

Fundamental values

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PAKALITHA B MOSISILI studied at the University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland and completed an MA at the University of Wisconsin and an MEd at Simon Fraser University in Canada in 1982. After teaching at a number of Southern African Universities, he was elected to Parliament in 1993. In 1998 he was elected leader of the Lesotho Congress for Democracy, which won the general election in May of that year and has since served as Prime Minister.

The overriding objective of the Commonwealth, since its foundation, has been to facilitate a collective approach to common problems.

The recent spate of man-made and natural catastrophies such as the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States of America, the persistent threat of nuclear holocaust, the worldwide HIV/ AIDS pandemic, the unprecedented floods in South East Asia and other parts of the world, tornadoes and hurricanes in the Caribbean, and drought in Southern Africa – all these have clearly demonstrated our collective vulnerability, and have underscored the need for increased international cooperation in dealing with world challenges.

We in the Commonwealth feel stronger knowing that, through our Organisation, we are connected as 53 nations which share a working language; certain fundamental political values and principles; similar institutions; and a joint commitment to build peace and to deliver prosperity to all our people. We know that the Commonwealth is a trusted partner and welcome its style of global diplomacy, which uses the power of consensus to make multilateralism work. There is no other forum where we can speak more openly about the needs of our citizens or sit at the negotiating table on the basis of equality. At the Commonwealth table, all voices are heard and no one is left out in the cold.

The 1971 Singapore Declaration of the Commonwealth Principles underscored the voluntary nature of the Organisation, the principle of equality of all states and preference for multilateralism as the best way to address conflicts and to promote world peace.

The adoption of the Harare Commonwealth Declaration in 1991 was a major milestone and marked a defining moment in the work of the Commonwealth. The Declaration widened the focus of the Commonwealth to include areas such as democracy, human rights, the environment, gender, free and fair international trade and equitable distribution of world resources, among others. It gave a new meaning to the existence of the Commonwealth and ensured its relevance in a complex and rapidly changing world environment.

One of the most important outcomes of the Millbrook Action Programme to achieve the Harare Declaration goals was the establishment of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG). It is this Group that was tasked with ensuring adherence

to the principles of the Harare Declaration, particularly the fundamental political values espoused in the Declaration.

My country's membership in CMAG has given us an opportunity to experience first-hand the work of the Commonwealth in promoting democracy, peace and stability in member states. The Organisation has been involved in assisting member states to strengthen their democratic institutions; it has been involved in conflict prevention and management, as well as in peace-building. We in Lesotho are also beneficiaries of this assistance. We owe our success in building a peaceful and stable democracy, in part, to the efforts of the Commonwealth.

The Commonwealth Partnership for Technology and Management (CPTM), the Smart Partnership Movement, the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation (CFTC), and the Commonwealth of Learning are some of the tools through which the Commonwealth continues to make an impact in member states. These demonstrate how members of the Commonwealth can share experiences and best practices; promote economic, technical and cultural cooperation among themselves; encourage private sector involvement and free interaction with governments; and benefit from technical assistance in all areas of focus.

The Commonwealth must therefore continue to play its advocacy role and to influence world opinion to ensure that we genuinely address the conditions that allow terrorism to thrive, and that breed conflicts and instability. In this regard, we look forward with interest to the recommendations of the report of the Commission on Respect, chaired by Professor Amartya Sen, to be presented to Heads of Government at the 2007 CHOGM in Kampala.

There are many other challenges. Today peace and stability remain elusive in many parts of the globe. Poverty and disease continue to plague a significant part of the Commonwealth family. HIV and AIDS continue to decimate our populations, particularly on the African Continent. The chasm between the rich and poor countries refuses to close. International trade is still unacceptably unbalanced despite the opportunities brought about by globalisation. These are some of the challenges facing the majority of the Commonwealth family. It is the extent to which the Commonwealth is effective in influencing international attention to these challenges that will determine its place in history. **F**