to the future, which established guidelines for what was going to happen at the Lancaster House meetings which took place subsequently.

It is all fairly informal. Difficult issues are dealt with pragmatically and by consultation. The retreats have worked because even the most powerful member of the Commonwealth has not really wanted to be left totally on the outer by all other members of the Commonwealth. But you need a little time for that. It is a difficult process if you have people who do not know each other reasonably well.

Dr HILL—Mr Fraser, obviously the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting is the top decision making body of the Commonwealth, but it has always struck me as a bit of a pity from the Australian perspective that we do not get more coverage or information about the meetings of other ministers which take place under the auspices of the Commonwealth.

If you look at the work that is done in the secretariat, I suppose you could say that most of the Commonwealth secretariat officers are spending their time working on other issues than the ones that finally emerge in the CHOGM communiques. I am thinking about the Commonwealth ministers of health, education, agriculture, science, and women's affairs. They hold meetings which have a lot of policy making impact, particularly when looking at this from the perspective of the Pacific island countries; they find these meetings very valuable. It strikes me that Australia probably does not give a high enough priority to these other meetings of Commonwealth ministers. I would like your opinion because, in some of the literature which comes out of the secretariat, Australian policy making is very often praised and given as an example for other countries to follow. I am thinking particularly of the area of women's health and some of the other policy making areas on women's issues—for example, legal ministers meetings on violence against

women. Yet the Australian follower of these things finds great difficulty in getting hold of information about what the Commonwealth is actually doing in these areas. I wonder if you would comment about this.

Mr FRASER—If the Commonwealth Heads of Government meetings themselves do not get much reporting in the press, it is not surprising that those other meetings also do not get much reporting in the press. I think that is a very valid point and it is something that the Commonwealth Secretariat would have within its own power to arrange, to make sure that its publications and communiques from those various working groups are more widely disseminated. The other way of doing that is to get on to the appropriate ministers in Australia and get them to do it, at least as far as Australia is concerned. I agree with you; a lot of good work is done in those forums and it is a pity for it not to be available.

Prof. PATIENCE—I am a professor of politics, also at Victoria University. My apologies for following on a colleague. Mr Fraser, I was impressed with your account of the Commonwealth. I would like to ask you to look a little into the future, particularly in terms of Australia's relations with Asia. Clearly, Asia is vitally important to Australia's future, but Australia is noticeably lonely in global affairs now, and our increasing isolation from our major allies in the past—Britain and the United States—I think is noteworthy. Australia as a lonely country is a very serious problem as we approach our relations with Asia. I note, particularly, our ongoing difficulties with Dr Mahathir, if not with Malaysia; our isolation from the Asia-Europe summits and, increasingly, our loneliness in terms of environmental issues.

Could not the Commonwealth, and Australia's active role in the Commonwealth—a more active role—help us in negotiating an appropriate place in Asia, an appropriate role in Asia? Could not our involvement in the Commonwealth be radically improved? For example, I note that at the very recent Commonwealth ministers of education conference Australia was represented at a very junior level, at an administrative level—our minister was not there—whereas most of the Commonwealth countries did have ministerial representation.

Mr FRASER—I am not up to date with the kinds of representation that Australia has been giving in recent years to specialist meetings of the Commonwealth. I would like to think that any government would take the meetings seriously, because it does provide one of the means for networking which is very important.

I do not completely agree with your interpretation about Australia's loneliness. But, in the aftermath of the Cold War—if I can put your sentiment in these terms—I think our relationship with Asia is going to put our United States relationship under increasing tension, because I am not sure that their interests and ours will necessarily coincide. When it was combating a perceived communist threat there was no argument about it. But the American role in Asia is not always a constructive one, and when it is not we ought to be

prepared to say it is not. That has happened a bit in recent times. I think it is too early to say what direction the current British government is going to take. But maybe it is not beyond hope that they will show a greater interest in the Commonwealth.

I do not like labouring the point, but if the regional meetings of the Commonwealth were still taking place, you would have had a meeting of India, Ceylon, Malaysia, Singapore, Papua New Guinea, the Pacific Island states and Australia and New Zealand. That is a fairly good weighting of South-East and East Asia as Commonwealth members. It would have provided further opportunities for us to get to know our counterparts in these countries perhaps better than we sometimes have.

The customs in Asia are so different from ours. In many ways they are a much more polite society than Australian society and if we behave in Australian ways to Asian heads of government, we cannot expect to be liked for it or respected for it.

We are working better at our relationships with Asia and I hope our membership of various forums is not going to continue to be blocked by Malaysia. We have to work at it and we have to be confident through our own actions about Australian security in the future. I do not think it is possible to rely on past associations with Britain or even the United States because even in the most likely circumstance which I could see involving difficulties for us, I do not think America would care two hoots in hell about. That might be wrong, but I do not think so.

We should not feel lonely. Feeling lonely is a sign of lack of confidence, lack of assurance, lack of objective, and I do not think there is any need for Australia to feel lonely. If partners are Asian instead of American, so what! Pauline Hanson might not like that but—

CHAIR—Just following on from Professor Patience's comment, isn't one of the problems with our role in the Commonwealth that while there is a Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting, each individual state is also a member? Consequently, to the degree to which you meet within the Commonwealth, you weaken the voice of the federal government vis-a-vis state governments in Commonwealth fora. As probably the most significant of all the roles which we are called on to play in a federal government is our relationship with the states, the Commonwealth becomes a less effective voice for Australia than in other fora where Australia as the federal government is the only foreign voice.

I would be interested to get your observation on that because it does seem to me that, if you look at Professor Patience's comments, with ministerial meetings and others, there are problems that occur simply because we are only one of seven voices instead of being the voice for our whole country.

Mr FRASER—But other countries are federations also. Other countries have state

administrations. I do not think that creates a difficulty.

CHAIR—Canadian provinces are not representative at Commonwealth parliamentary meetings. There are only representatives of the federal government of Canada in—

Mr FRASER—Are you sure about that?

Mr TONKIN—Yes, they are.

Mr FRASER—In the Commonwealth forum when you are trying to work out practical policies for different issues, I do not think that that is really a handicap. For a lot of Commonwealth issues, the British break up into seven countries so that they get seven votes.

Mr TONKIN—Nigeria is federal, as is Malaysia and Canada, and there is one other—

Prof. GERTZEL—Mr Fraser, I must thank you. You talked about the informality of the Commonwealth, and it comes out very clearly. But I want to take you back to the beginning of your address when you made the very important point that the Commonwealth now operates in a very different global environment brought on by globalisation itself. A lot of us feel that globalisation has in fact increased the gap between rich and poor—both countries and peoples. It seems to me that one of the great characteristics of the Commonwealth is that its members do associate together in a more intimate fashion than is possible in the United Nations and other bodies of rich and poor countries.

I would like to ask you whether you have any ideas about how the Commonwealth members, if they so wish, can use the Commonwealth—its structures and institutions, including the kind of committee work and policy making work that Dr Hill has mentioned—to contribute more to the eradication of poverty. This is not just a naive question. It seemed to some of us, again, that the recent Simons review of Australian overseas development assistance has not given significant attention to the role that Australia can play in relation to poverty eradication, which that review has recommended should be the sole objective of our overseas aid, in terms of using the Commonwealth. Could you say something about that? How can we promote that goal? How can we exploit Commonwealth membership to pursue that role? The review does not really take that up.

Mr FRASER—I do not think the review did, but we are living, unfortunately, in an environment where foreign aid votes worldwide have been cut for 15 years, especially in the United States and English speaking countries. They have been cut more than appears from the figures because more things have been bundled into the aid vote which were previously in other votes.

Countries like France, Italy and the Nordic countries have been much more generous and are much more generous still than most English speaking countries. In this environment where AusAID, for example, is scrambling to maintain programs in areas of priority importance, with the budget restraints it is very difficult to see how countries might put more money into Commonwealth technical cooperation, which broadly covers the Commonwealth's own aid programs.

I would like to think that more money is available. As chairman of CARE Australia and from my involvement with CARE International, I think the reduction in the aid vote is an absolute disgrace, especially in the United States, where the aid vote is now 0.075 per cent of GNP. They will claim it is 0.15 per cent, but half of that goes to military aid to Israel and Egypt, so it is not really developmental aid. That grossly distorts the figures for the entire rest of the world, obviously, because of America's weighting.

How to turn it all around? We are all richer than we were 20 years ago—not as individuals but the donor countries are all better off. Why we find it so much harder to do what we used to do with a sense of generosity—you will probably all be surprised that the year of the highest foreign aid vote was the last year of the Menzies government. You probably would not have expected it would have been in his term, but it was.

Prof. GERTZEL—May I ask a supplementary. Aid is not just about money, and poverty eradication is not achieved simply by overseas financial aid. It is about policies as well. I was thinking of this in terms of Dr Hill's problem. If we send a very junior person—although junior people are often far more able to answer the questions; forgive me. I am thinking in terms of using that relationship that you have talked about—the understanding between countries—to transfer the debate about poverty into a policy debate about education, health and so forth. I suspect it does happen up to a point, but how can Australia and the Commonwealth members use that relationship to take up these issues, not just of the percentage of GNP?

Mr FRASER—In a policy sense, there is certainly a great deal that could be done. In case there is a misunderstanding about my mention of aid, it needs to be defined as—this is my understanding anyway—as something that contributes to sustainable development, which can involve a whole raft of issues, including education, including women's issues. I think I mentioned that there were some Commonwealth countries which have got off a bit too lightly. Donor countries should be speaking a bit more firmly or taking actions a bit more firmly where policies are clearly being thoroughly counterproductive.

It would be very useful to put some of these issues on the agenda for the major meeting of the Commonwealth to get some decisions that would then encourage the other meetings to take place and to flesh out the decisions so that some action could be taken, and all of that certainly could be done. You could be talking about issues like education, the whole range of women's issues, what does or does not contribute to sustainable

development. It would be a major achievement for the Commonwealth and something very useful for Australia if Australia, for example, were to promote discussion on these kinds of issues at the next Commonwealth conference.

In relation to the poorest of the poor countries, it has been a question of going backwards, not going forwards. Environment is very much involved, with more land being degraded as each year passes, especially in some of the Pacific islands and especially in Africa.

You are quite right, it is not just a question of money. It is very often a question of a particular country's own policies that are inadequate or wrongly directed—or, in some cases, blatantly corrupt. But there are countries that are blatantly corrupt that still attract a great deal of foreign aid and, in my view, should not be getting it until they clean up their own behaviour.

Dr BARRACLOUGH—Mr Fraser, you compared the work done by the Commonwealth to assist developing countries with that of the work done by UN specialist agencies. Could you please elaborate on that and perhaps give a couple of examples of how the Commonwealth can actually do a more effective job than some of the UN agencies?

Mr FRASER—I can only do it very broadly. The example I used was trade. In Sonny Ramphal's time, a number of African countries had been very much helped in not the last round of trade negotiations but the one before and helped to put their case. The Commonwealth arguments were rational and sensible. You need to understand that many African countries did not even attend these meetings even though they were very important for them. Nigeria would probably have been the most frequent attendee, but then not completely regularly, so things were not followed through. Sonny Ramphal made sure that some of the basic work was done that would enable them to argue their case effectively.

UNCTAD was still imbued with the theories of the 1950s, with quite outdated economic and development policies that had not worked and would not work. Above all, UNCTAD had the view that no country in Africa had a trade problem because of the Lome convention. The second in charge of UNCTAD was a Frenchman, and France, of course, is one of the significant countries that framed the Lome convention. I believed then, and I believe now, that the Lome convention was a total fraud consummated by Europe on developing countries who were meant to be beneficiaries of it.

It would take too long to give chapter and verse, but it occurred in all sorts of things. I gave a couple of examples earlier about beef and sugar. You could give other examples relating to cotton. I am not sure what today's situation is, but certainly in the late 1980s Egypt did not turn any of the best long staple cotton in the world into material because they could make more money by selling it in raw form to Europe. If they tried to

make it into material, they would not have been allowed to sell any of it to Europe. They only had access for raw cotton, so they sold their long staple cotton and bought cheaper cotton to make up into garments for Egyptians. That is just another example of what went on.

UNCTAD should have been able to point out these deficiencies in trading relationships but had never attempted to. I got to know and understand some of it when I was doing a report for the UN on Africa's commodity problems, which really turned into a report on Africa's economic problems. But commodities and trading relationships were a major part of it. I had major problems with UNCTAD because they kept saying, 'You're wrong; they've got access to European markets for anything they want to sell.' It was UNCTAD that would not look at the facts. We had to dig out the facts against their opposition. I am not aware that they have done anything useful since then. They certainly have not done anything useful up till then.

CHAIR—Malcolm still has his prejudices, as we all have.

Mrs INALL—Mr Fraser, I wondered whether you would like to comment on the possibility, in view of the declining resources available to governments in aid, as you have pointed out, of whether perhaps more use could not be made of the NGOs that exist on a Commonwealth-wide level. That approach has been completely absent over the years. People like myself have been trying to fight for this for 20 years. We are hoping to achieve this by going to CHOGM in Edinburgh. Do you think there is any possibility that this might eventuate?

Mr FRASER—I would like to think that it would, because CARE would then be one of the beneficiaries of it. The Australian government has just given a certain quantity of aid to North Korea through the World Food Program. I am hoping that the Australian government might say that they would like that aid to be administered in North Korea by an Australian NGO, because we have all the approval from the Korean government to do that. When I say we, CARE Australia has. AusAID could say that to the World Food Program. Other countries, especially Canada, have said it repeatedly. Then we would be used for it.

But there is a dilemma here, because the World Food Program does good work and the UNHCR does good work, but they have to pay for their bureaucracies. They often do not implement programs themselves. If a government gives us money directly, the administrative costs are about nine per cent or 10 per cent or, at the maximum, 11 per cent. If we get the money through UNHCR, you have all their administrative expenses going on also. If it goes via a multinational agency to an NGO, which often happens, the total amount going in administrative expenses is probably upwards of 25 per cent.

So if you go straight to the NGO, you can get it done a lot more economically. But that creates a difficulty because you need UNHCR and you need the World Food Program.

Governments cannot give all the money to NGOs and ignore those agencies, especially those two and UNICEF. There are a number that do very good work, and they are needed. I think governments are a little bit torn between getting the maximum value for an aid dollar and also supporting international agencies that have, by and large, worked very well. With my CARE hat on, I would say, 'Give it to us.'

Ms MURRAY—Thank you very much for your very interesting outline of Australia's involvement in the Commonwealth and some of the workings of it. I was very struck by your mention of informality and how an ongoing relationship where people know each other and what can happen outside the formal meetings is so important, and linking that to the issue that was brought up about poverty alleviation. I wonder whether the fact that there is such a downturn in the funding of aid might not create an opportunity to, for a little while, do something else which is hard to get at. The Commonwealth could, through informal relationships, deliberately sponsor some kind of dialogue between those of us at various levels in our country who have had to work within political circles or the log frames of our aid agencies which require accountability back home, in which we have very good objectives for poverty alleviation.

On the ground with NGOs or within government or project managers or whatever, we know what we have to do and we know how to deal in a diplomatic sense. But often the people on the ground in the country and those who are providing the aid, the consultants and the others, find a way to make things work that we do not often put in the evaluation reports. The evaluation reports are what gets through and becomes policy and we say that we met our objectives. So it reinforces our strategies.

I think there is so much that could be gathered through people on the ground who worked with people in other countries—knowing each other and talking about what really worked in this relationship or what really worked in this village or in this area that get around the politics—but we had to talk about in a different way formally. If the Commonwealth could foster some fora where we all got together to talk honestly, I think we would learn a lot more about working relationships. We would learn a lot more about what we might have to confront in poverty alleviation. The fact that money is actually out of the way at present and is not part of the bargaining issues might be a wonderful opportunity.

Mr FRASER—A bit of that has been done, but not enough. I was at one Commonwealth-sponsored conference at Cumberland Lodge, which was talking about the work of NGOs and how different NGOs did operate in different parts of the Commonwealth, but I do not think that got down to the sort of grassroots information that I understand you are suggesting.

If you were going to do it, I would want to see the results of all that put in a book and published, brought up to date and published again so that aid workers in the field can learn from it. But even that takes money. Getting people together takes money because air

tickets take money. When something you might do might save half a dozen lives or enable a sustainable development program to be put in place in a particular village, how do you judge the priorities if you are going to spend more money going to a conference? They are not necessarily simple decisions.

I think some people have really given up on the question of resources simply because for so long funds have been reduced. But if we are going to have a reasonable world or a just world, resources are going to have to be increased. It is not in any of our interests to have an area the size of Belgium turned into desert in Africa every year.

Environmentalists get very upset about bad environmental decisions or too many trees being cut down by Malaysia or in the Amazon. I do not often find the same passion about the poverty of individuals—if we are concerned for a tree, we should be more concerned for people. Somehow we are going to have to try to change the public debate around so governments might feel that they will be supported if they increase the foreign aid vote. Unless that is turned around and unless it is turned around in the United States, the shortage of resources is really going to dominate so many things.

There can still be greater selectivity. You could rule out countries where governments are corrupt or pursue totally stupid policies or spend 40 per cent of government revenue on military expenditure when there is no threat. There are quite a lot of countries where military expenditure is designed to keep the incumbent in power and not designed to protect against a foreign enemy. More should be done. In many meetings in Africa this is a major problem. Africans have themselves said that pressure should be put on such governments to reduce military expenditure and to increase expenditure on education and other things that are going to help. While what you say is useful and practical, at the end of the day, there is still no substitute for a few dollars.

Mrs INALL—We were faced with just such a situation not long ago. I attended a Commonwealth meeting in Auckland at which representatives from every island state in the Pacific were there. One evening—it was very hot—I sat round the swimming pool with a couple of delegates from an island, which I will not name. I was told that they could really not understand why they were at this meeting at all. They had hoped to come to solve a problem which they had. I asked what the problem was, and they said, 'Global warming.'

I was a bit astonished because the conference certainly was not about global warming in any sense of the word. I said, 'That was not on the agenda'. They said, 'Yes, but that's our prime problem.' So I said, 'Okay. What's the problem?' They said, 'We can't go fishing anymore except within the lagoon and, because of that, the lagoons are getting fished out.' I said, 'Why can't you go outside the lagoons?' They said, 'Well, because of the weather, we can't see the tree any more.' That seemed a very strange answer. What tree? The tree is the only landmark that they can see so they do not get swept out to sea.

I said that there are such things as compasses. The senior delegate smiled at me. He had previously been Permanent Secretary for Foreign Affairs for that particular island state. He said, 'You obviously don't know very much about our economic situation. Our people cannot afford compasses. We are not a cash economy.' So I said, 'Do you mean to tell me that if you had compasses, you could solve the problem for your island population? They now had a threat of malnutrition and shortage of food because they are dependent on fish.

I came away and said, 'I will do something about that. We as a Professional Centre will try to solve this problem.' When you come to work it out, it is a sum of between $1,500 and $2,000. Believe it or not, I found a Rotary Club in Sydney that was prepared to raise that money, and I hope we are going to solve the malnutrition problem of one island state.

I do not wish to disagree with you, Mr Fraser, but sometimes it is a question of using the approach of Edward de Bono and a little bit of lateral thinking. The Commonwealth could promote that. My argument has been all these years: why are the professionals ignored when, in fact, we have the resources, we are the resource, and any country without professionals has no economic future in the 21st century anyway?

If people would only make themselves aware of what already exists that has been funded by the Commonwealth Secretariat and by the Commonwealth Foundation. For goodness sake, do not ignore us for 30 years. If the Commonwealth Foundation and the Commonwealth Secretariat would sponsor this, I have a resolution which I would like to come out of CHOGM this year, which would recognise what contribution professionals and the professional centres could make in various countries, especially in Africa. I have half-a-dozen countries in Africa which I would love to be able to assist. They should be taken notice of. Then I think we could marshal a whole heap of resources that do not need extra government expenditure but need people resources. It would be wonderful to have your backing for this, Mr Fraser.

CHAIR—Thank you very much, Mrs Inall. Do you wish to say a few remarks to conclude, Mr Fraser?

Mr FRASER—I think I have said enough, thank you.

CHAIR—Before we adjourn for morning tea, I wish to thank Mr Fraser very much indeed for coming and participating this morning. It has provided a very worthwhile opening to our dialogue.

Short adjournment

PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF THE COMMONWEALTH

CHAIR—One of the obvious aspects that Mr Fraser has drawn to our attention is the extent to which the role of the Commonwealth is by no means static. It is therefore of particular importance that we look not only at the role of those who participated, but the role played by those who from outside the Commonwealth, in the community and in the media, and from within the association of the Commonwealth, talk about the way in which the Commonwealth is seen by the public at large.

In this session I would like to welcome two people who approach the Commonwealth from two very different backgrounds. Michelle Grattan, who is a very distinguished and senior journalist in this city, has been editor of the local newspaper—if one could call it a local newspaper—but more significantly has been a leading contributor to the *Age* and more recently the *Australian Financial Review*. She has reported on a number of Commonwealth Heads of Government meetings.

Hugh Craft is president of the Royal Commonwealth Society. I would like to welcome you both today. We all look forward to your perceptions of how you see the Commonwealth from your respective points of view.

Mr CRAFT—Thank you, Mr Chairman. On behalf of the Royal Commonwealth Society I would like to commend you in your role as chair for convening this seminar and providing the opportunity to address these issues. I have been given a timeslot of 10 minutes, and I would like to make four or five basic points. These are not necessarily my views, but my observations.

The first point is that knowledge about the Commonwealth is appalling. This has been confirmed in two recent reports. The Symons report, focusing specifically on higher education, says that 'present levels of awareness and understanding of the Commonwealth can only be described as appalling.' The other is Derek Ingram's as yet unpublished report on the image of the Commonwealth, in which he says that:

For most people the Commonwealth is a blur—the most persistent image being that it doesn't seem to do very much; mostly a talkshop that produces very little action.

A couple of recent local stories given national media coverage in July would appear to reinforce these observations as being relevant to Australian perceptions of the Commonwealth. An early morning TV program carried the story of a young lady turned back at Heathrow because of a visa problem, incurring considerable cost. Her reaction was that she would have expected different treatment from a fellow Commonwealth country. The Commonwealth apparently is still meant to deliver special concessions for travellers.

On the same program a week or so later came the story of a Victorian coalition MP going public on his withdrawal from the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, labelling the CPA's activities as a waste of public money with very little positive to offer Australian politicians. A not-so-public example concerns a young student putting together

her speech here in Canberra for the annual Commonwealth Schools Speaking Competition. She was told by the librarian at her secondary school that the Commonwealth no longer existed, but had been replaced by the United Nations.

Clearly, we have a problem; Australia imbibes the malaise that seems to characterise the Commonwealth's image world-wide. It permeates widely and deeply through all sectors of our society, from the highly educated to the person in the street, through politicians and government policy makers. Back in 1963 R.G. Casey, later Lord Casey, writing on the future of the Commonwealth, said that the almost total lack of interest in the subject was 'reflected in the glazed eye of boredom whenever the subject was raised.' It would seem on the surface that little has changed in the ensuing 30 years.

The second point is to strike the contrast: because those close to the Commonwealth, including purists skilled in assessing international organisations, paint a vastly different picture. They would have us perceive that the Commonwealth is a dynamic, innovative and effective multilateral institution, playing a positive role in world affairs proportionately beyond its modest resources.

In his introduction to the 1996 *Commonwealth Year Book*, Chief Emeka Anyaoku, the Commonwealth Secretary-General, describes the Commonwealth of the future as being at the heart of the new liberation, at the forefront of world developments in three key areas: promoting fundamental political values, enhancing sustainable development, and building bridges across international divides. The Commonwealth is uniquely equipped to do so through its membership, which spans racial, religious, regional and economic differences, and with its well-tested consensual methods of conflict resolution and negotiation. As Sonny Ramphal, the former Secretary-General, once put it: 'The Commonwealth cannot negotiate for the world, but it can help the world to negotiate.'

But there are a number of continuing issues that impact adversely on Australian's perception of the Commonwealth that just will not go away. We need to face them and deal with them. Let me attempt to identify just one or two. The Commonwealth shares the public cynicism endemic to all international organisations. International organisations are sitting targets for criticism. It is said they cost too much, and they are riddled with patronage and corruption. What do they achieve? What is in it for Australia?

To ask what is in it for Australia is the correct starting point in the assessment of any foreign policy initiative. In this context, the Commonwealth does not deserve special pleading. It has to be judged on its performance. By all objective standards, it appears to have performed well. For example, on the political front over the past 10 years it has performed remarkably in southern African, and its seminal work on small states has given vulnerable microstates an unprecedented international profile. On the administrative front, the secretariat has been trimmed significantly. It has reduced its staff. It now operates on program budgeting, and by comparison to other international organisations it is a lean organisation. But this needs to be promoted. The message will be lost unless the

Commonwealth keeps its house in order and goes on delivering its mandate.

Another strong perception that will not go away—and we encounter this constantly in the Royal Commonwealth Society—is that Britain still runs what is widely termed 'the British Commonwealth of Nations', and that the Queen and the royal family have some exalted role to play in the Commonwealth that seems to overshadow the role of other Commonwealth members.

In the ranks of the RCS, we are often perceived even by our own members as champions of the status quo: the monarchy, the flag, the role of state governors and so on. Despite the fact that both in history and in practice the British Empire is long past and gone, the challenge to counter these perceptions with accurate information about the modern Commonwealth is still with us. The British have no problem with this. They play a very constructive role as an equal partner in the Commonwealth. I have often heard the British High Commissioner in Canberra here argue vigorously for Britain to be perceived as an equal partner in an association of 53 independent states.

A further conceptual problem is that to do with the Commonwealth as an institution. The number of nation states, as measured by membership of the United Nations, now approaches 200. The Commonwealth stands at 53, but when states in association with the Commonwealth are added it is considerably more: something like 70 nations compete in the Commonwealth Games.

In the early 1990s it was estimated that there were something like 300 international government organisations—that is, associations of three or more nation states. The number of international NGOs, ranging from the International Chamber of Commerce to Amnesty International, is expected to exceed 10,000 by the year 2000. Figures in 1991 said that there were almost 1,200 secretariats of organisations with intercontinental and universal membership. I quote these figures simply to illustrate the complex and competitive world in which the Commonwealth does its business: competing for issues, competing for funding and ultimately competing for relevance.

Unlike other postwar international bodies that proliferated in spectacular fashion to cater for specific purposes, the Commonwealth has evolved over a 50-year period. It has not been tailor-made in the interests of security, trade, culture or whatever. Given its origins and its evolution, it is therefore not surprising that a widespread perception of the Commonwealth is that it is an organisation seeking an identity, always seeking issues to give it international profile and cohesion.

Let me say a word about the role of government, which has been alluded to earlier. In terms of public perception, governments have a principal role to play as educators. The Commonwealth is bound to suffer when multilateralism is waning, when the aid vote is plummeting and when membership of international organisations is constantly under review. In a national environment that promotes insularity in foreign policy, where the

dollar return on trade and investment appears to dominate foreign policy making, and where true internationalism and humanitarianism are devalued in diplomatic practice, the Commonwealth along with other international bodies is bound to be a casualty.

In Derek Ingram's report he quotes a Canberra based high commissioner in discussions at the beginning of this year as saying that Australia had no time for multilateral activities, and that the Commonwealth was not alone in being unable to secure favourable official attention: Asian institutions and the UN itself suffered equally. Australia, he said, would only buy the Commonwealth role when it needed it.

The challenge here for organisations like the one I represent is to argue, to agitate and to lobby for a broad based commitment across the board to multilateralism and to internationalism as an indispensable and effectual tool in the pursuit of Australia's foreign policy objectives.

In conclusion, I make two specific suggestions. I believe that there is a role for those interested in Commonwealth affairs in Australia to promote further the role of the Commonwealth through two mechanisms.

First, is the creation of a Commonwealth resources centre. As has already been said, there is a dearth of relevant, up-to-date, well-targeted information about the Commonwealth in Australia, and one result is misinformation. But the more serious situation, in my view, is that anyone searching for substantial and timely material on the Commonwealth has great difficulty in coming by it. I know this to be true for journalists, teachers and students alike.

One initiative pursued by Malcolm Fraser as Prime Minister was the establishment of a regional Commonwealth office centred in Australia. It was ruled out at the time in the belief that Commonwealth interests were best pursued from London. However, the successful initiative of the New York office for Commonwealth small states has been remarkably advantageous, and perhaps the time has come for the Commonwealth to do a rethink of its representation in the regions. Very modest funding provided by national governments could achieve this.

Secondly, and lastly, a Commonwealth coalition should be formed in Australia. There is a formidable volume of goodwill towards the Commonwealth in Australia. Additionally, there is a veritable army of Australians with first-hand experience of the Commonwealth. These people have worked for the CFTC as agriculturists and economists, they have served on Commonwealth observer groups, they have participated as experts in Commonwealth consultative groups, and they have served as volunteers at the grassroots level in the Commonwealth volunteer program. Having worked on specific Commonwealth initiatives, they constitute a resourse of experience, commitment and skill that should be tapped to further the Commonwealth's objectives in Australia.

A Commonwealth coalition—a group of eminent Australian persons, if you like—should be formed in Australia to harness this resource as a political and promotional vehicle to sustain interest and commitment to the Commonwealth. Action along these two lines would significantly advance the values and objectives of the Commonwealth in Australia.

CHAIR—Thank you very much indeed, Mr Craft, and now we invite Ms Grattan to give us the journalist's perspective of the Commonwealth.

Ms GRATTAN—Thank you very much. I am going to broaden this topic somewhat which, as you know, is listed as public perceptions of the Commonwealth—indeed, broaden it quite a lot. This is mainly because I think the question of perceptions can be dealt with fairly briefly, especially in light of Hugh's very comprehensive presentation. As well as talking about perceptions, I also want to have a few words to say on the use of the Commonwealth to Australian politicians.

To start, however, with the perceptions, I agree with the thrust of what Hugh was saying. The public in Australia is not really very aware of the Commonwealth at all in any sort of detail. As Britain has increasingly come to be seen as less relevant to Australian foreign policy and Australia more generally, and as the Commonwealth has got a lower profile because it is no longer having to address some of the dramatic problems that kept it in the news for so many years, it has faded in people's minds, even in the minds of those who take a very active interest in foreign policy.

With less focus on the Commonwealth, some people have a fuzzy and inaccurate sense of the role of the monarch within it and even wrongly equate being a Commonwealth country with being a monarchy. I might say I would have thought that the Commonwealth Society being called the Royal Commonwealth Society does not necessarily help in that regard, so perhaps I could add the recommendation that the Australian Royal Commonwealth Society could drop the 'Royal' or substitute something else. There is a project for you, Hugh!

This is not to say that the Commonwealth has no use for Australia. I believe it still does for reasons that I will move on to. But I cannot say that I think either that it has a significant profile at present or, I must say, that its profile will get any higher. I think that, as Hugh was saying, a number of specific measures are useful at the margin, but I do not think that we should kid ourselves that there is going to be some transformation in the image of the Commonwealth in Australia.

In some ways, indeed, this low profile is a sign of a good situation. It means that the Commonwealth is not having to try to solve the extremely serious problems that it faced in earlier years. Ironically, success has brought something of an identity crisis. When the Rhodesian issue and apartheid were at their worst, the Commonwealth did have a very sharply defined public image because it was seen to be in the middle of these

problems—these crises—trying to get some sort of resolution. Now it is left with a rather more limited, if not mundane, agenda: at least mundane in the wider public view—of course the issues are important in themselves.

Stepping back I think we would all believe that it is better for the Commonwealth to have the image problem it has at the moment than to be confronted with the substantive problems that it was trying to address in earlier years, so the image problem is all relative. The Commonwealth itself, however, is clearly concerned about its profile and hence the Ingram investigation that Hugh talked about to assess widely opinions of the organisation within the member countries and to report on what might be done to reinvigorate this. Interestingly, this perception problem is something of a repeat of what the Commonwealth suffered in the early 1970s. Then it was worried about its image and it set up a public information program, so perhaps it just reinforces the point there is little new in politics.

On the more positive side, I think that what profile the Commonwealth does have in Australians' minds is reasonably positive—that is when they have got it straight. It is seen by many people as one of those generally good institutions, an organisation that does no harm and may do something positive by bringing countries together and standing for the right sort of values, and one that has, in its recent history, been significant in the resolution of some key issues of our time.

So what use is the 1990s Commonwealth for a country like Australia? About the time of the New Zealand meeting, or a little before, there was quite a considerable degree of questioning of this. I think if you went back to the writings in the run-up to the Auckland meeting, there was this note of 'Well, maybe it is all right but, really, it is not the centre of anything any more. It is not the main game for Australia.' Not that anyone in the then government was suggesting that we get out of it, but Paul Keating was obviously unimpressed with it. He saw Commonwealth meetings as too long and too frequent, and what is more he showed his frustration. He was instrumental in getting the meetings shortened. He also floated a proposal in New Zealand—which got nowhere—for CHOGMs to be held every three years and for each second one to be the responsibility of Britain. The rationale was that it would be increasingly difficult to get busy leaders to travel so often to all sorts of out-of-the-way spots. As I said, this got nowhere.

Keating did not see much relevance in the Commonwealth and it certainly did not fit in with his policy priority to the Asia-Pacific region. The creation and elevation of APEC has been, indeed, one of the long-term factors in pushing the Commonwealth more into the background in Australian foreign policy. There was a feeling that Australia had to concentrate its efforts in terms of international bodies—that you could not be thinking of them all at once, as it were—and the Labor government clearly wanted to keep the eggs in the APEC basket and not spread its efforts too much. However, Bob Hawke, earlier on, although he was actually instrumental in getting APEC going, nevertheless had given considerable attention to the Commonwealth and used it actively in his foreign policy. Hawke picked up the baton from Malcolm Fraser on the African issue and he sponsored

Fraser's continued involvement in this issue and later backed his unsuccessful campaign for Secretary-General.

So the Commonwealth in the last couple of decades when it faced crunch issues has been seen as useful by Australian prime ministers on both sides of politics as a forum in which they could play a very active role. But what of it now? One would expect that with Howard's view that traditional links should not be forgotten in the rush to Asia, he would find it quite a congenial forum. It is one big international body where Australia is among the larger players. But Australian officialdom, in particular the Department of Foreign Affairs, is said to be a bit lukewarm about the Commonwealth these days. I see a number of Foreign Affairs participants here so maybe they can contest this view, but that is certainly the perception that is about.

There are suggestions that the coming White Paper does not give the Commonwealth much emphasis. This slide in the world of officialdom has probably been going on for quite a while. But what is going on behind the politicians, what is going on at that sort of level, can be quite important in how much interest the politicians themselves take. The fact that Malcolm Fraser had Tony Eggleton around—who was not with the world of officialdom, of course, but in the Liberal secretariat at the time and obviously a close confidante—was, I think, one reason why the Commonwealth became so important a forum in Fraser's foreign policy.

Eggleton, who had worked at the London secretariat of the Commonwealth, not only stressed the potential of the organisation in giving Fraser an international platform but he had all the contacts and knew his way around. Thus, Fraser was able to make the Commonwealth somewhere where he could pursue foreign policy interests, and this combined with the fact that big issues of concern to him, especially the African issues, were happening at that time—so the contacts and forum and the issues converged to put the Commonwealth really at the centre of the Fraser foreign policy.

With the emphasis on Asia by any government now and a quite pragmatic, trade-oriented general view in the subsequently merged Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the more recent moving away of attention is not at all surprising. Just as the Commonwealth grew out of another era, so its purpose and strength and importance also did. It is, if you like, an organisation with roots more or less entirely in diplomacy and politics. It is directed to strengthening diplomatic ties, to solving political problems, to applying pressure on human rights and political institutions. Contrast APEC, which can be seen as an organisation with roots primarily in economic interests, concerned with issues of trade, investment and regional political and economic cooperation. Of course, I am overpainting that contrast, but I think it is quite a useful contrast both in interpreting the organisations and in understanding why they are seen differently in Australian foreign policy recently.

But for Australia, and indeed for its other members, the Commonwealth has the

advantage of being a large forum which provides access to a cross-section of the international community, and regular access. It enables an Australian leader to meet and rub shoulders with a whole host of other leaders who, without it, he would simply never come across. It can be effectively used by an Australian Prime Minister, therefore, to broaden his own horizons, his own understanding of the international situation. It cannot so effectively be used, as in Fraser's time or Bob Hawke's time, for an Australian Prime Minister to strut the international stage, because there are simply not the issues there these days on which he can make a mark.

Now, the matters before the Commonwealth are trying to deal with countries whose institutions break down from the democratic model—last meeting, Nigeria; this time, Sierra Leone—and, increasingly, to look at trade and development matters. The trade and investment theme of this year's meeting is an attempt by the Commonwealth to focus the meeting. It reflects a change of emphasis, an awareness that the modern world is moving more and more to those issues. Both bundles of issues—the attempt to promote democratic institutions and human rights and the trade and investments ones—are very important, but they are not the kind of thing that will bring an Australian Prime Minister a high profile in the Commonwealth. Australia is a lot less tuned in to Africa in general than it was in Malcolm Fraser's time, so the problem of erring states, which tends to be concentrated in Africa, is not something that one would expect an Australian Prime Minister to really be at the forefront of dealing with.

Australia is interested in the economic questions, especially as they relate to the small states in our region. But the very comprehensive nature of the Commonwealth means that trade and investment issues tend to have a less sharp focus at those sorts of meetings than they might at an APEC meeting or some other international forum. The fact that it is not primarily an economic body adds to that difficulty. So, in my view, John Howard is likely to find the Commonwealth meeting an occasion for acquiring a good international education or adding to his international education but not particularly a forum for action and not one that he can make a centre of his foreign policy in the way that he would remember Malcolm Fraser doing. Thank you very much.

CHAIR—Thank you very much, Michelle. One facet of the Commonwealth which I guess is perceived most by the public is that of sport. While Mr Arthur Tunstall is not listed as a speaker, I thought it would be interesting now to hear his perspective as somebody who is involved and has been involved for so long in the Commonwealth Games.

Mr TUNSTALL—Thank you, Mr Chairman, for the invitation to be here today. I am quite honoured. I was very interested to listen to some of the discussion this morning on ways to promote the Commonwealth and some of the problems that seem to be associated in that direction. I was interested in the lady's question about how the Commonwealth could do something to bring equality between the rich and the poor. I am afraid that that is never going to happen. Politics and money rule the world, and no matter

how much you try you will never succeed—I do not think so, anyway. I have seen it in my lifetime. Too many people have tried to do that. There will always be those who are a little bit brainier than the others and those who can make a dollar and those who cannot.

I listened with interest to my friend Barry down here who asked why not as much discussion was centred on India as on China. I thought that that would have been obvious: it becomes political also. A question was also raised by Malcolm regarding when India applied for the Commonwealth Games. It was one of the few times in my career when I had had political pressure put on me as to how I should vote and disclose Australia's vote, which I refused to do to the Australian ambassador, who approached me over there, and also a top IOC man.

For those who might have read about me: I am a fairly independent person. I am not frightened to speak up. I get criticised for it, but I have always believed in free speech. I believe in this great country of Australia, and I believe in the Commonwealth.

How can you promote the Commonwealth? CHOGM has been involved for some time. Of all the people I read about on the list here today, a lot of them would not know of those organisations. As a matter of fact, the Royal Commonwealth Society is not that well known in the general public's view. People regard the Commonwealth as something that is old-fashioned, but my view is totally different.

There are 69 countries affiliated with the Commonwealth Games Association. I attend the meetings of the Commonwealth Games Federation. I am an executive member, not only secretary of the Australian body but also a member of the executive body of the Commonwealth Games Federation. We meet with all the Commonwealth countries—all colours, all religions—and we all meet as brothers to try to promote the Commonwealth through sport.

In 12 months time the Commonwealth Games goes for the first time to Asia—to Malaysia between 11 to 21 September, if anybody is thinking of going. Nobody knows too much about it at the moment because the papers do not write about it. They are full of what is going to happen in the year 2000. But a lot is going to happen before 2000. Next year a lot of the young people who are ambitious and want to represent Australia in the year 2000 will be at the Commonwealth Games. It is the stepping stone to the Olympic Games, and the people you read about in 1998 will be the people you will be looking for to win gold medals in the year 2000.

We will have this great gathering of Commonwealth countries. I can assure you that, of all the organisations that might be represented there, there will be more public knowledge of the Commonwealth and what it means when the games are being held—whether it be Malaysia, whether it be India, or whether it be Australia.

In Australia we will probably know more about it because our record at the last

games when we won 84 gold medals, which has never been achieved before, created a lot of publicity. It will do it again. I hope that we can exceed the medals that we won the last time. Believe me: every day you will be reading about the Commonwealth—whether it is the Commonwealth athlete from India or the Commonwealth athlete from England. It does not matter where it is. To me, the young generation today are the people who we have to be looking at if we are talking about the future of the Commonwealth.

As for learning about the Commonwealth, my office gets so many inquiries from school organisations about past athletes or about the history of the Commonwealth. We now have it on the Internet. You would be amazed at the number of people who are ringing up and wanting information on the Internet. I am just staggered at the number of school children who are interested.

You also have to remember that one of the fastest growing industries in this country today is the leisure industry. Sport is paramount in this country. That is where you will get the name of the Commonwealth before the public eye, and more so in the coming games because for the first time there will be cricket, rugby and hockey. We do not do too badly in those sports. So you can be sure that when Shane Warne is bowling, it will make headlines, and when the rugby union is on it will make headlines. All the time the headlines will be 'At the Commonwealth Games in Malaysia is so-and-so.'

Ladies and gentlemen, in my world there are two people: realists and idealists. I am a realist. I think it is wonderful to be an idealist. I class some of them as dreamers because they look to what might happen. If you are a realist, you have to live in today's world.

I am not reading from any notes. I received all these papers in front of me last night for the meeting in KL, which I am attending next month and where we in the Commonwealth will be trying to improve the standard of the Commonwealth Games Federation and make it even better known throughout the Commonwealth, and mainly to young people. Believe me: the young people of today are the ones who will be talking about the Commonwealth in the future.

We read about CHOGM. I probably have had more to do with newspapers, through my comments, than the average person. They write about CHOGM only if there is any controversy about one nation attacking another nation—otherwise they are not really interested in promoting the Commonwealth. It is the same in any situation: newspapers live on sensationalism. I boosted the sales for them after the last Commonwealth Games. Whether I will do it again or not, I do not know—it all depends on what statements I make. That is what it is all about—publicity. It can be done through the new generation of schoolchildren of today, and that is the way to go.

When I go to the Commonwealth Games, there is no talk about what this nation does or what that nation does. In my time I have seen so many athletes who have gone on

to higher things in life, whether it be in politics or in business, and they are still the same. It is the greatest leveller of all time—to talk to people, to realise what is happening in their countries.

Talking of India, I knew one gentleman who was a boxer, who was educated at Oxford and had a beautiful accent. But he told me of the problems that he had when he went back to his own particular state in India. They did not want to know him because he was an educated Englishman. He said, 'Now where do I go from here?' He did go on as a matter of fact: he did get into politics because he had the drive and the ambition which an athlete has to have if you want to succeed.

Rather than going any further, Mr Chairman, I thank you for allowing me to speak. I hope that all of you will be watching in September of next year and be proud to say, 'Boy, that's the Commonwealth and they're our athletes.'

CHAIR—Thank you, Mr Tunstall. Michelle, one of the things that emerged from your paper which interested me is the extent to which you suggest the Edinburgh CHOGM may or may not be a forum for prioritising Australia's foreign policy directions, if you like to call it that, in the sense it once was under Malcolm Fraser. It seems to me that one of the real questions for the Commonwealth for the future is whether or not it replicates debates that continue in the United Nations or whether it pursues a different direction. For example, to my mind there are a number of major questions which I have little doubt will be discussed at Edinburgh—greenhouse gas emissions and the whole question of the environment, for example. I do not doubt that they will be pursued.

Equally, I think it is possible that there could be some discussion about the role companies like Shell, which are seen to be partly Commonwealth companies, play in environmental pollution in countries like Nigeria. I think it raises the question: has the Commonwealth a separate identity on foreign policy issues for the future other than where it affects one of the members? Given that the United States, as much of its foreign policy, has placed a significant emphasis on human rights, I wonder whether or not we should not look at the Commonwealth as perhaps a stronger voice to be able to promote democratic institutions—perhaps, as Malcolm Fraser said, reporting not just in countries like Pakistan on the conduct of elections but reporting more widely so that we could have a greater emphasis placed across the board on what one would see as truly democratic elections, as distinct from those which might produce results which are more suspect from our perspective.

The other field is the promotion of the rule of law and particularly the development of concepts of commercial law, which might not necessarily be identical but at least could help to promote a debate on what the fundamentals should be. I wondered whether we could promote some debate or questioning from around the audience that might pick up either that foreign policy question for Edinburgh or other issues raised by any of those three speakers. Any questions?

Ms WEST—Following on from Ian Sinclair's remarks and relating back to Michelle Grattan's, there may be some confusion that people are, in a fairly out-of-date way, looking for some kind of collective policy emanating from a Commonwealth association. What is interesting about the present Commonwealth and the Commonwealth of the future is that it is less a collective policy organisation than a network which is differentially used by different countries. Anybody interested in Asia, for example, would realise that the dynamic force in the Commonwealth today is now Malaysia and Singapore, who are using Commonwealth networks as an economic base to establish—with growth capacity in east Asia of 8.5 per cent in 1996, as an average—links with another growth area, southern Africa, with a growth rate of 6.5 per cent, with eight out of the 12 southern African countries having in 1996 a growth rate of over five per cent—leaving Australia for dead.

The Commonwealth is now in fact—and this is not understood, perhaps, by Australian politicians, although I hope it is increasingly understood by Australian public servants—being used and led economically by Singapore and Malaysia to establish liaisons with other countries—for example, southern Africa, also a growth area of the world. The information technology in which Malaysia and Singapore are so interested—and in which Australia ought to be interested—is now being promoted via Commonwealth networks in southern Africa under the label of 'smart partnerships'.

Similarly, as I will be discussing this afternoon, if we are to look at 'smart partnerships' in terms of trade and investment, Australia should be taking the lead at CHOGM in looking at 'smart partnerships' in aid whereby, accompanying the great investment in southern Africa by Australian and Canadian mining companies, there is a notion of an obligation and an opportunity to invest in social infrastructure, so that companies leave behind in these areas an opportunity for a better skilled infrastructure in the local community where the investment occurs and a better opportunity for that infrastructure to be used to carry those countries into the next stage of technological development.

Because Australia is allegedly interested in Asia, it should be looking at the way in which the Commonwealth network is now being led by Asian countries, Malaysia and Singapore, for the purpose of transregional investment. Because of the regional blinkers that in recent years have dominated Australian foreign policy, people do not understand the powerful nature of the Commonwealth; and Australia should be in there at CHOGM taking a lead. It is already going to be taking a lead on micro-credit as ultimately a self-funding form of aid for south Asia, but there is another concept of aid which is geared into the big private investment by Australian companies not only in Africa but elsewhere. I will regard this lengthy comment as time out from this afternoon, Mr Sinclair.

CHAIR—Professor Patience.

Prof. PATIENCE—I want to ask Mr Craft a question in relation to the name of

the Royal Commonwealth Society—and not so much the name as perhaps the fact of the secretariat being based in Britain, which may be a problem for it. Has the Commonwealth secretariat ever thought of being based elsewhere—in Africa, for example?

Michelle Grattan, I wonder if your view that the Commonwealth has a very low salience in Australia, particularly amongst Australian politicians, is not based too much on what I think is the fairly narrow view that, to some extent, Hawke, and certainly Keating had in relation to the Commonwealth. What about taking a leaf out of Malcolm Fraser's book? I can say this now that he is not here: he does surely emerge as a moral giant in terms of apartheid and Rhodesia, Zimbabwe. The problem of Burma looms increasing problematic in the Asia Pacific region. Could not an Australian Prime Minister use the Commonwealth in a similar way to Fraser's in relation to a problem like Burma?

MR CRAFT—Very quickly, on the name: as you know, the Royal Commonwealth Society is one of a number of voluntary non-governmental organisations associated around the Commonwealth. It has been in existence for almost 100 years. It is based in London, but there are branches of the society in every Commonwealth country and, in fact, in Australia there are probably 20 or 30 branches.

There were moves a few years ago out of London to have the Royal Commonwealth Society re-badged as the Commonwealth Trust, and in so doing to bring all the voluntary Commonwealth societies together; and the Commonwealth Trust did flower for a while. For example, in New Zealand and various other parts of the world, the Royal Commonwealth Society is known as the Commonwealth Trust. In India, Malaysia and some parts of Africa, the 'Royal' has been dropped and it is simply known as the Commonwealth Society.

There were suggestions in Australia that the 'Royal' should be dropped. Ours is a democratic organisation, and the views of the members were not in favour of that, and so we have stuck with 'Royal'. We try to explain the advantages of the society and its connections, as well as explaining the proper role and the rightful and very advantageous role of the Queen in the Commonwealth, and also Britain's appropriate role. So, it has been tried here, but it has not been successful.

Ms GRATTAN—On a question of fact, I would want, as I tried to do before, to distinguish between Hawke and Keating in terms of their views of the Commonwealth. Also, I do not think it is right to say that politicians do not give it some value. I was talking more about general community opinion.

Now, on your point about human rights—and Ian's point, also—yes, that is an issue that Australia could take up in the Commonwealth. But I do not think it would be as dramatic as some of the previous issues, because the problems are more specific and on a somewhat smaller scale, by which I do not mean 'unimportant' but more individualistic, if you like. One of the problems of this government doing that is that it has not shown much

sign at all of making human rights a central crusading issue.

More generally, I think that we do not yet have a handle on what the central themes of the Howard government's foreign policy are going to be. I suppose it took a while: if you think back to the Fraser government, really it was only actually at the 1977 CHOGM that Fraser's strong interest in apartheid came out, and people were quite surprised at the time. It took quite a while for people to realise that he was fair dinkum about all this and was really going to push it hard.

With the Howard government's foreign policy, though, we more generally do not have a handle on it yet. It seems so far that John Howard has been more trying to get an understanding of various issues, of meeting leaders and coming to grips with things and so on. To my mind anyway, there are no clear themes; but certainly I would be surprised if the human rights theme emerged as a strong one, even when we are clearer about what John Howard's longer-term foreign policy is going to look like.

Mr NEUHAUS—As I am currently sitting in the Foreign Affairs seat in place of Joanna Hewitt, I feel that I should respond to a couple of the comments made by Michelle Grattan, and emphasise that both the Prime Minister and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade take the Commonwealth very seriously. Obviously, there will be individuals whose work and careers focus them on other areas, and there would also be some who are more enthusiastic about multilateralism than are others who are more enthusiastic about bilateralism; but, from a policy point of view, the Commonwealth is very much an element of Australia's foreign policy. I should also make the point that this particular issue is somewhat unique in that, because of the Prime Minister's role at CHOGM, the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet has a very key role to play both in the policy development and the briefings for CHOGM.

The other point worth stressing, and it was brought out in Mr Craft's presentation, is that there is a very crowded international agenda now. The Commonwealth does compete in a world where APEC is of great importance, where the United Nations remains of importance, and where a whole network of bilateral and regional engagements—including the South Pacific Forum, and so many others—demand the attention of both the Prime Minister and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade; and that will probably only increase. But, in very specific ways, our engagement with the Commonwealth remains high on the list, and not only in terms of our role as the third largest donor. Indeed, Jo Hewitt, the deputy secretary of the department, who was here earlier and unfortunately has had to go away, chairs the steering committee of senior officials of the Commonwealth. That is a very tangible contribution Australia has made.

I agree with the points that have been made that the Commonwealth agenda is becoming much more a nuts and bolts agenda and I do not see that as a bad thing. In fact, it is a more realistic reflection perhaps of the current world that trade and development and good governance should be a focus. But we need not forget that, along with these

issues, at the last CHOGM in Auckland—and it is now so easy to forget because it has passed into history—nuclear weapons testing in the South Pacific was very much on the agenda. The support that was given through the Commonwealth to the testing issue—and there were some difficulties for some members over that—led within the year to a ground swell of support for the comprehensive test ban treaty and its successful conclusion. The Commonwealth continues to play an important role in even the great issues that come up and then move on, and I believe that the Commonwealth will continue to play that role and that Australia's commitment will continue.

Dr HILL—I would like to some extent to take issue with Michelle Grattan. You mentioned that the Commonwealth was most prominent when there was a big and a major issue that needed to be solved and that in fact it might not be a bad thing, if there were not such an issue, if the profile of the Commonwealth were to diminish. It seems to me that the big issue which we are faced with now is globalisation, and one of the things which the Commonwealth—possibly more than other international organisations—is very well equipped to deal with is the myriad of different impacts of globalisation on different populations around the world.

In fact, the Commonwealth does have in place campaigns to address quite a few issues. Just from my reading of the Commonwealth literature that I have been able to get hold of from the secretariat, I can see programs and campaigns et cetera—on violence against women, youth unemployment, how to get credit to the poorest of the poor, getting more women into the parliaments of the Commonwealth countries, reform of public administration, freedom of the press, and international cooperation in distance education—as being major initiatives that have been taken by the Commonwealth in cooperation with the Commonwealth non-governmental organisations.

I might just make mention of that last one. International cooperation in distance education is, to me, an example of a terribly lost opportunity for Australia because Australia was a founder of distance education. With the establishment of the Commonwealth of Learning in Vancouver, the Canadians have made all sorts of gains in international cooperation in distance education which Australia has only very belatedly caught up with, and that is to our disadvantage.

The type of organisation that the Commonwealth has, through the Commonwealth Foundation, is encouraging the participation of civil society in collaboration decision making with governments, because all of those issues are not the sorts of issues that can easily be addressed by declarations or by budgets or by legislation. I think that a lot of the issues that are being faced now are the ones where careful, clever policy making examples—case studies like the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh—need to be initiated.

As I mentioned earlier, Australia is the location of a lot of so-called good practice that is copied by other countries through Commonwealth networks. I would like to contrast that with APEC, which is a very different sort of organisation. It also meets at

heads of government level, but it has absolutely no place within its structure whatsoever for consultation with the organisations of civil society. In fact, it is very oriented towards a single narrow issue.

I was in the Philippines last year during the APEC conference. Some of the officials were saying they really wondered whether the APEC meetings were going to be able to continue to attract the interest of heads of government when they only looked at one narrow issue—namely, liberalisation of trade. I think that oddly enough, even though the Commonwealth is an old organisation, in the post-Cold War era when globalisation has made a different type of issue the major international issue, with the collaboration of the Commonwealth NGOs it has turned out to be probably a more suitable model for an international cooperation organisation than some of the newer ones that are being set up. That is just my opinion.

Ms GRATTAN—I think our interest is a bit different. Perhaps, in terms of a government's and a Prime Minister's foreign policy agenda, it is going to be rather more difficult to use the organisation. You are really talking at a much broader governmental level. I would agree with many of those points.

Mr HOLLIS—It was interesting that both Michelle Grattan and you made the point, rightly, that the person in the street does not put a lot of emphasis on or does not have that image of the Commonwealth now. Mine is a fairly simplistic point. These things are all about images and perceptions. I remember when I first started to go to Britain, I used to go through where it said, 'Britain and Commonwealth passports'. Now when I go there, I go through the aliens. I am surprised that you used the example, Hugh Craft, that a person said that they would have expected better of a Commonwealth country. I would agree with that person very much. The representation I get on the Commonwealth is when people are refused entry into the UK. That is the only representation I get on the Commonwealth.

Quite frankly, if we are talking very much about what the Commonwealth can give and our role in the Commonwealth and what we should be doing, if we want to lift the image, it is all about perceptions. While I have to go through the alien entry into Britain—and I am someone who lived in Britain for 14 years and went to university there—I am afraid that is my image of that part of the Commonwealth. I do think that it is very much perceived as the British Commonwealth still out there. Maybe the problem with that is having the Queen as the head of it, let alone your 'royal'. Drop the royal, and drop the Queen as the head of it, and you may have more interest from many Australians in the Commonwealth.

CHAIR—A defence, Hugh Craft.

Mr CRAFT—I probably agree with a lot of what Colin Hollis is saying. I was not suggesting that it would not be better if we could recreate a situation where

Commonwealth citizens did have easy access through customs at Heathrow. I have been through that ignominy myself on many occasions. What I was suggesting was that the tit for tat that goes on in visa regulations between countries has long since left the old arrangements behind, but people still think of the Commonwealth as what it used to be rather than what it is now.Interestingly enough, the Derek Ingram report says that if you want to improve the image of the Commonwealth, one thing that ought to be done is to issue some sort of Commonwealth identity card that does overcome that problem.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. We have opened up a number of areas where the Commonwealth might be able to play a part in the future. To both Hugh Craft and Michelle Grattan, I would like to say particular thanks for your perspective and also to Arthur Tunstall for having commented about the Commonwealth Games.

Luncheon adjournment

[1.22 p.m.]

THE 'INFORMAL' COMMONWEALTH

CHAIR—I declare our meeting resumed. It is not just in the formal sense that the Commonwealth exists, but there are all sorts of activities that we have learnt of this morning. The secretariat in London and the biennial CHOGMs are important, but there are many other facets too. In addition to the contacts at government level, as we have learnt, there is a network of unofficial organisations, professional bodies and voluntary societies and associations that bring together people from all parts of the Commonwealth. To speak specifically about these we have two very distinguished speakers in Mr Frank Hambly, the former Executive Director and Secretary of the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee, and Mr David Tonkin, a former Premier of South Australia, a distinguished parliamentarian in his own right and one who was Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association from 1986 to 1992. We are very pleased to have you both with us. I ask Mr Hambly to open and to tell us just how the world is seen from the university perspective, amongst other things.

Mr HAMBLY—Thank you, Chairman, and ladies and gentlemen. Education programs and organisations have been among the strongest of the threads which have held the Commonwealth together over the years. But from where I sat with the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee for 30 years and from my consequent close involvement with both the programs and the organisations, notably the Commonwealth Secretariat and particularly the Association of Commonwealth Universities, I have observed in recent years that those threads are starting to wear pretty thin as we approach the 21st century. This is borne out by the report by Tom Symons, to which Hugh Craft referred this morning, about Commonwealth studies, particularly with its focus on higher education.

I have also noted that in recent times the re-admission of South Africa, in

particular, to the Commonwealth has helped to breathe some new life, at least in the short term, into some Commonwealth education activities.

The Commonwealth Secretariat maintains an education division which has oversight of a number of education programs, which are monitored by the Commonwealth Education Conference. It is meant to be a conference of ministers. The first conference was held in July 1959, and they continue to be held in different Commonwealth countries every three years to discuss the education programs and matters of mutual interest. The delegations to the conferences comprise prominent educators and senior bureaucrats, and it is hoped that each national minister for education will head their country's delegation.

Over the years, Australian ministers have not given priority to this activity, and Australian delegations have been headed variously by bureaucrats or vice-chancellors. On several occasions I personally was asked to intercede between the Commonwealth Secretariat and the minister, or the minister's office, to try to persuade the minister to attend the next conference. But after the initial, 'I'll try to attend', invariably something more pressing has come up.

That is not necessarily a criticism, but it does reflect a fairly widely held attitude within Australia to both the conferences and to the Commonwealth education programs which are not accorded a very high priority. The same is true of many other Commonwealth countries, particularly those from the developed Commonwealth.

What are the Commonwealth education programs? Probably the most successful and enduring is the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan—CSFP—which was instituted in 1959. The first scholars took up their awards in 1960. It was created to enable Commonwealth students of high intellectual promise to pursue, principally, postgraduate studies in Commonwealth countries other than their own, so that when they returned home they could make a distinctive contribution to life in their own countries and to mutual understanding of the Commonwealth.

At present 14 countries, including Australia, participate in the plan and another five have declared their intention to join. In addition to the postgraduate scholarships there are senior awards, including professorships and fellowships, which have been instituted by Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United Kingdom. These are awards for a few scholars of established reputation and achievement.

Since the inception of the CSFP, about 24,000 scholarships and other awardees have benefited under the plan, with about 4,000 awards received by women. But the CSFP is not growing. For example, funding by Australia has maintained the number of awards for study in Australia at a little over 80 in total in recent years, and there are just over 100 Australian students studying abroad on awards offered by other Commonwealth countries.

In 1997, there were 27 new awards granted for study in Australia and 42 new

awards were granted for Australians to study in the United Kingdom and three in Canada. The year 1996 was a particularly disastrous one, with only two awards being granted to Australians to study in the United Kingdom, because of certain budgetary problems which the British government was facing, and seven awards only for study in Australia.

The reasons for this declining trend in the number of awards are regionalisation, internationalisation and globalisation, themes to which I will return shortly. Australia is also providing funds for awards to students from non-Commonwealth countries, partly through the Australian-European Awards Program and other schemes, and the same is true of awards offered by other Commonwealth countries.

Between 1982 and 1986, I was the Australian representative on the Commonwealth Secretariat's Standing Committee on Student Mobility, which was established by the Commonwealth Education Conference and endorsed by CHOGM. It was set up in response to moves being made in developed Commonwealth countries to introduce full cost tuition fees for overseas students. The standing committee submitted five reports making many recommendations, including in particular proposals for fees concessions for students from Commonwealth countries. Almost all the recommendations which we made were rejected or ignored by the Commonwealth Education Conferences and CHOGM, although we were complimented for the quality of our work and there were platitudinous comments in CHOGM communiques about the importance of student flows to Commonwealth ties.

Students from impoverished countries in the developing Commonwealth simply could not afford the new fees, and the governments of these countries in particular felt that, if the Commonwealth meant anything, some concessions should have been granted to students from their countries. While a few countries, notably Australia and the United Kingdom, introduced scholarships to assist some international students, these awards were and still are available to students from all countries despite requests to earmark some for Commonwealth countries.

The only noteworthy development to emerge from the work of the standing committee was the Commonwealth of Learning—which Helen Hill referred to this morning—which was set up by Commonwealth governments in September 1988 to promote collaboration in distance education. It was felt that, if Commonwealth students could not afford the newly introduced full cost tuition fees, they could study by distance education. In supporting the creation of this new organisation, heads of government stated that its objectives would be to widen access to education, share resources, raise education quality and support the mobility of ideas, of teaching, of relevant research and of people.

As Helen said, the Commonwealth of Learning is located in Vancouver, although much of its work is decentralised with the development of materials largely being carried out by the staff of Commonwealth universities and colleges under contract. Australia supports the Commonwealth of Learning and is represented on the board of governors.

The Commonwealth of Learning does not enrol individual students. It works with universities and colleges that can enrol students and so enables these to tap into each others' resources. It does not teach students directly.

This is a fairly positive Commonwealth education program and, with the rapid developments in communications technology, it has potential for positive contributions for Commonwealth cooperation. There are other educational programs. The Commonwealth Secretariat administers the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation, which provides awards for selected personnel from Commonwealth developing countries for education and training in other Commonwealth developing countries. The British Council, through a new program which it has just introduced called Partnerships for Excellence, provides funds to support the development of projects in arts, science and education involving Australia and the United Kingdom.

The Commonwealth Secretariat and the Commonwealth Foundation work closely on funding several education programs. The Commonwealth Secretariat works with a number of professional bodies such as the Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration, the Commonwealth Association of Science, Technology and Mathematics Educators, and particularly the Association of Commonwealth Universities, which is the organisation with which I have been closely involved, indeed, I have had some periods of secondment there.

The ACU was set up in 1913 and is the oldest and arguably the premier international association of universities in the world. Its aim is to promote contact and cooperation between its over 500 member universities by promoting, through several programs, the movement of academic and administrative staff, and students, from one country of the Commonwealth to another, by providing information about Commonwealth universities and by organising meetings of various kinds.

Unlike in some other Commonwealth countries, all Australian universities, the whole 37 of them are and always have been members of the ACU. The ACU has been and is a great organisation. It is my best gauge of support for the Commonwealth, among the universities, as we approach the 21st century. While membership of the ACU has increased in recent years, largely because of the re-admission of South Africa and Pakistan to the Commonwealth and an increase in the number of universities in Australia and the United Kingdom, following the abolition of the binary systems of higher education in both countries, questions are now being asked about the benefits of membership.

These questions are being asked because of the increasing regionalisation, internationalisation and globalisation of universities worldwide. There are the questions of disparity between the quality of the universities within the Commonwealth, the withdrawal from membership, already, by a number of Canadian and British universities, the increasing cost of membership in the face of financial stringency and the desire of universities to form alliances with a wider range of universities around the world, and

certainly beyond the Commonwealth, particularly those with whom they feel they can benchmark themselves.

Let me just briefly explain. Like the British government, the British universities are more preoccupied with their role in Europe than with the Commonwealth. They apparently see that that is where their future lies. They participate in educational programs and student exchange arrangements operating out of Brussels, schemes like ERASMUS and SOCRATES and TEMPEST, and others with widely ranging different acronyms, and they belong actively to the Conference of European Rectors and so on.

The Canadian universities are focused on the Americas and the Caribbean and the Pacific Rim. The New Zealand universities are likewise regionally focused. The Australian universities acknowledge and accept this, for they too, like the Australian government, are concentrating more on Asia and the Pacific because they see that that is much of where their future lies.

Accordingly, they have developed UMAP, University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific, which is modelled on ERASMUS in Europe, to assist students in the region to undertake part of their courses in another country in the region. The Australian universities have spearheaded the formation of an Association of Universities in Asia and the Pacific. They are formalising bilateral agreements with universities in Asia and the Pacific for staff and student exchange and research collaboration. They are concluding similar agreements with universities in other parts of the world.

At present, there are 2,500 such bilateral agreements in total between Australian universities and universities in other countries. Of these, 126 are with United Kingdom universities. There are 683 agreements with all Commonwealth universities, compared with 1,100 with universities in non-Commonwealth countries in Asia and the Pacific alone. Universities around the world, and notably those in Australia, are becoming more international.

The internationalisation of universities has many dimensions. While we generally focus on the enrolment of international or overseas students, internationalisation also involves the curricula, research and staffing and internally enrolled students—our students—increasing numbers of whom now study overseas for one year or one semester for credit in their own universities. Generally, the countries in which Australian students undertake these study abroad programs are outside the Commonwealth.

The globalisation of universities including, as it does, taking advantage of the revolution in communications technology means that universities can tap into the best ideas and collaborate with the best scholars around the world, and they are not necessarily in Commonwealth countries.

There is wide disparity in quality between Commonwealth universities and

Australian universities feel that they have a closer identity of interest with universities in the developed Commonwealth, and that is understandable. That is not to say that they stand aloof from the others but, for benchmarking and for purposes of international comparison, they believe that they can deal meaningfully and collaboratively with a small number of Commonwealth universities and universities from other countries.

Indeed, other groups of universities are being developed. For example, three Australian universities have joined a group known as Universitas 2000, along with about 20 other universities from the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, New Zealand and Asia, with which they believe they can benchmark themselves and collaborate. Another two Australian universities are part of a newly formed Pacific Rim Network, and other similar arrangements are in train.

While the Australian and many other Commonwealth universities have historically been modelled on the Scottish and English university systems, the nature of the higher education systems in Australia, and in other countries, has changed significantly in recent years. In Australia and elsewhere we now have a highly diverse system more akin to that in the United States of America. These changes, and the other developments that I have mentioned, mean that, inevitably, and I believe irreversibly, to the Australian universities, the Commonwealth of Nations and the Association of Commonwealth Universities in particular, while important networks, are not now as significant groupings as they once were.

CHAIR—Thank you. We might ask Mr David Tonkin to give the second presentation. Mr Frank Hambly's view is of course as former Executive Director and Secretary of the AVCC, whereas Mr David Tonkin, as I remarked, was a former Secretary-General of the CPA.

MR TONKIN—The last speech I made here was on the Commonwealth some 21 months ago, and I did not dream then that I would not be saying any more until today. In the interim, I have had a stroke—so bear with me a little. I think that my frustration after three and a half months of not saying a single word is enough to make up for it.

I have always been a Commonwealth person and I have known the day to day issues right from the start. The informal Commonwealth: I think the Commonwealth is far older than 1965, the date of the sitting of the Commonwealth Secretariat. Significant though this was it was only a development of the desire to get governments on to a firmer footing. The Commonwealth is far older than that.

My stay in London from 1986 to 1992, as Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, would have to be classed as one of the most exciting times of my life, the equivalent of being premier in South Australia. I toured extensively for about three months totally every year, moving throughout the Commonwealth of Nations and making friends with everyone I met. Always, be it in Africa, Asia, Canada, the Caribbean,

the British Isles, the Mediterranean, the Pacific, South-East Asia and even Australia, I was made most welcome, and I got to know a good deal about the various cultures involved.

My main job was to visit the parliaments of this enormous family of more than 50 countries, representing 142 cultures and over 14,000 members of parliament. I was, too, constantly meeting with parliamentary members and officials from many diverse cultures when they came to visit the 'mother of parliaments' at Westminster. But I got to understand the informal Commonwealth, too.

I was surprised at the common links which I found. They all—Australia included—participated positively in the evolution of empire into Commonwealth and have a shared background and a common past. They have similar frameworks of constitutional and parliamentary development. Their legal, educational and administrative systems are broadly similar, and a common working language, English, has enabled them to consult and speak together freely, frankly and informally as equal members of one family.

They chose to remain within the Commonwealth family by adopting the Westminster form of parliamentary democracy, adapted to suit local conditions, as the basis for their new governments and administrations. It is appropriate that we should be holding this seminar in a parliamentary setting.

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association was founded in 1911 as the Empire Parliamentary Association and, through its members—prime ministers, ministers, presiding officers and members of parliament—has been directly involved with the development of the Commonwealth from its inception.

In earlier years, until 1965, it also provided the meeting place for heads of government, many of whom led their delegations to the annual parliamentary conference. I have used the CPA as an example because I know it well, but let me hasten to add that a similar pattern has been followed by many other long-established organisations which can also claim to have been closely involved with the empire, and later with the development of the Commonwealth.

The EPA became the CPA in 1948, and many other organisations did the same. There is not time to name them all, but as examples will prove, each one developed in the form which suits it best. There are more than 115 organisations appearing in the records of the Commonwealth, and while some of them do not meet the standards of truly Commonwealth bodies, the great majority of them do.

It has become natural for the informal Commonwealth to be called NGOs—non-government organisations—but I think this derived from after 1965, after the formation of the Commonwealth Secretariat—shades of the United Nations in the 1950s and their NGOs. After all, why should we not call the real Commonwealth bodies by their correct names, and the government organisations GOs? At least let us look at some of them.

The Royal Commonwealth Society, as we have heard—and I served on the council during my time in London—was founded in 1868 as the Colonial Society and adopted its present name in 1958. Its aims are to promote the Commonwealth and the factors which shaped the lives of its people and the policies of its governments.

The Royal Life Saving Society was founded in 1891 and currently exists with representatives of over 50 Commonwealth countries. Over one million of the society's awards are given annually, thus saving lives. There are 250,000 deaths by drowning each year. It also provides technical support and material to developing countries.

The Commonwealth Institute was established in 1893 as the Imperial Institute. It was set up as the Commonwealth Institute in 1958. It is not really a Commonwealth organisation in the true sense of the word, existing only to promote the Commonwealth within the British Isles, but it does a good job of that. It is controlled by a board of governors which includes the high commissioners of all Commonwealth countries represented in London, and the funding comes from each country.

The Victorian League for Commonwealth Friendship was founded in 1901 as an organisation set up in London to promote closer union between the many parts of the Commonwealth by the interchange of information, hospitality and cooperation. I think, by and large, we need to look at this by extending to all countries in the future; it is not going to be much good if it is confined to London.

The League for the Exchange of Commonwealth Teachers was founded as a charity in 1901. LECT maintains its charitable status but is largely funded by Britain's education departments. Currently up to 900 teachers a year exchange between Britain and 23 other Commonwealth countries, thus making mutual education a task for international goodwill and understanding.

The Royal Over-Seas League was founded in 1910. There are reciprocal clubs, branches and chapters in over 70 countries. Its aims are to support the ideals of the Commonwealth, to encourage young people in the arts and music, and literary lectures, summer and winter programs, discussion circles and receptions are carried out. Among other things, an eye care project in Sri Lanka and welfare for the needy in Namibia are included on the Australian scene.

There are many others, too numerous to mention, but if one took, perhaps, the pick of the bunch, Sight Savers International would be hard to beat. In fact, I served on the council too while I was in London. Founded in 1950 through the joint actions of Commonwealth governments and the Royal National Institute for the Blind, its name was changed to Royal Commonwealth Society for the Blind in 1958 and to its current name, Sight Savers International, in 1994.

Sight Savers International is active in many west African countries where 1.5

million now receive their annual dose of Mectizan for river blindness, which is still increasing. It has to be taken for 10 years to beat the black simulium fly, which causes all the damage by transmitting millions of tiny microfilariae throughout the body. People usually go blind in their 30s or 40s.

MRS TONKIN—Sight Savers is also active in eastern Africa. In 1996, more than 360,000 people were seen and 12,000 cataract operations were performed. More than 200 students have graduated from the programs for ophthalmic medical assistants based in Lilongwe and on their return home are able to run clinics and handle up to 70 per cent of the eye problems they encounter. The African braille computer program is in Nairobi and the eye care paramedics program is in Uganda.

In countries of the Indian subcontinent, Sight Savers deals with cataract surgery and progress is being made to reduce the toll of blindness. In 1996, there were more than 85,000 cataract operations, coming from a total of more than 1.3 million people examined. In the Caribbean, its activities include a low-cost eye glass workshop in Jamaica, a low-cost production of eye drops in Dominica, wide ranging eye services in Guyana and low-cost intra-ocular lens production in Belize. And so it goes on.

The trouble is that we have got used to organisations based in Britain and we think little of bodies based outside. It is probably the longstanding effect of our long stint away from all communication. Well, let me warn you: be it a as republic or under the continuation of the present monarchy, we would be at risk if we do not allow the Commonwealth to flourish and prosper. There are 37 countries as republics and 16 as monarchies in the overall total of 53 in the Commonwealth. For the future, let us set up a Commonwealth resources centre to promote the Commonwealth.

Finally, let us press for activities outside Britain if the time is ripe and Australia has something to offer. But, remember, the standards are extremely high and you could be up against someone equally well qualified from another member of the Commonwealth family—as David was up against 122 others in his job application. As you can see, David has always been a Commonwealth person.

CHAIR—Thank you very much indeed, David and Prue. It is the first time David has spoken in public since he had his stroke. Thank you again for coming in.

As another dimension to that section, before we move to Senator Margaret Reid who is the President of the Senate and has now joined us, I thought we would ask Alf Parsons, who is a former Australian high commissioner in London, to tell us how he saw the Commonwealth, because so much of what David said referred to bodies on which the Australian representative in London is the representative. Alf, would you like to add a few words?

MR PARSONS—Mr Chairman, you almost caught me short but I will try. In

talking about the informal Commonwealth, I would just like to add one other thought. That is, that this informality stretches immediately beyond these organisations, universities and Commonwealth parliamentary associations and many others we have heard about today. It reflects in many other organisations where members of the Commonwealth or people who have shared the experience that have made them members of the Commonwealth—that is, ex-British colonies—meet in meetings internationally. Any of you who have been at any series of UN meetings will have found that there is an immediate bond with Commonwealth colleagues. You may in fact disagree with their side of an argument or where you are, but it is very easy to consult with them, to do deals or cut a few corners which immediately contributes to making solutions and generally getting the understanding that has to come from international organisations.

At the same time, this informality also expresses itself in strange ways. It is an informality which I think only members of the Commonwealth, members of the club, understand. I can best illustrate it by one story from many years ago at the UN, where half one's life is spent in an almost parliamentary atmosphere of going around twisting people's arms for votes or amendments to resolutions. The whole world seems to revolve around getting the score of votes or getting your amendment through, so there is a lot of horse-trading that goes on. On this particular occasion, we were trying to cut a deal with the French and even get the French on side. This French counsellor said to me one day, 'I can line up all the French Africans; we give them aid, so that is not hard. You fix the Commonwealth.'

When I tried to explain to him that the Commonwealth did not work like that, that it was not fixable, that we did not control them, I found it just about impossible to get the message through in answering the question: 'Well, what's the use of it to you?' It is not explicable. It is just that there is that understanding and it does reflect in international organisations, and any of us with that experience would find that it works. Why it works does not particular matter. It just does—and we ought not to sacrifice that in any throwaway way.

I found much the same thing in London, in an entirely different way, and I can illustrate it best by just one illustration. Normally in an overseas place there is a diplomatic corps. London was much too big to have a diplomatic corps, but there was a Commonwealth diplomatic corps. It met and it talked to one another within the whole range of the 180 missions, or whatever it was there. It was the only organisation that mattered in this entirely informal way. It is just something worth preserving.

CHAIR—Thank you very much indeed, Mr Parsons. Mr Frank Hambly raised a number of very significant issues with respect to education and I should report that Professor Donald Markwell wrote to me apologising for his inability to attend our seminar today. He has just returned from his attendance as a member—I do not know whether he was representing himself or Victoria University—of the Commission on Commonwealth Studies which was appointed by Chief Emeka Anyaoku and reported last year.

Professor Markwell said he had returned only days ago from presenting the commission's report at a conference of Commonwealth education ministers in Botswana. He has enclosed a number of relevant documents and when our transcript is finally published I would propose to include some of those because they are very relevant to your views, Frank, and to matters you have raised. Are there any comments or discussion or questions that might be raised with respect to any of the interventions we have had?

Mr BARRY JONES—We have had a number of representatives from DFAT, but we do not seem to have any representation from DEETYA. I wondered whether a specific invitation was made to DEETYA. It is a matter of some concern because, as Frank Hambly has said, the educational aspect of it is really very important.

CHAIR—We might comment on that in our report. They were invited. Frank Hambly, one thing that struck me from your report is that you have suggested that generally, from Australia's perspective, there is if anything a decline in the general feeling that the Association of Commonwealth Universities is of ongoing relevance. That strikes me as rather strange basically because, more and more, if you want to try to set standards of educational excellence, you need to be seen as being able to perform in comparable company.

Under the present arrangements within the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee, is there any group that liaises internationally within the Commonwealth? I notice that the sandstone universities have set themselves up in some new marketing arm which, presumably, is directed essentially towards Asia. Is there any group within the AVCC which looks towards the Commonwealth and functions that way or are they essentially treating the Commonwealth, as you have suggested, as being now of somewhat lesser importance?

MR HAMBLY—As I have said, all universities belong to the Association of Commonwealth Universities. It is, and continues to be, a great organisation. But it is essentially a club and they turn on great parties. We have hosted some of those parties here in Australia—

Mr BARRY JONES—Where do you get an invitation?

MR HAMBLY—When you go, as you are suggesting, Chairman, to comparing or benchmarking yourself, there is a wide disparity between the quality of Commonwealth universities. The group, Universitas 2000, has some of the sandstone universities. They see it as being more relevant to be close to some of the Ivy League universities in the United States and the premier institutions in China and a couple of New Zealand universities and so on. There is an international group within the AVCC, but that deals with universities worldwide and does not focus specifically on the Commonwealth. There is a council of the Association of Commonwealth Universities, on which three vice-chancellors sit, and that is where the input would come from.

MRS INALL—I apologise for my frequent participation, but it is such a wonderful opportunity to have sympathetic audiences on a subject that has been dear to my heart for far longer than I want to acknowledge.It would be interesting to know how many people in this room who are concerned with Commonwealth affairs actually receive *Commonwealth Currents*. It seems to me there is a terribly basic gap about this basic information document about what the Commonwealth is doing and how it is interacting with people of similar interests.

We have heard from Mr Tonkin of the various Commonwealth NGOs that are active, but there are so many more areas than mentioned here. For example, there is one additional aspect that we have in common. That is, from the British we all inherited a common system of public administration. I am surprised that nobody in the audience has mentioned this because it is so important.To that end, the Commonwealth has established another Commonwealth association recently to look at furthering the best performance practice of public servants throughout the Commonwealth. I would not have found out about this if I did not have *Commonwealth Currents*.

I should apologise for the absence of somebody who was wanting to be here today. Peter Wessels, who is a journalist, was going to come with us. As the president of the Australian chapter of the Commonwealth Journalists' Association, he is very often contacted about what is happening both with the formal and the informal Commonwealth. Until he made contact with me, which was thanks to Derek Ingram, he himself never received *Commonwealth Currents*.

All of these aspects that we are dealing with are very important. Good news does not make any headlines, so we do not find out about it unless we get access to these types of publications to find out what is going on. When we are asking whether it is worth preserving other links, there are people in this audience here today, with whom I have been talking, who have already found that it is worthwhile that we have the opportunity to get together.

One of the very important things that CHOGM has done for this meeting in Edinburgh is that for the first time it actually has Commonwealth-wide NGOs accredited to be represented. I give the British full credit for providing that opportunity for officials to show why we should continue and why we are important and to give the politicians an insight into what is happening at the level of the unofficial Commonwealth. I would urge everyone who does not get this that they do get a copy and have themselves put on the mailing list. I will happily provide the address.

CHAIR—Can you complete the commercial and tell us who publishes it?

MRS INALL—The Commonwealth Secretariat.

CHAIR—I have never heard of it. Thank you.

MR CRAFT—What Ruth has said emphasises the point of what I was suggesting earlier, a Commonwealth resource centre—which is being backed by David Tonkin—to let people know about this. And by the way, the Commonwealth is on the Internet, so all of these things can be found there.

I wanted to make an observation and ask a question about something Frank Hambly said. When I worked for the Commonwealth Secretariat I was once on the fringes of a conversation that Sonny Ramphal had with the French foreign minister in about 1980 when the French foreign minister was saying to Ramphal, 'Why on earth are the Commonwealth developed countries moving in the direction of imposing full cost fees on universities?'. This conduit of students from Commonwealth countries coming into developed countries and into universities is something that the French, through their francophonie, would dearly love to have. He was saying, 'Send them all to France, we will pay for them'.

The rationale is that the networks, the methodologies, the products, the ways of thinking, the ways of going about doing business that one learns at university are then accessed in professional life with the obvious trade and other commercial advantages. It does seem to be fairly short-sighted if a government pursues policy that does not actually permit that to happen. That is the observation.

The Symons report is an incredibly important report that talks about the appalling state of information available in schools and knowledge in schools. Amongst other things they are talking about Commonwealth studies being promoted within the curricula, both secondary and tertiary. Has anyone in Australia picked up that notion and begun talking to the curriculum corporation or to state governments about guidelines and frameworks for education in Australia and formal Commonwealth studies being picked up at university and secondary school level?

MR HAMBLY—The only thing I am aware of is what goes on at the ANU where Professor Anthony Low, who came from Cambridge where he held the chair of Commonwealth studies, now heads up a unit at the ANU. That is the only initiative that I am aware of. There have been a number of developments in universities for setting up European studies, but that does not incorporate necessarily the concept of Commonwealth studies. Indeed, in many curricula you will find elements of Commonwealth studies but nothing specific, as Tom Symons was suggesting.

MR CRAFT—My observation is that Tony Low does all that voluntarily. He is a professor emeritus and his commitment to the Commonwealth has him doing it. Herein is the real problem with the Commonwealth, we talk about the value of the various layers of what Commonwealth ministers do and consultative groups and expert groups do. This is a first-rate report on education in the Commonwealth. It falls onto the desks in Commonwealth countries and nothing is being done about it. That is the real issue here. I wonder whether there is sufficient commitment within the associations, governments and

vice-chancellors' committees to actually turn away from the very comfortable social occasions that the Commonwealth engenders, the club-like atmosphere, and actually do something practical that is going to land up in the curriculum.

Mr HAMBLY—You have said it all. There is that lack of interest. That is what I was saying in my remarks. People are focused elsewhere. It is the same story that happened to our reports from the standing committee on student mobility: nothing.

Mr TONKIN—Do you read *The Parliamentarian*?

CHAIR—Yes.

Mr TONKIN—I think you would see a copy of *Commonwealth Currents* there.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Dr HILL—I want to make one comment on what David Tonkin said, which I fully agree with, which relates to Commonwealth NGOs which do not have their headquarters in London. I think there is a big problem. The Commonwealth Foundation, which is the body primarily set up to fund the NGOs slightly separately from the secretariat, does have a great tendency to relate only to those Commonwealth NGOs that have their headquarters in London. I am speaking here as a member of the council of the Commonwealth Association of Adult Education and Training and I am also the newsletter editor. Our headquarters happens to be in Zimbabwe and we have the most terrible difficulty in getting up-to-date information. Fortunately, we have a lot of innovative adult educators in Canada, India and Tanzania and other parts of the Commonwealth, but it has, unfortunately, in recent times, been difficult to get direct information from the Commonwealth in London.

The other point I wanted to make was that I was very sorry to hear that the Australian government does not seem to be putting the high priority on the educational work of the Commonwealth that I had hoped it might. It would seem to me that in this part of the world, we could make great use of international exchange programs. I understand that there is a Commonwealth universities exchange program, which three Australian universities are members of. I tried to find out a bit more about this on my last visit to the secretariat. I know the University of the South Pacific is a member and we are very interested in sending some of our undergraduates to do a semester in Asian and Pacific countries, particularly where English is the medium of instruction. With UMAP, I think, unfortunately the priority has been on Thailand and Indonesia, where English is not the medium of instruction and the Commonwealth has a network of universities predominantly—not all, but predominantly—where the medium of instruction is English. I would have thought this could be a valuable educational tool for teaching Australians about how to operate in the Asian and Pacific regions.

Mr HAMBLY—I forgot to mention that there is a small Commonwealth network, the acronym for which escapes me at the moment, and there are some universities such as Edith Cowan involved. You would have to check with Edith Cowan to get more details.

Dr HILL—And one in South Australia and one somewhere else.

Mr HAMBLY—I think it is the University of South Australia as well. I have not got the details here, Helen, but we can soon dig them out if you really want them.

CHAIR—Professor Gertzel?

Prof. GERTZEL—If I could just follow on from that and going back to the question Mr Craft asked about why the politicians are not picking up this report and why the universities are not picking up this report. I speak as an academic here. I think this illustrates the interconnectedness of policies. Australian higher education policy has pushed universities into a very difficult position to education. As you know, we are pushed to focus on the Asia region far more exclusively, with the notion that this will contribute to Australia's integration in Asia. I am speaking out of my own experience here. We are much less able to take up support and assistance for universities as Commonwealth members. It might be very good when you have Pacific countries that are also members of the Commonwealth. I think we have to recognise that we are talking about political issues and there is a conflict between our political interests in one set of areas, our foreign policy interests in terms of trade and aid and so forth and our interests in terms of this other relationship. I think that is very important. It just applies to Britain and Europe and so forth.

CHAIR—Mr Hambly, would you like to respond? If not, would you like to sum up? Between you, Mr Tonkin and Mr Parsons, we have just about come to the end of our time.

Mr HAMBLY—To sum up, on the education front, which has been one of the strong areas holding the Commonwealth together, there is a singular lack of interest amongst educational institutions. But there are other Commonwealth activities, which David Tonkin has outlined, which we ought to be feeding off because there are some strengths there which we should be developing and nurturing for the future.

CHAIR—I thank the three main speakers and everybody for that session.

[2.17 p.m.]

THE COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATION

CHAIR—I welcome the President of the Senate, Margaret Reid, and invite her to tell us about the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. Margaret is a senator for the

ACT and is well known in her many roles. As the President of the Senate she has brought a distinction to that body where some of us sometimes find that we do not always have our way. Internationally, as an executive member of the CPA, she is a very important person representing our country in that body. We have had quite an interesting and diverse range of views expressed this morning and I am sure that the contribution of Senator Reid will enhance that.

Senator REID—Thank you, Mr Chairman, colleagues and ladies and gentlemen who are interested in this topic. If you were of the view that the Commonwealth was of little value, then you would probably also think that the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association had little place either. It is my view that the Commonwealth is of value and that the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association has a role to play and does play it. I feel a little strange sitting here talking about it when the former distinguished Secretary-General of the CPA, David Tonkin, who was in that job from 1986 to 1992, is sitting here. We will see what he says about all this at the end of it.

I want to go back to how it came into existence. It was at the time of the coronation of George V in 1911 when parliamentarians from all over the former dominions and colonies assembled in London for that event and realised that there were few opportunities for them to meet and discuss matters of interest—they all came from places which had the common British background in the way that they were structured. At the time, United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, Newfoundland, New Zealand and South Africa agreed to establish what was then called the Empire Parliamentary Association. It met even during the war and continued to meet up until it changed its name to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association in 1949.

The Queen, as head of the Commonwealth, is its patron. The vice-patron changes from year to year and is the head of state of the next country hosting the conference. The conference this year is in Mauritius and so the other vice-patron is the head of that country.

In contrast to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, which is made up of only national parliaments, the national and state or provincial parliaments are also members of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and are encouraged to join. So there are a large number of members but also a number of very small parliaments amongst them. That, in my view, is one of its strengths. Any member of the legislature of any of the parliaments may become a member.

Australia in our region has nine members—the six states, the two territories and Norfolk Island. Malaysia has the national parliament and 13 members, India has the national parliament and 27 members, and Canada has the national parliament and 12 members. So the Falkland Islands and the United Kingdom all sit next to each other and have equal status, as do the British Virgin Islands, South Africa, Niue and New Zealand. You might suggest that the small countries dominate. So they might if they all got

together and held hands at the same time on the same issue—you have discussed earlier whether or not that is the case. But, generally, in making decisions within the CPA—more than generally, I think—consensus is the way that the organisation operates. Many of these smaller countries, for good reason, do not belong to the inter-parliamentary union and this is the place where they meet and have the opportunity to discuss important matters about parliament with other people from similar backgrounds.

The CPA is divided into eight regions—Africa, Asia, British Islands and the Mediterranean, Canada, Caribbean, Americas and Atlantic, Pacific and Australia. Pacific and Australia were one until 1990 when Australia became a region on its own. The executive of the CPA, in my view, is too large. There are three executive members from each region and then a range of other executive members who are on it. It seems to me that there is some scope for a sort of management committee out of that. There is room, I think, for a little review. I hesitate to say too much about that, Mr Chairman, because the first meeting of the executive that I was to attend I got to Florida and came home. This very day last year the executive was meeting in Malaysia and, for good reason, I did not attend. Mauritius this year will actually be my first executive meeting, so it is really not for me to start making comments about the executive at this stage.

There are subgroups of the executive that supervise various things. There are 130 branches and 14,000 members. Mozambique was admitted to membership comparatively recently. That, to me, seemed a little strange. It seemed a fairly oblique or obscure attachment to the Commonwealth, but it was thought by those involved at the time that there was benefit to Mozambique in becoming a member.

It has been a place where, for example, when India and Pakistan were not talking together that members of parliament from those countries would meet. I will not go through the history of those who have been in and out of the CPA. To be accepted as a member a country should be a parliamentary democracy functioning pretty well in that fashion. Fiji is not a member at the present time. It is my hope that they will again become a member.

The leader of the CPA is the chairman of the executive committee. At present that is Mrs Billy Miller, who is the Deputy Prime Minister of Barbados and their Foreign Minister. She took over this position this time last year.

The charter broadly is to promote knowledge and education about constitutional matters, legislation, and economic, social and cultural systems within a parliamentary democracy. It takes place with consultation and conferences. We have had regional conferences in our region, mostly with the Pacific region. Delegations visit each other. The presiding officers meet as presiding officers of the whole Commonwealth Parliamentary Association every two years. That, I believe, is worthwhile. Within our own region and with the Pacific the presiding officers and clerks meet every year. That is certainly worthwhile.

I believe that the larger countries have been significant in assisting the smaller ones to develop the committee systems and the structure of how they are to operate within a Westminster style system, frequently in a social environment where the Westminster concept is totally at variance with the structure of their societies as they functioned previously. So, I do not think it is patronising to suggest that they need a little help to cope with this from time to time. We are asking them to operate with a system that really is quite different from the society in which they grew up.

In addition, each year at the annual conference there is a small countries conference where the smaller members can meet on their own and discuss the matters particularly of concern to them.

There is the publication, *The Parliamentarian,* which comes from the central office, a copy of which we all receive and read. There is practical assistance available from the reference section and library of the office of the secretariat in London. It is a layer of the Commonwealth of value to the larger members and of great value, in my view, to the smaller members. The Commonwealth observes and monitors elections in member countries from time to time where there is a suggestion of there being difficulties in running elections in those places. Who better to monitor elections than those who are used to standing themselves.

Seminars are held in countries and others visit to attend Regional Meetings. The Hon. Ralph Willis MP and Senator Chris Ellison have each been to Southern Africa in recent times to attend seminars and participate. Mr Barlin, who retired as Clerk of the House of Representatives just two months ago, went to Zambia to participate in a conference of clerks.

Members come and go from parliaments. In some of the smaller countries, members come and go quite quickly; there is a high turnover each election. To build up a bureaucracy—if I can refer to the clerks in that fashion—and to build up expertise within those who stay longer is really very important if you are going to get any sort of stability to the system. For the clerks to meet and discuss things is a very important part of what the Commonwealth does.

Something strange happens to many parliamentarians at a stage in their lives as parliamentarians—they become ministers and members of the executive and the role of parliament seems to recede from the front of their minds, if I may say so. It is important, therefore, for parliamentarians to be able to meet as non-executive members and discuss the things that really are fundamental to what we are elected to do—that is, represent constituents at all times. All of us are here only because people have elected us and because we are representing them.

The other thing to remember, of course, is that there is no perfect system. The way it evolves from one place to another will be perhaps quite different, and to discuss those

differences and assist each other is important. Within some of them, the presiding officer is appointed by the executive. The role of that person as an appointive presiding officer is very different from one elected by members of the parliament itself. In some of the countries the presiding officer is appointed from outside the membership of the parliament by the executive. So that role, of course, is very different indeed and can cause some conflicts and difficulties. So discussing matters as presiding officers and discussing how a parliament is run is very worthwhile so that experiences can be shared.

Another issue that is important to discuss in a similar way is the matter of privilege or immunity, as it is referred to in some places. The words do mean much the same thing, but to me there is a subtle difference. I prefer it to be referred to as the privilege of a member of parliament to speak with immunity rather than to refer to it as immunity. It seems to me that there is a concept of less obligation on the person by referring to it as immunity rather than privilege. One can discuss these matters in a forum and perhaps convey a different view to others by doing so.

Individual rights, the rule of law, self-determination, the supremacy of parliament and the people having a voice are the sorts of topics that are discussed in the conferences that we have.

The Pacific is an area of particular interest to me and it should be to Australia as it is to New Zealand in the CPA. Anne Hazelton, who is here with us today, is the secretary of both the Australian and Pacific regions. When they became a region in 1990, the Pacific countries felt that it would be of benefit to them for the secretariat of their region to be based here and run by somebody with experience in the CPA, and so it has remained. Over the few years since then, it has from time to time been mentioned that the Pacific secretariat should perhaps move to one of the Pacific countries. It will in time, no doubt, when they all agree which one it moves to. Meantime, we are delighted to share Anne with them, she being the secretary of our region as well, and I think it is developing quite well.

I mentioned seminars and conferences. We have a study tour from the Pacific countries, three countries each year, who send members here and visit. We have a lot of visits from the Pacific and the small island nations—not always to Canberra and the federal parliament. To somebody from a very small parliament, this place can be a little bit intimidating, but the smaller parliaments within our own continent, such as the ACT and Tasmania, will perhaps take a clerk and they will go there. From where it is paid does not matter, as long as they get to a place that is worth while.

To an even greater extent, we send clerks from this place and the other parliaments of Australia to regional neighbouring parliaments. It is, in my view, frequently of more value for someone to go out there for two, four or six weeks and assist with getting their Hansard arrangements functioning or assist with the library. We have just had an officer of this parliament in Fiji for six weeks, I think, assisting with their parliamentary library.

Often, to me, the right solution is for us just to send one person out for a period of time.

We meet within the region as a seminar every other year, and on the alternate years we have a conference which is held in one of the Pacific countries or here. So, generally, the things that one would do within a region, we do with the Pacific and so assist them to be able to talk and chat and get to know people within the region and in relation to the matters that they deal with.

The CPA recently held a meeting in London of women members, with a view to establishing mechanisms to assist women to get into the parliaments more easily than is now the case. In some countries it is very difficult. There is talk of establishing a youth parliament to encourage and educate, as well.

I shall conclude there, Mr Chairman. There is a lot one might talk about.

CHAIR—Thank you very much indeed, Senator Reid. One person who at one stage was in that office, of lesser significance, took a decision with respect to removing the ultimate right of appeal to the Privy Council. As far as I am aware, we did not ask the Commonwealth Association, or the parliament itself, 'What are the ways by which you might pursue the question of the separation of powers and, in particular, the degree to which the judiciary and the rule of law are something which, being at the basis of the Commonwealth, are matters that perhaps the CPA or others might address?'

Do you know whether there has been any analysis made within the CPA about the extent to which there is a separate role for lawyers and perhaps some way by which there can be a consideration of the relationship between the law and parliament, within the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association? It is an issue which, I must admit, when you were speaking emerged as something that perhaps we ought to address.

Senator REID—The short answer is that I do not really know. David may know.

Mr TONKIN—I do not think so. I think that it is not carried out yet.

CHAIR—Is there a body which associates the lawyers?

Mr TONKIN—No.

CHAIR—I know there is Lincoln's Inn and all the rest of it.

Dr HILL—The Commonwealth Lawyers Association, but not within the CPA.

Mr TONKIN—I think not within the CPA.

CHAIR—It just seemed to me that the rule of law is a fairly fundamental question

and might be something we could pursue. Are there any questions or comments regarding Senator Reid's presentation?

Dr HILL—Sorry about asking so many questions. Senator Reid, I am very interested to know about the financial basis and structure of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. Do governments fund these activities? The level of resources of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association is very much the envy of other Commonwealth NGOs, who do not seem to be able to get access to these levels of funds. Is there a levy on governments? How is it actually all funded?

Senator REID—The members of the branches contribute—we pay to be members; that comprises part of it—and the governments do as well. Then funds are paid on a per capita basis to the secretariat in London. If your fees fall in arrears, your membership will after a time be suspended. I am not sure what the time is. I know there are a couple at the moment at risk in that regard.

In terms of the conferences which are held, much of that is paid for from London. The reason for that is to even out the expenses of those for whom it would be enormously costly to get to a conference as compared with those for whom it is cheaper. But it is branch contributions and government contributions. From our branch, the Commonwealth branch, there is a trust fund that I will mention, if I may, which we use to spend money. It was created after the CPA conference in Australia in 1988, when, well managed as it was by the Commonwealth, there was a surplus. The states and territories who had contributed to it decided that, rather than the money just being given back to those who had paid it, it should be put into a trust fund to be administered to provide for, particularly, the Pacific countries, although we have spent some in some of the smaller African countries.

I think you would find that the photocopiers, computers, faxes, anything of that kind, and a lot of books that exist in the Pacific Island countries have been provided either by New Zealand or by Australia. We run this trust fund on the basis that, each year, each one of them may apply for something in the vicinity of $10,000 in value, something that we then examine as to whether or not it is worth while, et cetera. Sometimes the money may be spent in sending people out there to assist them, or sometimes it is used for photocopiers or for other things.

If we do that, we get involved with AusAID or Foreign Affairs to actually specifically check out that the photocopier in question can be serviced in that country, and things like that, and I think the money has been spent well and wisely. But for the most part, for the secretariat, their funds come nationally from the members.

The other aspect of the conferences is that these conferences become pretty expensive in the end, as everybody would know. Numbers of members attending each one range from about 400 to 1,000, depending a bit on where it is. My view is that it is very important that we allow the conferences to happen in such a fashion that the small

countries can host them. That means doing it a bit differently from if you are going to do it in, say, Ottawa or London. Conferences can get a bit too grand sometimes and be a bit intimidating; to me it is very important that we set out mechanisms to enable the small countries to host them from time to time.

The executive meetings are frequently in small countries—usually, I think you would say. It was to have been in the Cook Islands in 1997, but the Cook Islands a year or so ago found that they would not be able to host it this year, and Mauritius offered to. In Mauritius we will not all be staying in one hotel, as is nice if we can do it; we will be staying in a number of hotels. It is just my personal view that it is very important that we see that that can happen. When it was in Delhi everybody stayed in the Ashok Hotel and the conference was there. That is great if that is possible, but a country should not be eliminated from consideration if it is not. The next one in this country should be in 2001. We are very pleased about that and are looking forward to it.

Major Gen. PHILLIPS—I am representing the Returned and Services League of Australia. I just wanted to make an observation. Like a number in the back seats, I came along to make an assessment of the strength and future of the Commonwealth, not unreasonable given that the theme of the conference is the Commonwealth in the 21st century. Few, if any, of the speakers have ventured beyond the present day to this point. I will give a simple illustration of why I want to hear this. The Returned and Services League is a member of the British Commonwealth Ex-Serviceman's League, which had its 50th anniversary meeting in Capetown last year. The Grand President, Prince Phillip, enjoined us to go away and think about the future of our organisation and to come back in the year 2000. Did we want it to continue and were we prepared to keep putting money into looking after frail aged veterans in Commonwealth countries? That is an interesting decision that our organisation has to face.

I can only ask if the speakers might like to trespass a little into the future. Is the Commonwealth going to be a victim of politics, the republican debate or globalisation? Is it going to go in new directions?

CHAIR—Thank you very much, Peter. Ladies and gentlemen, Tim Cape.

Major Gen. CAPE—Mr Chairman, I prefix my remarks by saying that I am very old and very retired of 25 years standing after just under 40 years in the Australian Army. I am fascinated and interested that so far today what I believe is one of the strongest links in the Commonwealth is that of the armed forces. Admittedly, from 1939 to 1972 Australian soldiers were being shot at and, happily, we have had 25 years without that.

As a result, if I may presume to say, politics, the community and particularly academia, are inclined to find the Defence Force a rather dull subject. But the point I wish to make is this: from the time the Imperial Forces left our country in 1870, Australians have fought in wars with other armies and services of then empire and now

Commonwealth countries. The strength of the bridge between the armed forces of the countries of the Commonwealth is, in my view, of enormous significance to the retention of the philosophy that we have been discussing today. The alliance of regiments of our Army and those of Canada and New Zealand and Scotland—God bless them—and England and, indeed, Ireland are a very strong element in creating this tremendous family bridge within the armed forces, be it Navy, Army or Air Force.

I would like, for what it is worth, to throw into this gathering the thought that—God willing, we are not going to have any more wars—if we are going to keep our defence forces organised and efficient, the bridge and the contact between the historical associations of the armed forces of the countries of the Commonwealth is of enormous significance. I am not only talking about the ex-British stock; it has as much to do with India and Suva and Malaysia as it has to do with Scotland, New Zealand and Canada. I just wish to make that point.

CHAIR—Thank you very much, Major General. One of the aspects of a report on officer training, which was prepared by the defence subcommittee of the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, under the chairmanship of Mr Roger Price, was that we looked at the question of relationship in our defence cooperation program—our defence aid program—between helping to instil attitudes towards human rights and other aspects that were inherited virtually from that imperial connection within the Defence Force to which Major General Phillips and Major General Cape referred. Would you like to offer any comment on that, Mr Price?

Mr PRICE—It is just that I think that any future military action is likely to be in a peacekeeping mode in our region and with coalition partners who may not be Commonwealth members.

If we are going to look at the future of the Commonwealth into the 21st century, is it a case of just rolling over the show and trying to maximise what we have, or are there some new elements that will reinvigorate the institution, so it can last for another century? I suspect if we just roll the show over, it may very well wither and die. What those new elements are, I do not know.

Prof. PATIENCE—If we are considering the Commonwealth of Nations into the 21st century, don't we need to make a distinction between two kinds of Commonwealth? There is a Commonwealth—and I am following on from Mr Price's point—of what I would want to call nostalgia, which is a very dangerous Commonwealth. It is a Commonwealth rooted in colonialism; it is a Commonwealth that is rooted in a history which has a great deal of hostility to it in large parts of the world that are very important, particularly to Australia. Surely, therefore, we have to start talking about a Commonwealth of multilateralism that is going to enhance Australia and the other member states in mutual discussions that are going to enable them to realistically deal with problems that are going to confront us.

In the light of the end of the Cold War, when the world is no longer torn between two great ideological poles, Professor Samuel Huntington at Harvard University warns us that we are confronted now with what he calls a clash of civilisations threatening world order and world stability into the 21st century. I can see a very splendid defence of the Commonwealth in terms of confronting the theory of the clash of civilisations.

We do have a multicultural Commonwealth of Nations that are talking to each other. Senator Reid's comments earlier about developing parliamentarianism throughout the member states are to be applauded. If it is defending that kind of realism, then I am very pleased to back something like the CPA, or Mr David Tonkin's defence and list of the NGO activities, or Mr Hambly's comments about the education links between Commonwealth countries. These are things that we ought to be following through. But we have to be very, very careful of the Commonwealth of nostalgia, which might be defended in terms of the 'Oh boy' realism of sports gatherings or whatever, but we must surely be confronting a Commonwealth in the 21st century that is going to be vastly different to that nostalgic picture of something, in fact, that never really existed anyway.

Mr BARRY JONES—I really wanted to follow up what Professor Patience was saying. Earlier on, I noticed Malcolm Fraser made a reference to the fact that Mozambique and Cameroon have joined the Commonwealth. I hear a comment that they have only applied to do so. Mozambique has joined, I think.

CHAIR—Mozambique certainly has.

Mr BARRY JONES—Mozambique has certainly joined. He expressed some concern and said, 'That is going to break down the idea of a monolingual Commonwealth.' I have been thinking about that a lot and particularly the suggestion that was put up by Yasser Arafat, but no further action was taken on it, that Palestine should join the Commonwealth. I took that to mean not that they wanted to express absolute total devotion to the ideals of the Royal Commonwealth Society, including the name, but that they did see the possibility of the Commonwealth operating as—it would be exaggerating to call it so—a third force.

You could define the Commonwealth, in a sense, by what it was not. It was not American, to coin a phrase. Britain itself, particularly because of its emergence into Europe, was in grave danger of being swallowed up to some extent within the European Union. There were a few lonely nations wandering around looking for friendly faces to which they could say, 'Are you from the Commonwealth? Come and let's have a drink.'

To the extent that it was possible to promote that idea of commitment to democratic processes—although in a number of countries in the developing world it is somewhat theoretical at this stage—I can see some benefit of it and the danger of it. I remember my friend David Lange and I were at a CPA conference in Edinburgh. A collection of rather bibulous Scots in Edinburgh wanted to find out about the CPA. He

tried to explain what it was and he said, 'Well, it is like Rotary plus trips.'

CHAIR—I think Rotarians get a few trips too.

Mr BARRY JONES—It has got to be more than that, if it is going to survive.

CHAIR—After that comparison with Rotary, are there any other dimensions in this section? Did you wish to say something, Mrs Inall?

Mrs INALL—I was going to talk about the 21st century.

CHAIR—Please do.

Mrs INALL—Perhaps we are the latest, or the last, Commonwealth wide association to form. We were born here in Canberra last August. In that effort we had people here from 15 Commonwealth countries, but not Britain or Canada—although there was a New Zealand representative—because none of them have seen the need for this interaction between professionals.

I was struck by the fact that there was an entirely new spirit, if you like. The difference was that there was nobody on the giving end, and there was nobody on the taking end, but it was a meeting of partners who were exploring in what way we could assist each other. If there is anything the 21st century ought to be about, it is about evaluating our own country's potential, looking at what our needs are, and then also looking at what the other needs are and in what way we can interact as equals. I see that as the challenge for the 21st century—a different aspect of interacting with each other.

All the various United Nations activities have been split into north, south or east and west, but not on a basis of equality. I have been to the United Nations as a delegate and watched what happens, whether it is UNCSTED or UNCTAD, or whatever, and there is a divide between those that have and those that do not. They have to come as mendicants and you go as a provider. It is the change in philosophy that we have to achieve, and I think that is one of the big challenges for Australia. Where do we fit in? Are we a mendicant, or are we a donor? Are we prepared to achieve that difference in our own mentality?

We have much going for us. We are a multicultural society—Pauline Hanson not withstanding or otherwise. It will survive because it is now embedded. To some extent I suspect a very large number of people in this room are migrants; I am certainly one. Australia has given me much which I would like to share with other countries, not just in our region but on a Commonwealth wide basis. It is easy because we do not have to have interpreters and that is a big bonus. I see as a challenge for the 21st century a change in the mentality in the way in which countries and organisations interact.

Ms KOSSATZ—I represent the general public. There have been a couple of throwaway comments which I feel have been so valuable but were not being picked up. One of them was the public lack of perception of knowledge of the plain Commonwealth to begin with. The example was given of one librarian who said that it did not exist and it was now the United Nations.

We must be aware students cannot know what they have not been taught, and it does not belong in this country only. The idea was given that each nation would develop its own curriculum to be part of a shared area. We do have our own curriculum development corporation, which again was mentioned in a throwaway line. Can we have this meeting decide that one of the committees of the Commonwealth do something to ensure that this idea of each nation developing its own school curriculum is actually carried out and then shared amongst all of the member nations?

CHAIR—Thank you very much indeed. Senator Reid, in the way of the Senate, has managed to persuade us into a fairly diverse range of subjects out of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. I do thank you very much, Margaret, for giving of your time, and wish you well at the first of your executive meetings you do attend. There is no doubt that, from the point of view of those of us in parliament, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association has always been regarded very highly as a forum where you do meet colleagues and where you are able, at a different level from that of the executive, to debate subjects that are of enormous importance to the general public.

[2.57 p.m.]

THE COMMONWEALTH AS AN ENGINE FOR ECONOMIC INVESTMENT, TRADE AND AID

CHAIR—I now invite His Excellency, the High Commissioner for Zimbabwe, Professor Patel, to speak to us. There is no doubt that, if we are looking at the Commonwealth in the 21st century, the economic relationship between Commonwealth members in the days of globalisation and trade liberalisation is of great consequence. There are a number of ways in which we can assist each other. We have learnt of some, but in the field of technical assistance for economic and social development there is certainly a great deal that can be done. I invite Professor Patel to speak to us first, and subsequently Ms Katharine West.

Prof. PATEL—Thank you, Mr Chairman. I also would like to thank you for asking me to present a few thoughts on this topic. I am especially happy that Katharine West is participating in this panel; she will put much flesh to the bare bones that I will present.

In terms of the topic itself, if the metaphor of the engine suggests that that is the only source of power or driving power to this topic, meaning that the Commonwealth is

the only source for investment, trade and aid, then clearly that is not true. I would say that the Commonwealth in those terms cannot be an engine in itself but is an important element in addition to other elements.

What I am really saying is that we should look at the Commonwealth basically as one among many concentric circles of associations in which individual nations participate. It is not exclusive in terms of its membership and neither is it restrictive in terms of its members participating in other associations. So if one looks at the Commonwealth as one of the many concentric circles of associations in international relations in which individual states participate for mutual interest and, hopefully, equal—but not often equal—advantages, then one can talk about the Commonwealth as an important vehicle for economic investment, trade and aid.

Therefore, in that context the Commonwealth has made a difference and can make a difference, and will continue to make a difference, to the lives of people in various countries, rich and poor, big and small. A lot has been said about the shared experience, the common language, the common legal system, educational links, parliamentary institutions, evolving common business cultures and so on, and I think this is part of the strength of the Commonwealth. It has a small secretariat. Basically, it is not a government, it does not have a constitution, it does not have a charter. It is more like a family.

You can have squabbles in the family, you have a history in the family, you may have a past in the family, you also have neighbours in the family. And you interact with a variety of neighbours. You may have difficulties within the family but you do not necessarily throw them into exile. You try to reason, to pull on the heartstrings, if you like, to use all kinds of mechanisms in order to maintain the family. If you value the family, then, clearly, you will do all these things. The nature of the family may change over time, but it is still a family. The notion of family—the Commonwealth as family—is important as far as I am concerned, at any rate, and I think there are many others who share that.

Another way also of looking at it, which is crucial, is that the Commonwealth is seen as a series of networking exercises. If one sees the Commonwealth as a series of networking exercises, whether they take institutional form or whether they take non-institutional form, or formal or informal forms, then we do not have this duality between the NGOs and the formal structures. The networking is important. This seminar itself is part of the networking, I would say, in terms of the Commonwealth.

Secondly, it has programs. These are formalised programs and informal programs, and I will talk very quickly about a few illustrative examples of programs in investment, trade and aid. Thirdly, also important is the building of consensus. The building of consensus is a continuous exercise and in itself does not have a finiteness. It is a process. Therefore, to talk about the 21st century or the 19th century or the 20th century does not mean too much to me. I am not impressed by this ‘end of the millennium’. The

millennium is ending, a new one is coming, and we will adapt to it as it comes along. It is only a few years away, anyway, so I do not see why we continue to emphasise the 21st century.

Let me give some examples of the kinds of things that the Commonwealth has been doing, and some new things that it has been doing lately, in terms of investment, trade and aid. These may be small; they may be small-scale in terms of some bilateral projects or other multilateral projects. But in themselves they are symptomatic and they are symbolic of this family of networking, in that they may mobilise other kinds of resources in addition to what itself can do.

The first one, which is more British oriented, is the Commonwealth Development Corporation. The Commonwealth Development Corporation has a very illustrious history. I think its funding globally, although it started in the Commonwealth, is almost £2.2 billion that it has invested over the years. And I think that within the Commonwealth itself it is almost £1½ billion. Of course, it is not there for charity. But the question is that this is part of an investment package in which both sides can win, if you like. We are talking about win/win situations as the South-East Asians, the Malaysians, Singaporeans and, increasingly, we in Southern Africa are talking about. So we are not talking about zero sum games here.

Seventy-one per cent of its portfolio is invested in Commonwealth countries. It has offices in so many countries, including Commonwealth countries, including Commonwealth African countries, and I think its role has been recognised in terms of emphasise on private sector investment. However, because its role has been recognised, it has now become a partner, and this is the second kind of program which is relatively new.

It has become a partner with the Commonwealth Secretariat in what is called COMAFIN. There were so many acronyms when I was going through this material; so many new acronyms are coming through in the Commonwealth language.

Ms WEST—It is an academic discipline!

Prof. PATEL—COMAFIN is the Commonwealth Africa Investment Fund. The Commonwealth Africa Investment Fund was started last July—as recently as that. But it has a longer history, in the sense that there were the Commonwealth Finance Ministers meetings; they have been talking over the years. In 1995, in Bermuda, they agreed to establish the Commonwealth Private Investment Initiative. That was endorsed at CHOGM in Auckland. One visible aspect of that now is the setting up of the first program in Africa. It is a joint venture between the Secretariat and the CDC, the Commonwealth Development Corporation. Its initial capital is quite modest, actually, even in terms of some bilateral relations—only about $US70 million. But it becomes a catalytic agent, if you like, and that is the important thing. It creates confidence amongst the participants.

Another area which we might want to look at, and that Katharine touched on this morning, is called the CPTM, the Commonwealth Partnership for Technology Management. Of course, this also has an earlier history, just as the CPIA had an earlier history. But this again was endorsed at Auckland in CHOGM 1995. It involves smart partnerships, which means between business and business, business and government, government and government, and now increasingly region and region within the Commonwealth and beyond the Commonwealth. To give an illustration of that, Malaysia started the Langkawi International Dialogue before the CHOGM meeting in 1995, but the second Langkawi Dialogue, which was in July 1996, follows on from that initial experience in South-East Asia. Singapore is very keen on smart partnerships. If you go to Singapore they are always talking about win-win situations, just as they talk about it in Malaysia. Everybody should benefit. That is the whole point about this exercise.

But what is interesting, as far as the Commonwealth is concerned, is that in the second Langkawi Dialogue the Commonwealth Partnership for Technology Management was directly involved with a Malaysian organisation in order to create the process. This has ripple effects. If something good happens within the Commonwealth in one region, we see a ripple effect in another. We know in the Southern African region, where I come from, we just started what is called the Southern African Investment Dialogue, SAID. That was started in Botswana, in Kasane, in May 1997. There are many other investment activities going on, from the *International Herald Tribune* to the African American Institute, et cetera, within the Southern African region, including our own. But now what is interesting is that we are picking up on the lessons of Langkawi, and now there is going to be a direct continuation of the Langkawi process in Southern Africa. Again, this is in the field of investment.

There is also—as the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth has emphasised in terms of trade, for example, and debt and things of that sort—the CSDRMS, the Commonwealth Secretariat Debt Recording and Management System, which has assisted many countries within the Commonwealth to record and manage their own domestic and international debts. That, in itself, is an important exercise. You can have planning in terms of how you are servicing your debts.

Of course, there have been Commonwealth exercises, as there have been non-Commonwealth exercises, in terms of debates about bilateral and multilateral debt relief. And there is some relief which has been given by some countries, particularly the richer ones in relation to the poor ones, and there has been talk about 80 per cent debt relief for the poorest of the poor.

Again, here consensus building is important. The role of the Commonwealth has been very important in building consensus, so that that issue can then be taken up in other forums, like the Paris Club, like G7 and so on. If there is a Commonwealth consensus developing, then—for example, because Canada and the UK are part of the G7—they will be morally bound, if nothing else, to carry that consensus forward in the highest organs

where these things can be debated.

Similarly, the UK can be the intermediary when there is a Commonwealth consensus, in terms of discussions on Lome, for example. Lome has its deficiencies, but nevertheless there are certain benefits of Lome to some countries within the Commonwealth and beyond the Commonwealth. If there is a consensus, then the UK, as the only Commonwealth member of the EU, can whisper, if you like, in the ears of the EU about the Commonwealth views.

On the debt question, for example, there is some concern in some Commonwealth countries that whilst it is important to have debt relief for the poorest of the poor, one should not then penalise those who are not the poorest of the poor but who have debts that they are servicing. If you are behaving well, then you get penalised because you do not get debt relief. I think this is something which the Commonwealth also has been trying to deal with.

On the trade question again, it is important to have consensus on the terms of trade. Poorer countries in the Commonwealth, primary commodity producers in the Commonwealth, as in other, non-Commonwealth countries, do have problems in terms of access to markets and in terms of trade for their commodities. And the terms of trade again has been animating the Commonwealth and should continue to animate the Commonwealth.

The Commonwealth is not a trading bloc, as we have heard. The imperial preferences went and the Commonwealth preferences went, and it is not a trading bloc like many others. Therefore we should not expect too much drama or dramatics, but incremental activities which are positive for the Commonwealth, and one should continue to have faith in the Commonwealth in spite of any possible disappointments at any time. And there are sometimes disappointments—for example, in terms of aid.

I talk about aid in terms of cash and kind; I do not just talk about cash as aid. Aid is not always a one-way street; aid can also generate various kinds of benefits to the donors. One need not go into too much detail, but I am sure you know what I am saying. There are mutual benefits—to both the donor country and the recipient country—and sometimes there are invisible benefits to the donors and sometimes they are very visible, particularly when there is tied aid.

Nevertheless, it is true that, within the Commonwealth, countries like the UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand—the old Commonwealth, if you like—to some extent, have been giving quite a bit. But that aid is, in fact, going down as a percentage of the GNP. It is certainly nowhere near the 0.7 per cent of the GNP as recommended some years ago, and that is a source of concern.

But there may be other countries. For example, Malaysia and Singapore are also

becoming very highly developed. In spite of the speculators I would say that they are part of the more developed part of the Commonwealth, and linkages can be established and have been established. Both Malaysia and Singapore, I believe, do not believe in aid in terms of cash, but in terms of training which is also very important.

For example, they participate very heavily in the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation. Singapore alone, small as it is, trains I think about 2,000 non-Singaporeans per annum, including people from the Commonwealth. And the actual Commonwealth CFTC, whose budget is only about £23 million a year and is dwindling—and there is some concern about that—has sent out, on the figures I have, about 600 highly qualified personnel per annum, throughout the Commonwealth. This may not sound a lot, but if they are strategically targeted they are quite crucial in many countries, I would argue. It is part of the capacity building; it is part of aid, I would argue.

Similar things—I will stop in a few minutes—are the volunteer executive programs which are coming on stream now, for retired executives who have long experience. Why should the experience not be used on a very minimum cost basis? It gives them something to do, it gives them relevance, but it is of low cost benefit to the countries in which they give their experience. I am not suggesting that there are no problems in these relationships or that details do not have to be ironed out; I am simply saying that these are important elements within the networking.

We have heard about the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Fund, which is also having a problem—but they target, by the way. The Committee of the Whole, before CHOGM 1995, put forward a suggestion to CHOGM itself—namely, the Heads of Government—that the target should be about 2,000 per year by the year 2000. Of course, it has had a long history, but it is still regarded as a very important element in terms of the transfer or interchange, if you like, of experience and technical expertise and so on.

There has been another acronym, CONET-IT, added recently to the Commonwealth structure in relation to investment trade and aid. That is the Commonwealth Network on Information Technology. If we are talking about the 21st century as the age of cyberspace, there it is. The Commonwealth is trying to do something about sharing of information technology and I think many countries, certainly in Africa, that I know of, are looking very much at countries like Australia and South-East Asia, Malaysia and Singapore, and this whole cyber-city that is evolving in Malaysia is capturing people's imagination as to the kind of benefits that can be realised.

There is also the Commonwealth Business Network, COMBUNET, which was established in 1994. It was supposed to have a CD-ROM database for business networking within the Commonwealth. Apparently it has not progressed very much, but hopefully it will.

We have had, therefore, in summary, Commonwealth Finance Ministers meetings—

regular meetings, important meetings. Sometimes they have gone on and had, if you like, corridor press conferences when other multilateral institutions have been meeting—in Washington, DC, for example. That becomes an important voice, an important pressure point.

For some reason which I cannot fathom very much—perhaps Katharine can help me—the Commonwealth Trade Ministers meetings have ceased. There does not seem to be much support for reviving that, but it might be worthwhile looking at either a revival of that or combining it with the Commonwealth Finance Ministers meetings, so finance and trade would go together in this new world that we are talking about. Thank you very much.

CHAIR—Thank you very much indeed, Professor Patel. You have raised a number of interesting questions. I would now like to call on Katharine West, who is a very respected academic and author from this city, and whose interests and experience for the Commonwealth is very extensive. It is delightful to have you here, Katharine.

Ms WEST—Thank you. I would like to follow on from Professor Patel's emphasis on networking and take up some of the comments I made this morning.

I think it is agreed that the more competitive and the more globalised an economy, the more important the opportunities for regional and transregional networking. If you accept that initial proposition, the Commonwealth is crucial. It is more and more crucial in an increasingly competitive and increasingly globalised economy.

I would like to argue that the Commonwealth, in this kind of new context, has assumed a new kind of economic relevance and a new kind of value for all member states. Even some of the most sceptical member states are now expressing far more positive perceptions of the Commonwealth as a low cost, ready-made, transregional network—or series of networks—through which members in one region can improve their capacity to benefit from economic and diplomatic opportunities as well in other regions of the world.

More than any other international association, the Commonwealth has both regional and transregional links in abundance. I exclude the United Nations, on the ground that in recent years I would not like to call it effective in most areas. We are talking about effective regional and transregional links. More than any other international association, the Commonwealth has those links in abundance. The question is the use made of them.

The Commonwealth Secretary-General has regularly described the Commonwealth as 'a global sub-system', which I think is an apt description of an association that contains almost one-third of the countries of the world and more than one-quarter of the world's population. Moreover, between them, the Commonwealth's member states belong to 22 regional organisations and the Commonwealth's membership is drawn from every continent. It is a global entity that we have been talking about today—not something

tacked on to other multilateral or regional associations. It is the world's most dramatic example of transregional and regional organisations combined.

Consider the benefit if the Commonwealth's networks are used with sufficient imagination, skill and determination, as Malaysia and Singapore are now using them. The Commonwealth is now led, in my view, by Malaysia and by Singapore, and rapidly coming up behind them are the countries of southern Africa—South Africa, Zimbabwe and the other 10 countries of southern Africa. The lead will be taken by a trans-regional grouping in the Commonwealth, and you will see it happening at CHOGM. The lead will be taken by Malaysia and Singapore, the South-East Asian hub, effectively liaising in a mutually beneficial way with the southern African hub, by which I do not mean simply South Africa, but southern Africa—an important distinction. What you will have then is the Commonwealth operating as a highly significant transregional economic network for the future, answering the question raised about the relevance of the Commonwealth for the 21st century.

The networking potential of the Commonwealth, however, can be understood only if the Commonwealth is discussed in a much wider focus than it has been discussed today. Today's focus was too narrow, in my view, looking at the Commonwealth as one might have done in the past—the emphasis being on the internal dynamics and the links within the Commonwealth. These are important. But, instead of the conventional inward-looking focus that sees the Commonwealth as a self-contained association, the contemporary Commonwealth needs to be discussed in outward-looking terms that stress not only the value of links within the Commonwealth but also Commonwealth links with the rest of the world. In this context, so-called 'Commonwealth' networks are much broader than the name suggests. Indeed, its combination of internal and external links is the Commonwealth's main economic and diplomatic asset. A country that ignores the potential networking ability of the Commonwealth is diplomatically, as well as economically, ill-advised and unintelligent.

In today's globalised economy, the most successful strategies need to use, in a mutually reinforcing way, three kinds of economic networks: bilateral, regional and transregional. This mutually reinforcing three-pronged approach to policy making represents the way of the future. It represents the way Malaysia and Singapore are thinking. It represents what I have called, in the forthcoming CHOGM issue of the Commonwealth Secretariat journal, *Commonwealth Currents*, 'the economic power of three'. Countries of the future will do best if they understand the potential of 'the economic power of three'—that is, the mutually reinforcing use of bilateral, regional and transregional networks. Because this kind of 'economic power of three' produces the best economic results, achieving the economic power of three should be a major goal of economic policy makers in Australia and elsewhere.

While close cooperation with regional neighbours is obviously vital for Australia and for all countries, Commonwealth and non-Commonwealth, regional cooperation will

not in itself, in today's transregional economy, ensure that a country remains competitive in world terms. Today's global economy is paradoxically not only more regionalised than ever before but also more transregionalised than ever before. Skilful countries are those that understand this reality and understand the delicate balancing act that must always occur between regional and transregional strategies, which have to be combined with bilateral strategies in a mutually reinforcing way and in a way that is not simply agreed to by business but agreed to by bipartisan politics.

So long as you have the kind of confrontationist government/opposition politics that you have in Australia, you will naturally fall behind countries like Malaysia and Singapore, which believe that this kind of agreement on a national strategy for regional, transregional and bilateral relationships is essential in an increasingly competitive world.

The biggest economic prizes will continue to be won, as they are now being won, by the countries and the entrepreneurs who can use a strong regional base to expand their economic activities in other regions as well. In other words, I am not arguing regionalism versus transregionalism, but the stronger you are regionally, the more important it is for you to use that increased regional strength for transregional purposes. Far from regional and transregional options being mutually exclusive in today's global economy, the most effective national economic policies are now those in which both options are chosen, each reinforcing the other in an overarching national economic strategy that reflects not only a business but also a political commitment of a bipartisan kind in a democracy.

Although Australia invests in and trades—often very profitably—with many regions, this does not in itself constitute a global national economic strategy. Such a strategy would need to be preceded by more systematic thought than in the past about how best to achieve the three-pronged ideal whereby Australia's bilateral, regional and transregional relations are all of them mutually reinforcing in their positive economic impact. Here the Commonwealth is an incredibly valuable asset.

This necessary concern for transregionalism has been a key dimension of the economic success of many Asian countries, but, particularly in the case of academics in Australia, this transregional dimension of Asian economic success has often been underemphasised because of Australia's obsession with regionalism at the expense of an adequately balanced transregionalism. You need both. The reason Australians have not understood the transregional basis of Asian economic success is that they have been focused on Asian regionalism—which is really Australia's problem and almost, you could argue, Asia's past. Asia has dealt with that problem. It is now using its strength regionally to go transregional, and it is doing it in a very big way. It is a tragedy that Australia has not been part of Asia, in the sense of being part of this great Asian exercise of transregionalism.

The transregional dimension of Asian economic success is most evident if you analyse not so much nation states but, rather, the operations of transnational companies,

natural economic territories—very much part of the language of Asia—and ethnic diaspora networks, notably the global Chinese networks that link business activities in Asia, including activities in Australia, with activities in Europe, Africa, and North and South America.

In international economic strategy, then, Australia is still running too far behind the main game—I am not talking about cricket here, where it is ahead, but the main economic game—that is now being played by a growing number of Australia's Asian regional partners. They have already established themselves as dynamic regional players. Many of the Asian countries have already moved on, leaving Australia far behind, to adopt a much wider and explicitly global focus for their economic and diplomatic strategies. They have done so in the right kind of conviction, that a global focus will increase not only their economic clout but also their political and diplomatic influence, not only in Asia but throughout the world.

To maximise its competitive position, then, every country needs to think and act not only regionally but also globally. The point was stressed at the end of 1995 by Australia's senior trade commissioner in Britain—a very fine operator who is no longer with Austrade, unfortunately. He said:

> The fastest growing part of the world is Asia. But if we Australians are going to be successful in Asia then Australia must be a global player. Our principal focus may be on Asia because of its growth and proximity. But if at the same time we ignore the rest of the world we will simply find ourselves becoming uncompetitive . . . You put your eggs in many baskets and you'll get the maximum outcomes.

Some Commonwealth countries are doing precisely this. Consider the case of Canada's enterprising use of Commonwealth networks for transregional relations with fellow Commonwealth members in the Caribbean, Asia and Africa. So I am not simply talking about Asia's use of the Commonwealth; I am talking about Canada's use. You could argue that Canada was a leader in this—it goes back for years. Canada has always known how to use the Commonwealth as a diplomatic network; it is now conscious of the need to use it as an economic network. Or take the 1996 Barbados International Dialogue, with its focus on the special needs of small states, reviving the 1985 Commonwealth interest in small states. Or take the recent initiative to achieve closer economic cooperation between Commonwealth countries in South-East Asia and southern Africa.

Incorporated in the South-East Asian-southern African strategy are all three kinds of Commonwealth network: bilateral, regional and transregional. Why isn't Australia in it too? The strategy promises to be a classic and exciting example of 'the economic power of three' at work. It has been strongly promoted by Malaysia's Prime Minister, as mentioned by Professor Patel, as a win/win strategy for what is being called 'smart partnership' based on the creation of a southern African hub to parallel and interact with the existing hub in South-East Asia.

Dr Mahathir's call for transregional economic strategies has recently been endorsed by the President of South Africa, as chairman of the 12-country Southern African Development Community. Said President Mandela a few weeks ago:

With its strategic location, Southern Africa is bound to play a key role in the development of economic relations between Asia, Africa and—

listen to it: President Mandela has added another region—

Latin America.

In extending transregionalism to include Latin America, President Mandela is publicly supporting an enlightened global strategy, seeking to reach out to non-Commonwealth countries from Commonwealth networks already established in Africa and Asia.

Close links between Commonwealth and non-Commonwealth countries, as we have talked about today—and I must finish; I am aware of the time frame here—have already been consolidated by the Commonwealth business culture and all aspects thereof. But they have also been consolidated by the global reach of something that has not been talked about today, the Commonwealth's many ethnic diaspora networks. Within the uniting framework of the Commonwealth business culture, we have a multi-diaspora Commonwealth—a multicultural Commonwealth within a uniting, English speaking, Commonwealth business culture. We have the best of both worlds—unity where it is needed for economic enterprises, and diversity including the British diaspora, the African diaspora, the potentially mighty Indian diaspora and the economically pivotal Chinese diaspora network. That is not to exclude all the other diasporas that we could talk about within the Commonwealth, each of them very important.

Within the Commonwealth, such ethnic networks have been united by the overarching, critically important business culture, based on a shared English language, on similar administrative and educational systems, on shared legal, commercial, accountancy and other financial practices. The Commonwealth business culture, then, facilitates the full range of economic relations among Commonwealth countries that, in other cultural respects, may be very different.

I am not suggesting that the existence of a common business culture is either a necessary or a sufficient condition for any decision by one Commonwealth country to invest in another. But there is wide agreement among Commonwealth members that all business transactions, if the bottom line looks good enough, are much easier to conduct in a shared business culture. Especially when business risk is involved, it is important, as investors put it, 'to know your way around the system'—or at least to think you know your way around the system. In an increasingly competitive global economy, Commonwealth enthusiasts rightly argue that every advantage, even a marginal advantage, matters.

There are many examples of the shared Commonwealth business culture helping one Commonwealth country to provide for another Commonwealth country an effective jumping off point for doing business in a geographically distant part of the world. Australia, for example, is increasingly being used as a regional headquarters for British companies doing business in Asia. A similar jumping-off role can be played by, for example, South Africa or Zimbabwe for the rest of Africa, or Canada for NAFTA, or Britain for the EU.

Commonwealth networking—always, we should realise—is not only about economic benefit; it is also about social benefit. The challenge, then, is to ensure that Commonwealth networking, which already offers impressive economic benefit to all member states, offers social benefit as well. In addition to 'smart partnerships' for investment and trade, the Commonwealth needs to implement 'smart partnership' concepts of aid. That is what I have written about in the forthcoming special CHOGM issue of *Commonwealth Currents*. Why is Australia not taking the lead at CHOGM on smart concepts, 'smart partnerships' for aid, in conjunction with the initiatives being taken by South-East Asia and southern Africa on 'smart partnerships' for investment and trade?

In today's global economy, some of the best forms of aid will increasingly be linked to investment, through developing the skills of the local community where the investment occurs. Such an approach will ensure a genuine joint partnership in profits—I am speaking business people's language because ultimately it is business that is putting the money in; if you are worried about declining government aid, you need aid from somewhere else as well—by enabling the investor and the local community both to benefit. The local community will benefit by being able to use its new skills infrastructure to build its own next wave of technological development. This is exactly the type of aid most relevant to the rapidly growing number of Australian, as well as Canadian, companies that are locating and developing resource projects throughout sub-Saharan Africa. There are hundreds of such companies, and they are growing by the month in number.

Such companies have what I regard as the privilege, as well as the obligation, of ensuring that their investment leaves something behind other than the proverbial hole in the ground. What Australian and Canadian mining companies, for example, and companies in other fields, leave behind should be defined by the host country—or the host region or the host town—in accordance with its own needs, as defined in any national strategic plan that the country of investment may have.

The best form of aid, then, is not directed aid but the outcome of cooperative planning for the mutual benefit of donor and recipient. This is the essence of any 'smart partnership' that is genuinely joint, whether it be a partnership in investment or aid or, ideally, in both. CHOGM 1997—and this timely Australian inquiry—are ideal occasions to ensure that the 'smart partnership' concept is discussed in the widest possible context, to embrace not only investment and trade but also aid. Thank you, Mr Chairman.

CHAIR—Thanks very much, Ms West. One of the things that come through to me out of all the contributions on trade and the economic dimension is the extent to which we have not mentioned the United States. Yet, in so much of the world economy, the United States is dominant. I am just not too sure, from the way in which you both, Professor Patel and Katharine, presented your papers, whether you see this as an alternative or in spite of America, and whether you think that it is a way of perhaps using the old association to get at what might be some of the problems that have occurred because of American dominance of the world economy for so long. I wonder if you have any views about whether, if you are looking at expansion of Commonwealth membership and you are thinking of some of the countries that have been mentioned, we should think of inviting the United States to join.

Ms WEST—Mr Chairman, you're the politician. You know the answer to that!

CHAIR—It just struck me. We talk about things that are not there—quite properly, we heard about the service links not having been mentioned—and we have had a lot of discussion about where America has been. I know it is a difficult question, but I just raise it and wonder whether there is a point of view. For example, Zimbabwe. Have you thought about it? I am thinking of your other hat.

Prof. PATEL—I have no instructions to talk on that! However, I think generally it is true that America shares in common the similarities we were talking about, in terms of common historical experience, language, et cetera. But I suspect that it is not so much for the Commonwealth to invite members; it is for others to apply to join. It is really up to the Americans whether they wish to apply to join, and what are the consequences.

CHAIR—And you said that you weren't a politician! I think you are underestimating.

Prof. PATEL—But on the other question, which is whether the Commonwealth is being used by some countries, or can be used, in order to deflect or balance the overarching presence of some actors in the system, I am not sure that that is necessarily true. Certainly in Southern Africa I do not see that there is an attempt to balance one country's participation against another country's. It is more to globalise, in the sense that if you are a small country—and Zimbabwe is still small—you try to make friends wherever you can, and as many as you can. In a sense, one can maintain one's sovereignty better when one disperses one's dependence or creates more friends. Each country has its own strategy. That does not mean that you will succeed 100 per cent, but at least one should not give up.

Ms WEST—I agree. I think that is an interesting point. Assumptions are often made looking backwards towards the idea of superpowers. Perhaps what we needed to stress more strongly today was that the Commonwealth does enable smaller powers to make the most of the strength of others in the Commonwealth, and also to combine with

large numbers of the relatively weak to create a particular kind of strength.

CHAIR—We will adjourn now. We will then have our next session, and later a general discussion on these issues.

Short adjournment

[4.03 p.m.]

THE COMMONWEALTH, GOOD GOVERNANCE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

CHAIR—I apologise that we did not have quite enough time at the end of that last session to engage in an adequate dialogue. In this session entitled 'The Commonwealth, Good Governance and Human Rights', Senator Margaret Reynolds has extended her apologies as she is ill. However, there is a paper that she has prepared which I thought it best to incorporate because it would only take time to have it read. Therefore it is being distributed and we can look at it in relation to this section.

The paper read as follows—

CHAIR—What I would propose is that, at the end of the paper by Ms Kate Gilmore, we might talk about not only this section but also other aspects of the Commonwealth as an economic investment in trade and aid. Then we might talk generally about where we go from here and in particular those aspects of the Commonwealth in the next century, which have certainly been dealt with in passing but perhaps not in total over the course of the last few sessions.

I am delighted to be able to welcome Ms Kate Gilmore here. She is National Director of Amnesty International. There is little doubt that, while the Commonwealth does not have a legal regime in place to address human rights issues, concerns about human rights have been central to CHOGM, to the CPA and other dialogue at various fora. For example, it was central to the Singapore declaration in 1971, to the Harare declaration in 1991 and, more recently, to the Millbrook action plan arising from the CHOGM in Auckland in 1995.

The suspension of Nigeria's membership of the Commonwealth in 1995 was quite an historic moment. One of the major challenges facing the Commonwealth today lies in how it will respond in future to persistent human rights violations by member countries. I am delighted to be able to welcome Ms Kate Gilmore, the National Director of Amnesty International, and invite you to speak to us.

Ms GILMORE—Thank you very much. Amnesty International Australia is delighted to have the opportunity to contribute to this forum and through you, sir, I thank the joint standing committee for their kind invitation.

As you would know, Amnesty International is not only the world's largest human rights movement but, to many governments, we are also the most unpalatable. We take this to be an encouraging sign. Widespread popularity with nation states would give us cause for some concern. But we are not at much risk of that likelihood. After all, ours is the fate of all watchdogs. When we praise and commend, our research is deemed impeccable; when we criticise or condemn, we are at once a left-wing rabble—a one-time Premier of Queensland called Amnesty International an 'arm of communist propaganda'—and a right-wing plot which is, to quote the old USSR, 'completely maintained by imperialist security forces'.

It is said by some that Amnesty International speaks in the fatuous tones of the full bellied, and concurrently we are accused of being romantic wets who do not understand the hard edges to contemporary economic realities in a global marketplace. A past attorney-general of Kenya warned Africa that AI was run by frustrated old women and young people—a very harsh accusation. The Ayatollah Khomeini believed that AI was driven by satanic forces—an uncanny insight.

We operate in a political no-friends land, where our enemy one day may be our friend the next. In 1975, the then President of Zambia, Kenneth Kaunda, claimed that

Amnesty International was an operation of foolish men insulting the people of Zambia with unparalleled insolence. Twenty-two years later, actually just last month, Amnesty International issued a press release of concern for the wellbeing of that same Kenneth Kaunda because of his persecution at the hands of the current Zambian regime.

So Amnesty International's popularity is not with governments in power; it is with people—and, I might add, more than one million of them in more than 100 countries and territories. We are popular with common people. Thus, Amnesty International has merely a common person's aspiration for the Commonwealth of Nations in the 21st century. In the first instance, our aspiration is that its objective continues to be the common good: the good of the people even where that is incompatible with the good of the government of the day. Freedom, equality, dignity and rights is, as article 1 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights affirms, our common heritage. The pursuit of that dignity and those rights are our common good which, in turn, has been and will be integral to any future Commonwealth.

For the Commonwealth entering the next millennium, Amnesty International further aspires that it adopt and enforce a common standard. The rate of ratification of key human rights instruments across the body of the Commonwealth of Nations is variable, to say the least. While the Commonwealth supports as a whole the 1993 Vienna declaration on human rights, only 32 of its members have ratified or are signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Indeed, only five Commonwealth member countries have ratified the second optional protocol aiming at the abolition of the death penalty. Thirty Commonwealth countries have ratified or are signatory to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, but only 19 have chosen to support the convention against torture. Amnesty International's concern is not with the common explanation for these contradictions but with their common consequences.

When 15-year-old Jehan Mina became pregnant after rape at the hands of her uncle and cousin, her family filed a complaint. However, as there were no witnesses, the alleged rapists were acquitted and instead it was Jehan herself who was sentenced. Under the Zina ordinance, Jehan's pregnancy was taken as proof that she had committed extramarital sexual intercourse and she was sentenced to 100 lashes in public. The punishment was later converted to 10 lashes and three years imprisonment. Yet Pakistan, a voluntary member of the Commonwealth, has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

On 25 June this year, 42 members of the Dayak-Iban indigenous community were arrested because of a dispute with an oil palm plantation company over their native land. The Iban alleged that they were beaten, kicked and assaulted with machine guns by police officers. A number of the group were said to be suffering from bruising and swelling all over their bodies and had requested medical treatment whilst in custody but were refused. Yet these are citizens of Malaysia, a Commonwealth country which has sat by choice at

the Commonwealth table since 1957, participating in the drafting of the 1971 Singapore declaration, the 1991 Harare declaration and the 1995 Millbrook action program.

On 7 July this year—last month—police and security forces violently broke up pro-democracy rallies organised throughout Kenya, resulting in the deaths of 10 people. Scores more were injured, including religious and political leaders. Police were reported to have used live ammunition, rubber bullets and tear gas. Yet the Kenyan government—a member of the Commonwealth since 1963, a voluntary signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and to the African charter on people's rights—has resisted the demand for minimal constitutional and legal reform.

In place of this buggers muddle, Amnesty International would have the Commonwealth aspire to a common standard for the 21st century—a gold standard of common human rights whose observance comes not by virtue of a common colonial past but from a common recognition that no government can ever claim that its mandate authorises it to erode the common entitlement of common people to fundamental human rights.

To this end, Amnesty International holds the aspiration for a Commonwealth of the future in which its member countries observe the common law—an aspiration that it be commonplace that member states apply the rule of law, meaning a common right to recognition as a person before the law and that arbitrary arrest, detention or exile become uncommon; a common right to fair and public hearings by independent and impartial tribunals; a common right to the presumption of innocence; a common right to competent and independent representation; and a common right to appeal. These are the elements of the framework for the rule of common law, a force whose presence is a precondition for civil society—not western, not white, not wealthy society but civil society.

As Boutros Boutros-Ghali observed, our contemporary human rights system is heir to demands for human dignity throughout history and across cultures. It expresses the enduring elements of the world's great philosophies, religions and cultures. But Commonwealth countries demonstrate all too commonly a consistent disrespect for these perennial and universal human longings.

Scanning by country across a range of civil and political rights, Amnesty International's research has shown that the following examples have occurred in the years since the last CHOGM meeting. In Cameroon, dozens of critics of government—including journalists and opposition politicians—were arrested, torture of prisoners was routine and many died because of the harsh prison conditions. In Canada, the airborne regiment had to be disbanded for its part in the torture and death of Somali citizens. Cyprus imprisoned Jehovah's Witnesses for refusing on grounds of conscience to perform military service.

In Mozambique, a brother and two sisters, taken to a police station to file a complaint against one of their employers, experienced this: the brother handcuffed and

whipped while the sisters were beaten and raped by other male prisoners in the presence of police. In Sierra Leone, armed opponents of the government were responsible for deliberate and arbitrary killings and torture. In South Africa, 500 people were killed in continuing political violence in Kwa Zulu-Natal, some apparently victims of extrajudicial executions.

In India, thousands of political prisoners were held without charge or trial; and torture, including rape and ill-treatment were endemic, leading to at least 200 deaths in custody. Disappearances at the hands of Papua New Guinea security forces continue to be reported. Dozens of people are believed to have been extrajudicially executed on the island of Bougainville. Over 50 people were detained in Singapore for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression and the state executed last year at least 38 people.

Sri Lankan authorities detained more than 1,600 people without charge or trial. Tanzania forcibly returned over 500,000 refugees to the scourge of Rwanda. And the mother of four was the first woman to receive a sentence of corporal punishment in Trinidad and Tobago when she was sentenced to 12 years imprisonment and 10 strokes with the cat-o'-nine-tails.

The contemporary commonplace disregard for human rights means that a post-apartheid, post-colonial Commonwealth offers cold comfort to common people. A preoccupation with common good, a common standard, a common law—these are Amnesty International's aspirations for a future Commonwealth. And Amnesty would urge the Commonwealth to find a firm and indefatigable common voice with which to denounce violations of human rights in member states, with which to call for each member of the Commonwealth to immediately address the violations of human rights in their own countries. And, for example, members of the Commonwealth of this common future would ensure that full account is taken of Nigeria's human rights track record when considering the future of its relationship to the Commonwealth.

Indeed, Amnesty International aspires for the Commonwealth of the future only the observance of the principles of the past—those very principles which distinguish the grouping and which its members themselves have drafted and endorsed. Amnesty International calls on the Commonwealth of today to promote a common action plan for the future consistent with its established principles.

Spell out clearly and in detail the responsibilities of membership in relation to respect for human rights. Establish a permanent mechanism to assess members' compliance with international and Commonwealth human rights principles. Make specific and widely known the steps the Commonwealth will take when members violate these human rights standards, including investigation methods and public denouncement of violations as perpetrated.

The Edinburgh CHOGM provides an important opportunity to expand the Harare

declaration and to make a positive contribution to the 50th anniversary of the universal declaration of human rights by establishing such a permanent mechanism.

When Kofi Annan, the UN secretary-general, spoke to a meeting of the Organisation of African Unity on 2 June this year he said:

> I am aware of the fact that some view human rights as a luxury of the rich countries for which Africa is not ready. I know that others treat it as an imposition, if not a plot, by the industrialised West. I find these thoughts truly demeaning, demeaning of the yearning for human dignity that resides in every African heart. Do not African mothers weep when their sons or daughters are killed or maimed by the agents of repressive rule? Are not African fathers saddened when their children are unjustly jailed or tortured? Is not Africa as a whole impoverished when even one of its brilliant voices is silenced?

Amnesty International urges the Commonwealth and its member states to see that its future lies in the unique identity it has forged which, unlike the United Nations, is a grouping of common interests. The common good for the common people is its common purpose—a common end to be pursued relentlessly by way of a common standard, a common law, advocated with a common voice, promoted by a common agenda for the Commonwealth.

CHAIR—Thank you very much indeed, Ms Gilmore. In the light of Ms Gilmore's comments, it might be worth noting from Margaret Reynolds's paper that the Commonwealth human rights initiative was founded in 1987 and, as she says on page 2 of her paper:

> One of the major functions of the Initiative is its report to CHOGM every two years as part of its efforts to monitor member states' progress in addressing the human rights commitments made in Harare in 1992.

I know we have a Commonwealth parliamentary Amnesty group. Are there any direct relations between Amnesty and the Commonwealth human rights initiative? I know you have separate relations generally, but is there a specific relationship, particularly having in mind those comments in Senator Reynolds's paper?

Ms GILMORE—The relationship is not as developed as it might be. Amnesty International is also an NGO run from London. I might say that, from the Australian section's point of view, reminding the international movement of Amnesty that an intergovernmental organisation such as the Commonwealth is of considerable importance is also something of a challenge. I think it should be a concern for the Commonwealth that it is not immediately seen to be a champion of human rights with effective implementation of its rhetoric—to such a degree than an organisation like Amnesty International gives it priority, because it simply does not. In fact, Amnesty International has started to give priority to other multilateral organisations and groupings over and above the Commonwealth for reason of the gap between rhetoric and practice.

CHAIR—Apropos that same comment, is there a common criterion on human rights that is accepted by the members of Amnesty? One of the obvious features that has emerged from our discussion about the Commonwealth, in the past at least, is that there are a number of common inheritances: an understanding, for example, of the bureaucracy and the way in which a civil service works, as Mrs Inall commented; a common parliamentary concept which certainly varies, as we have learnt, but is still there; and concepts of law, although they too are varied. Is there a common human rights understanding or basis from which Amnesty operates?

Ms GILMORE—The most practical response to that would be to say that that list that you just articulated matched very well the operationalising of what Amnesty would see to be the common human rights standard articulated in the universal declaration. In fact, Amnesty does not attempt to promote a different concept of human rights from that of the United Nations; its agenda or raison d'etre is to advocate adherence to that standard forged by all the countries of the world and reviewed as recently as 1993.

CHAIR—The only area that is not in there is freedom of the press—you do not talk about the freedom of press, do you? I do not think it is part of it, yet to my mind one of the critical areas in terms of human rights monitoring—

Ms GILMORE—Yes—freedom of expression, of which a free uncensored press is a critical part. It is certainly the case that we have an extensive worldwide network of journalists supporting and monitoring with interest the experience of journalists in countries where they are likely to become prisoners of conscience simply for having criticised the government of the day.

Mr BARRY JONES—I note that, in the last few weeks, Dr Mahathir, at one of the ASEAN meetings, indicated that in his view there should be a radical revision of the International Declaration of Human Rights on the grounds that it was too individual, that it stressed individual rights, and that that should be replaced with collective rights, with group rights. I do not know if that was just a bit of rhetoric for the ASEAN group that he was addressing or whether there will be any follow-up, but the United States indicated that they were not sympathetic to it.

It is true that the Commonwealth record is not outstandingly good. It is perhaps a dubious consolation to say that there are some groups where the situation is actually worse. I have always taken a particular interest in Mauritania. One of the distinguished things about Mauritania is that they are very much committed to the abolition of slavery, so much so that they do it every 10 years—and this will be the year for doing it again. They did it in 1967 and nothing whatever happened. So in 1977, after some pressure, they abolished it again. Nothing happened. They abolished it again in 1987 and I think you can take it as pretty certain that they will abolish it once again in 1997. It is time.

CHAIR—Sounds like a few government and opposition policies—frequently

recycling! Do we have any more comments or questions?

Ms WELLS—I had the privilege of setting up the human rights unit in the Commonwealth secretariat following the Melbourne CHOGM. In fact, Australia should take credit for the idea of having a human rights unit set up in the Commonwealth secretariat—it came out of the CHOGM hosted by Malcolm Fraser. I was appointed by Sonny Ramphal to set it up. Hugh Craft was the director of the international division at the time. I would like to say that we did it in very close consultation with Amnesty International. Ian Martin was then the secretary-general and he was a great support for what we were trying to do.

Our approach was promotional and we were successful in drawing on the strength of the Commonwealth, working very closely with the Singapore declaration. We set up a program of looking at the resources of the Commonwealth, particularly the legal resources. The Commonwealth meeting of lawyers and Attorneys-General or law ministers, which was held in Harare, was the first occasion for really engaging the interest of lawyers and law ministers in the Commonwealth in their responsibility for understanding the development of the international human rights instrument and how they might better be applied to their own jurisdictions.

One of the really valuable initiatives that was taken, in conjunction with the Ford Foundation, was to have a meeting of the senior judges in the Commonwealth to look at their compliance with the international human rights instruments. So there was a very valuable role in educating people within Commonwealth governments who actually would have hands-on responsibility for advancing the protection of human rights in the instruments that have been negotiated and developed. From that flowed a whole lot of initiatives. We identified points of contact in all the Commonwealth governments who we could work with to promote an awareness and understanding of human rights issues that went beyond the Attorneys-General or the foreign ministries. We really reached into all sorts of agencies and developed a rolling conversation which engaged all sorts of different people in a sense of their responsibility for the promotion of human rights.

Where we did not make the progress which Amnesty International is very aware of is that we did not set up a mechanism for compliance and for monitoring the capacity of governments to deal with violations of human rights. I think, though, that 10 years down the track you have put a very strong case for the Commonwealth perhaps to revisit that as an issue and to look a bit more critically at its capacity now to look in-house. When we were setting up the human rights program, the focus was on South Africa. There was an enormous amount of energy focused on South Africa, which was at the time outside the Commonwealth.

The energy now is more for cleaning up our own house, but it seems to me that the real challenge—and Mr Fraser pointed to it this morning—is that when a Commonwealth member is in difficulty, the tendency has been, as it was in Fiji, to say,

'Sorry, you're out.' It has been with Nigeria. So you need a more sophisticated mechanism for enabling a government that is in difficulty to deal with its problems. I hope that can be done. Thank you.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. Any further comments?

Prof. PATEL—Just a point of information. When you are talking about a mechanism for compliance, the CMAG has been started. One does not know what form it will take in its transformation but—

Ms GILMORE—Certainly Amnesty welcomes the creation of the Ministers Action Group, but it is aware that it is up for review in Edinburgh. It emerged in an ad hoc way as a response to a particular crisis, which was Nigeria on the occasion of the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa. We are concerned that this becomes a durable mechanism which does have the capacity to quite rightly build on the promotional work of the past decade and emerge more confidently into questions of investigation, compliance and encouragement of member states to adhere to the universal standard.

CHAIR—Any further comment?

Ms HILL—It seems to me that, within the Commonwealth perspective, human rights is very much a good example of the need for more education, more networking and more information. There is the case of Mahathir's statements at the end of the ASEAN conference, for example. I notice that most of the Australian media fell into this trap of not being analytical enough to realise that there was a review of the human rights instruments in 1993 at the Vienna conference. All that was done.

In fact, the conclusion come to was that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was not focusing excessively on civil and political rights. It is only that certain countries—namely, the US, Australia and western countries—tend to focus more on civil and political rights and less on cultural, economic and other ones. You can easily be taken in by that usage of the terminology. Within the Commonwealth NGOs of all types, there is far more need for a really focused educational program on human rights. I see from Margaret Reynolds's notices that the CHRI is producing something for schools. The whole area of adult and public education tends to be a bit ignored.

The other thing is, that for human rights to be implemented in a country, you need more than standards setting because we already have the UN standards and many countries can violate those. You need active participation of people inside the countries in the form of voluntary organisations of various types—human rights groups, even Amnesty branches. As you would know, it is quite difficult to set up Amnesty branches in certain countries simply because there is not a tradition or people do not have time.

This is where the Commonwealth, again through the Commonwealth Foundation,

can play a very important role in creating the climate of opinion for people to be not afraid to stand up. I know that the Commonwealth Journalists Association and the Commonwealth Trade Union Congress have collaborated on this in trying to bring about an awareness within countries that those standards need to be implemented.

I will just make a comment about Fiji. I was working for the Commonwealth for two years in Fiji just after it was thrown out of the Commonwealth. It was a rather odd situation. I was working for the Commonwealth youth program of the Pacific region, which was based in Fiji. Just as I was about to take up the job, Fiji was suspended at the CHOGM meeting, so they sent me to Tonga, Tuvalu and other places to run courses. Finally, it was decided we would have our headquarters on the campus of the University of the South Pacific, which was the territory of 11 other countries as well as Fiji.

I notice that the suspension of Fiji from the Commonwealth did have a long-term good effect in terms of concentrating the energies of many people on building a good constitution that would implement one-person, one-vote and getting rid of the gerrymandering, et cetera. Even though it took a long time, I think the constitution that has come out in Fiji is probably a lot better than it would otherwise have been if Fiji had not been suspended from the Commonwealth. This is just a private opinion about that, although I agree that there could be other encouraging types of actions taken by the Commonwealth other than simply suspension.

Mr VARMA—I would like to say a couple of words to follow up on Myanmar. I teach English to Burmese refugees and I served as an acting rifle company commander in Burma in 1945 when Aung San was killed. It seems to me that it would be appropriate for this forum to send out a message to Myanmar to the effect that, following Fiji's recent example of coming back into the Commonwealth, Myanmar might consider doing the same thing. What we need not say, but would be obviously implied, is that in order to come back they would have to do quite a lot about their behaviour for consideration perhaps for this forum. I have a second question, later.

Mr CRAFT—A historical reflection on the development of human rights within the Commonwealth shows that, as Pera has rightly said, in setting up the human rights unit within the international affairs division of the Commonwealth secretariat in the early 1980s, the parameters which were delivered to us by member governments, after a huge amount of consultation, were that the Commonwealth should focus on promotion and not on protection. So it was placed in the political division, the international affairs division, and the division I was running, and we worked closely with the legal division.

The legal division went about setting up training courses for lawyers, judges and legislative draftsmen right through the Commonwealth. I think that that has had a ricocheting effect in many Commonwealth countries where the legislation necessary to implement the international covenants was not actually in existence. That is one mark for the Commonwealth's effort. It will be interesting now to see whether Dr Mahathir takes

his ASEAN statement into the Commonwealth forum in October and where that will lead the Commonwealth on this subject.

The other point that needs to be made is that the wider version of human rights that has been adopted by the Commonwealth in the promotion of democracy, democratic systems and free and fair elections, and so on, is something that should be recognised if they were really put in the judgment box. There are wider definitions, broader views and more comprehensive approaches being adopted by the Commonwealth in its own unique style, I might say, in order to promote human rights in the ultimate interest of the compliance with human rights.

Ms GILMORE—You might take some comfort from the fact that Amnesty International criticises everybody. One of the longest chapters is on the United States, and Australia does not get off scot-free. I do not mention it, because I am prohibited, as an Australian national, by a self-imposed rule of Amnesty which is, 'We don't work on our own countries.' Australia gets a bagging. Great Britain gets a bagging.

The important issue that I was trying to emphasise is that there is a temptation post-apartheid to relax. Post-apartheid and with independence being secured in many states which previously, if you like, were colonial or unable to express local aspirations in a democratic and free way, there is a tendency to think that the human rights issues have ebbed and that the economic issues come to the fore cleanly and without the social agenda being there. I was delighted to hear Katharine remind us that social and economic agendas are intimately linked.

You need only turn your gaze to Rwanda, and I need say no more than emphasise to you that gross violations of human rights are contemporary—they are current—and we pay the price continually. The Commonwealth countries are right at the frontier of some of those worst excesses.

Prof. GERTZEL—I wish to ask a question of Kate and anyone else. I know something of Amnesty. I wonder where in the process does Amnesty or the Commonwealth take up the question of why. I have considerable reservations about the easy relationship assumed between a democratic system of a kind similar to our own and the absence of human rights abuses.

I took the point about Tanzania, and Professor Patel might comment on this. It is my recollection that Tanzania had a considerably better record on human rights as a one party state than it seems to have today. I remember that there was an appalling case when a regional commissioner put a dozen people in a very small cell—it was a long time ago—and he was charged, fined and sacked. This is reality. This is not me being idealistic and naive.

I think we have to go a bit further than the question of governance. I do not think

we reject governance as good governance for the benefit of the common good. But I wonder where in this process of seeking to ensure compliance, we start asking the questions why, particularly in light of what you have said in the 1990s, conflict is still a much greater problem now than it was during the period of the Cold War, with the possible exception of Latin America.

CHAIR—Thank you, Professor Gertzel. Would you like to comment, Ms Gilmore?

Ms GILMORE—I will comment just briefly and then get out of the way so that other people can offer more. I think Amnesty would be quick to assert that there is no neat correlation between white, western, wealthy, and democratic, and respect for human rights. It is true that there are contradictions and paradoxes in the simple framework of common law—the right to vote, democratic representation, and so on. Nevertheless, what Amnesty would say is that all governments need to be willing to be monitored by a standard that is transcendent to their particular mandate in any one moment in time and that that transcendent standard is a universal declaration of human rights. The question of how a government participates in systems of administration, governance and citizen entitlement that allow monitoring, criticism, the right to appeal, and checks and balances against government authority, is an important issue with which every nation state is obliged to grapple.

On many occasions a democratic system will be a more effective answer than other systems, but not on every occasion. It will never be a comprehensive answer—as we see in the example of the United States in its application of the death penalty; in Great Britain's continual resistance to prosecute those found perpetrating ill-treatment in prison settings; and, indeed, as we see in Australia in the situation of deaths in custody and mandatory detention of applicants for asylum.

So there is no neat and perfect correlation. But one cannot help but observe that the solution to improved human rights lies in the empowerment of the citizenry and the capacity of ordinary citizens to claim what they are entitled to. When that stewardship is vested only in governments, as it is in authoritarian states, we are frequently more disappointed than gladdened by their performance.

CHAIR—Mr Ong?

Mr ONG—If I may, I will attempt to answer your question 'why?' because it seems to me that this is part of the problem of this whole debate. On the one hand, we seem to have a standard and everybody says yes, yes, yes, but we have some limitations. If one looks at the debate historically, there seem to be several problems. Firstly, there is the dimension of time. I am quite sure that you will recall a few years there was an article in the *Economist* about a discussion between the bishop and the imam. They were talking about the evolution of human rights from the West and the time in which the West expects the Islamic world to achieve the same status—so there is a time dimension.

Whether we accept it or not, I think that is a fact of life.

Secondly, going back to the point that Mr Jones made about Mahathir questioning the evaluation or review of the UN human rights convention, I think that that problem has to do much more with the realities of power. My suspicion is that leaders of developing countries like Singapore and Malaysia are saying,'Look, in the past when you guys were in power, you were telling us what to do. You were using a lot of powers which were, by your own standards, against human rights.' The Internal Security Acts in a lot of the Commonwealth countries were originally part of the British colonial system, and a lot of the countries which became independent said, 'This is how you guys used it. Once we are in power, we will use the same strategy against those who opposed us.'

There is that sort of moral, ethical dimension. But, more importantly, at the international level there is the change in the post-Cold War power game, as it were. There is no longer the ideological conflict between Russia and the United States. Some would like to say, 'The Americans won', but the Americans say, 'What did we get out of it?' In fact, they found that they had not got very much out of it.

You have this problem. They say, 'We have to have some benefits.' What are these benefits? The benefits are to some extent having some dividend out of the whole affair. But the problem is that the world has changed. A lot of those countries which in the past were quite willing to say, 'Yes, sir, no, sir, three bags full, sir' now say, 'No, we are in a position now to assert ourselves.' This assertion of themselves is the search for ultimate equality on an international level.

The irony is that at the domestic level these countries are not prepared to argue the democratic case but on the international level they want and seek to make the democratic case. Therefore, there is the desire of people like Dr Mahathir to re-evaluate the human rights convention. When these conventions were made, who were making them and why were they made?

If you recall your history, when the League of Nations was formed there was a celebrated case when the Japanese government tried to raise the question of racial discrimination in the League of Nations. What happened then? The British, the Australians, the Americans, who for reasons of their own ethnic and racial prejudices were not prepared to entertain that argument, said, 'No, we should not interfere in the domestic politics of member countries.' But now the situation has changed. You are now saying, 'We can interfere.' These are some of the problems when we ask ourselves why.

Ultimately, the question one has to ask is this. If we are talking about human rights, are we using the wrong language, because rights are rooted in law, its a legalistic concept, which I submit for many countries in the developing world is not relevant. We are talking about duties and obligations. If you take the Islamic case of human rights, there is no claim to human rights in a vacuum. In Islam you have rights only if, firstly,

you submit to the will of Allah, secondly, you fulfil obligations to your community and fellow human beings, and thirdly, you fulfil obligations and your duties towards nature.

It is only when you have fulfilled these duties that you are entitled to rights. Rights do not exist in a vacuum. Part of the problem of the western world, as these Third World countries see it, is that if we follow your argument we are going to end up like America and they take the worst scenario from the Americans. At the same time there are people who emulate the voluntariness of Americans in doing work for their community. So you have a contradiction.

In the end the ultimate argument is not between individual and community. If you are aware of the communitarian movement in American, there is a huge movement by Professor Etzioni who has been talking about the need for a community spirit. What does community spirit ultimately depend on? Not on rights, but on responsibilities, which is the other side of the coin. If one looks at rights and responsibilities in contrast to duties and obligation one sees a parallel. Both societies, whether Asian or western societies, are seeking to ultimately give dignity to their own people.

Let us come back to that issue of Third World countries and the argument of human rights. I would argue that rather than talk about human rights we should talk about human dignity. I think increasingly this is the word being used. The reason why we need to use dignity is that, as the UN has pointed out, every culture, every religion, talks about the importance and invaluable worth of the individual.

By their own standards we should judge them—not using your standard or my standard, but saying that your religion, your philosophy argues that you need to respect other religions whether Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism or whatever. You need to have a certain standard. Lee Kuan Yew admitted it—that all government must perform good governance. That is the standard which he sets. The question is then, 'How does this moral ethical standard deal with the world of reality where the Machiavellian desire to stay in power implies 'Hey, if we don't stay in power, these naughty guys will change the system, we can do something about it, let's check them.' I hope I have contributed some dimension to the problem of why.

Prof. GERTZEL—I must apologise for talking too much. I am in great sympathy with what you are saying but I would like to raise another word. You talk about dignity, and I fully share quite a lot of your feelings about the international level. But what about the entitlements, the right to entitlements? I think I put myself in a trap by starting off with democracy. You know, there is a great deal of literature now on causes of conflict and the causes of violence. There is a very wide consensus that we have to seek the causes in the social context. Senator Reid made the point, which I thought was really important, that they use CPA meetings to discuss the difficulties of introducing a Westminster system in a different social context.

I am not saying human rights are relative, but we have seen in the world an increasing marginalisation of people. I made this point this morning. There are many who would argue that, if we are going to see an improvement in human rights, we will have to do something about the economic distribution. I think we are on the same wave length; you would not disagree with that, would you?

Mr ONG—No. Can I just add something. I think one of the problems with this human rights debate also is that increasingly in the last few years you see assertion on the part of some of the more authoritarian countries, saying, 'Look, we have got to look at your human rights records.' I think the Chinese government has started looking at the American standards. I think Dr Mahathir was also saying that we must have an America Watch equivalent.

I think what is ultimately important is not that we are all going in different directions. I have a feeling that there is consensus and evolution towards a common base. The problem is that, like going up a mountain, there are different tracks going up there. We are all trying to get there. The question is, how do we try to distinguish between the human dignity dimension and the power dimension? Ultimately, our problem as outside observers of these countries is to say, 'Look, who guards the guardians?'.

Can I make one other point, Mr Chairman, on this whole question of the individual and society. A lot of us talk about the Confucian society. Let me make one point. If one understands Confucianism, Confucianism ultimately talks about the superior man. It may not be politically correct, but ultimately it is the superior man who is conscious of doing what is right and what is proper, passing on information to his family, which is the building block of the community. So, when you talk about individual and society, Confucianism does not conflict with what is perceived as a communitarian system, but ultimately that Confucianism is based on individual man or the individual person who knows what is right and proper. Question: how does one then acquire that wisdom of knowing what is right and proper so that we can pass it on to society and through them the community.

Ms GILMORE—I might just reply briefly by reminding us that the concept of minimum human rights standards is a bedrock of no-go areas—no matter culture, no matter moment, no matter history, no matter time. That bedrock includes things like no justification for torture, not aspects of self-actualisation, self-realisation, within communitarian versus individualist principles—no torture. It means no extra-judicial killings, not Confucianism versus Judeo-Christianity. It means no detention without trial and right to representation. That is a bedrock from which there can be no government who can claim a mandate of a right to wander. One of my real concerns is that, when governments speak as if they have a hegemonic or a monolithic opinion representing all voices in their community, they do so with forked tongue, not with one tongue. They misrepresent their own constituency. Amnesty International has members in each of the Commonwealth countries, in every country which has a government who decries the

universality of human rights, claiming the needs of particular cultural moments or religious traditions or history. In each of those countries, there are ordinary, common people, not in power, disempowered, calling for the respect of a bedrock of minimum human rights standards. By all means, cultural diversity along the journey, in the pathway, but not at the expensive of the bedrock.

Mr TUNSTALL—I enjoyed the last debate and I think it was great. I think we all learned a lot. Amnesty International is a great organisation. I listened to my friend over here talking about governments signing documents. All governments do that because it suits their purpose. But some of the governments that you are talking about since that bill was signed have probably changed, so you have got different types of people in there.

I think one of the most important things that comes out—and nobody ever likes to talk about it, but the previous speaker did mention the word—is religion. That is one of the curses of mankind. There are so many religions: everybody wants to go their own way, gain their own power, but we all want to finish up in heaven no matter which way you go. So I think that there will always be that problem.

You talk about Rwanda. This is a case where you have got racial discrimination which causes the problem there, plus religion, and it will go on forever. It comes back to the old story, which a lot of people talk about—the two curses of mankind: politics and religion.

CHAIR—Any other comment? Does anybody else want to add anything before we wrap it all up?

Ms INALL—I just want to add one sentence. I think we all come from different societies but generally it took us 400 or 500 years to accept that we do not burn witches at the stake any longer. I think mankind just has to recognise that it takes quite a long time to change the psychology of nations. While our societies have changed quite a lot, it is not so long ago since the only occupation for a boy was to go into the army or the church—end of story. Evolution in the last 100 years socially has been so rapid that some societies just have not caught up with it, and I think we just have to be a little patient, but I am quite certain that it will happen in the end. I am an optimist.

CHAIR—Thank you very much indeed. If there are no further comments I might wrap everything up. Can I, first of all, thank all those who spoke—and in the last session Ms Gilmore, and in the session before that Professor Patel and Katharine West.

It is very difficult in setting a topic like the ‘Commonwealth for the future’ to know the parameters that need to be set. It is equally regrettable that there are so many we have barely touched. I think quite probably we had two that we learnt about before in the returned services area. We have also had a number of associations in the trade and commercial area where we have had minimal discussion. We had some discussion about

the NGOs, as they have been called, with a suggestion by David Tonkin that we ought to talk about GOs and NGOs. I must admit it would be much better for a lot of them, in my view, as David suggested, if they were called by their own name, because they each have a particular function or role. As one who has worked with them, I find it incredibly difficult to remember in which context they are being used—like most acronyms—and therefore which organisation really is exercising which responsibility.

But I would like to thank all the speakers, both those who have been the main presenters and those who have contributed so much from the floor during our dialogue.

There will be a transcript of proceedings prepared and all those who have made a contribution, either formally or informally, will receive a copy. If you have errors of fact that you wish to correct or matters that you feel need to be presented other than you have presented them, then do so. Of course, it will finally be considered by the joint committee and we will consider how and in what way we will present it to the parliament—whether we add recommendations or, from the report and from the transcript, seek to reach conclusions that have been actually mentioned on the day. In any event, nobody will be attributed with anything that has not, in fact, been said here and if we do add comment, it would be that of the members of the joint committee.

I would like to also thank the members of the diplomatic corps, who have been very strong in their presence here today. I am delighted we have Professor Ken Noga from PNG. Professor Patel is still here, and there have been quite a number of others who have been here off and on through the day and others from many of the Commonwealth countries.

I would also like to thank Hansard, and thank the staff of the joint committee, particularly Joanne Towner, who made it all possible. To everybody, drive safely and a safe journey home. We will all watch the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Edinburgh with considerable interest.

I thank you all and declare our meeting concluded.

Seminar concluded at 5.00 p.m.