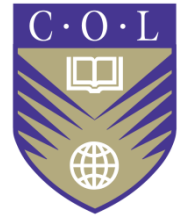


2003 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), Abuja, Nigeria (5 - 8 December 2003)



Notes for Remarks to Commonwealth Heads of Government, Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, 2003 (CHOGM) Abuja, Nigeria, 5 December 2003

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

Transcript

Mr. President, Your Excellencies, Mr. Secretary-General:

As the new Chairman of the Commonwealth of Learning I am grateful for the honour to address you on behalf of its Board of Governors. I count it a privilege to have been asked to become its Chairman.

When COL was established former Commonwealth Secretary-General Shridath Ramphal, noted that, "it is not often that ideas emerge which stir the imagination and beckon people to work for their fulfilment." COL is one such idea and it is to the credit of Commonwealth Heads of Government that they seized on it when they created the Commonwealth of Learning in Vancouver fifteen years ago. It was a bold and imaginative initiative - an act of faith that has been more than fulfilled. COL is now established as the premier multilateral organisation in open and distance learning. In creating it, Commonwealth Heads of Government have forged new paths for the educational advancement of Commonwealth countries and to bring education within the reach of the Commonwealth's peoples. This is the significance of your action - it is your achievement and it should be a source of pride to all Commonwealth Heads of Government. COL's Report entitled "The World of Knowledge" which your Delegations have received will give you a glimpse of some of COL's accomplishments in the past three years. We would welcome your reactions to it.

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. For its part, COL's record speaks for itself. It enjoys widespread respect 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 slender resources go far beyond what can be normally expected. More importantly, COL has heralded a new era in educational

cooperation in the Commonwealth.

Education for all cannot be achieved using only conventional and traditional methods. Open and distance learning offers the promise of fashioning new techniques, new technologies and new approaches to this end. For instance, Nigeria must produce 40,000 teachers annually for the next ten years. We count it a privilege to work with the National Teachers' Institute and Open University to meet this formidable and ambitious objective.

COL's Three Year Plan (2003-2006) which Commonwealth Ministers approved in Edinburgh on October 30, which was also provided to Delegations, addresses the vast and urgent educational needs facing many Commonwealth governments, notably in the developing world. It demonstrates that COL is at the forefront of change - to liberate societies that are trapped in the bondage of illiteracy and to make education for all a reality in the Commonwealth. Your Excellencies, the Commonwealth of Learning is your instrument to bring about an educational transformation in the Commonwealth.

The Commonwealth Education Ministers' decision to direct COL to work with the Commonwealth Secretariat to secure the financing necessary for the creation of a Virtual University for Small States, further demonstrates their confidence in COL to initiate an exciting new Commonwealth endeavour.

We urge Heads of Government to take steps 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 was approved by Commonwealth Heads of Government in Durban in 1999 but unfortunately it has not yet been achieved. Since leaving Vancouver a few days ago I was delighted to learn that South Africa has tripled its contribution to COL to \$201,000.

Finally, I wish to pay tribute to COL President, Raj Dhanarajan who plans to retire in May 2004. The Commonwealth owes much to the indefatigable efforts of this distinguished Malaysian educator. His inspiring, dedicated and imaginative stewardship of its affairs have made COL a pioneer and leader in open and distance learning.

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.