

The Elephant in the Room: Climate Change and the Commonwealth Report of a workshop of the Commonwealth People's Forum, Malta 22nd October 2005

The latest assessment of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change shows that the danger of human induced climate change is intensifying. Without strong and immediate action, climate change will bring massive destruction to human settlements, infrastructure and agriculture, loss of biodiversity and permanent damage to ecosystems. Climate change is increasingly recognised as having a direct impact on sustainable development – changes in weather patterns, sea level rise, desertification, the rising number of environmental refugees – and as a global security issue. The adverse and long-term effects of climate change and sea-level rise place particular risk on developing countries, small island developing states and other vulnerable countries.

Recognising the impact of climate change on nations' ability to meet the universally agreed UN Millennium Development Goals, the workshop participants unanimously called upon the Commonwealth Foundation, working in close cooperation with the Commonwealth Secretariat and within resources available, to bring together all concerned Commonwealth associations and organisations in government, civil society, science and academia, national parliaments and the private sector, to prepare a programme of action on climate change in the Commonwealth that can address this long-term and crucial issue, which affects us all. The plan should be prepared in time for consideration for adoption by the Commonwealth Heads of Government at their 2007 meeting in Kampala, Uganda.

The remit for this work should include an examination of:

- The needs of Commonwealth Member States facing the challenge of climate change.
- The provision of technological support in the development of adaptation strategies and in reducing emissions of greenhouse gases.
- The support required by Commonwealth scientific and technological institutions researching and reporting upon climate change.
- Best practice in creating awareness of the growing dangers of climate change and the opportunities for personal responses, with particular emphasis on education,
- The most effective way to strengthen and widen communications strategies on the growing dangers of climate change.
- The convergence of greenhouse gas emissions to a global equity of per capita entitlements within a specified timeframe.
- The development of a Commonwealth cap and trade scheme.
- The development of new low emission technologies and the improvement of access to renewable energy sources.
- Strategies for incorporating adaptation and mitigation strategies within national development policies.
- The potential for improvements in energy conservation.

This plan of action should at all time focus particularly on the problems facing vulnerable people and the need to ensure long-term sustainable development for all the peoples of the Commonwealth.