

15th triennial Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (15CCEM), Edinburgh, Scotland (27 - 30 October 2003)



Notes for Remarks to Commonwealth Education Ministers, 15th triennial Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (15CCEM), Edinburgh, Scotland, 30 October 2003

by Mr. Lewis Perinbam, O.C. Chairman of the Board of Governors, Commonwealth of Learning

Transcript

Mr. Chairman, Honourable Ministers, Your Excellencies:

As the new Chairman of the Commonwealth of Learning I am honoured to speak to you briefly on behalf of COL's Board of Governors. I count it a privilege to have been asked to become its Chairman. I accepted this invitation because of my respect and admiration for COL's impressive achievements since it was created fifteen years ago - and my desire to contribute to its advancement. And because I consider that COL adds new dimensions to Commonwealth cooperation and enhances the Commonwealth.

Before I ask COL President and CEO, Dr. Raj Dhanarajan, to present the Commonwealth of Learning's Three Year Plan (2003-2006) for your consideration and approval I wish to express the gratitude of COL's Board of Governors to your governments for your generous financial as well as in-kind support of COL. Your confidence is a source of strength to the organisation. For its part, COL's record speaks for itself. Your eloquent tributes to it manifests the respect it enjoys in the international community especially in the countries where it works. This is because it is an agency which recognises that the services it renders are more important than itself. And, in keeping its operating costs at less than 18% of its budget, it ensures that its resources go far beyond what can be normally expected.

It is significant that the theme of this year's CCEM is, "Access, Inclusion and Achievement: Closing the Gaps" because access, inclusion and achievement are at the heart of COL's operations. They are the forces that drive COL and give meaning to its endeavours. For these gaps cannot be closed using conventional and traditional methods. Education for all can be achieved only if new techniques and technologies are harnessed. For instance, Nigeria must produce 40,000 teachers annually for the next ten years. It will do so through its National Teachers' Institute and Open University working in close collaboration with COL

using open and distance learning. This is the only way to meet this formidable and ambitious objective.

COL's Three Year Plan (2003-2006) is a bold and imaginative effort to respond to the vast educational needs facing many Commonwealth governments, notably in the developing world. More importantly, COL is at the forefront of change - to transform societies that are trapped in the bondage of illiteracy and to bring, "access, inclusion and achievement" and education for all within the reach of the Commonwealth's peoples. The Plan is the result of extensive consultations including a special retreat of COL's Board of Governors called for this purpose. It bears the marks of contributions made by many of your ministries, educational specialists and institutions. It offers the opportunity for you, Honourable Ministers, to use the Commonwealth of Learning as your instrument to bring about the changes you desire. This is why the Board of Governors believes it merits your support. The Board is grateful for your proposed financial contributions and ventures to hope that you will make every effort to ensure that COL obtains the C\$9 million in core funding it requires annually for the next three years to implement its Three Year Plan. You will recall that this level of funding for COL was approved by Commonwealth Heads of Government in Durban in 1999 - four years ago.

Before I ask Dr. Dhanarajan to present the Plan to you for your consideration I wish to pay tribute to him as this will be his last CCEM as he plans to retire in May 2004. COL owes much to his indefatigable efforts in its service. His inspiring, dedicated and imaginative stewardship of its affairs have made COL a pioneer and leader in open and distance learning and a source of pride to the Commonwealth.

I wish to pay tribute to the efforts of my predecessor, Dr. H. Ian Macdonald who served COL with distinction for eight years. I count it a privilege to succeed him. I shall now ask Dr. Dhanarajan to present COL's Three Year Plan (2003-2006).