

# National Commonwealth Youth Summit

## Communiqué

Youth delegates at the 2010 National Commonwealth Youth Summit in London considered that gender equality was a matter of primary importance for countries around the Commonwealth as, where women did not pursue education and employment, birth rates were high and the economies of countries could suffer. Several solutions were proposed which included the promotion of contraceptive use, grassroots microfinance schemes and more opportunities for women to take part in further education and work. Support for women with children and equipment and resources in the home could also help to keep children in school rather than being excluded. It would be important to work with religious institutions in order to ensure that religious and cultural traditions did not stand in the way of gender equality.

Youth delegates noted that cross-Commonwealth scholarships similar to the UK Commonwealth Scholarships Programme would be a useful way to promote a better quality of life around the world and to give students from poorer countries in particular a chance to gain an international education. It would be difficult to ensure that these students went back to support their countries after taking part in the scholarship programmes, but the Commonwealth should work to find a solution for this problem. Delegates agreed that it was crucial for the Commonwealth to work as a unified group, since there were many shared issues as well as differences between countries.

Sharing ideas across the Commonwealth was felt to be an important factor in improving social conditions and connections between countries. Countries could act as role models for other countries, with goodwill ambassadors and institutions like the Commonwealth sharing good practice. For example, in current Australian politics, the UK is used as a reference point in a national debate about maternity leave. It would be crucial to inspire rather than patronise, and to support the idea of cultural sensitivity in order to appreciate the cultural strengths of countries rather than Westernising them. School links and peer-to-peer exchanges could work but should be substantial rather than tokenistic exchanges, involving first hand experience, partnerships and trips.

Youth delegates affirmed that practical suggestions could make a difference for many poorer Commonwealth countries. Constructing teacher training colleges and sexual health clinics would be a priority, alongside free contraception, sexual health campaigns and vocational training appropriate to the local context. In all countries, knowing about the Commonwealth and about politics is vital, in order to understand each other better. People could be taught about the Commonwealth and global issues using the Internet and by reinforcing the content and delivery of the school curriculum. Finally, delegates emphasised the importance of taking a macro approach and changing the national consciousness, by setting up lobbying groups for politicians and taking part in crucial election processes. It was hoped that young people interested in politics and global issues could use these suggestions to make a real difference and to take practical steps towards a better world.

Youth delegates found the experience of the Summit inspiring and committed to take these actions forward to make a difference in their own communities and to promote the Commonwealth.