



March 2007

Now

Your voice to be heard



Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma addressing international media in New York, as rotating President of the UN Security Council, March 2007

DEAR COLLEAGUES

This month there were significant developments for South Africa in the international relations arena. Mainly, in a historic first, South Africa was presented with the Presidency of the United Nations Security Council for the whole month of March. This gave the country a further opportunity to continue to influence the international community towards the achievement of global peace and security. In this issue we carry an article that gives an inside into this momentous occasion.

Also, on 12 March South Africa joined all other members States of the Commonwealth in celebrating/commemorating the Commonwealth Day, under the theme "respecting differences, promoting understanding". In outlining the importance on this organisation, President Mbeki in his statement for the Day wrote that "The Commonwealth is a working example of diversity, it comprises 53 member countries on every continent and major ocean and with a combined population of 1,8 billion (1/4 of world population), making up 1/5th of world trade. It is an important multilateral institution uniting countries within common historical backgrounds." Inside there is an article on the Commonwealth Day.

Once again, there is a lot of interesting read in the *DFA Now* and it is hoped that you will find it stimulating.

The *DFA Now* needs and value your views, opinions and inputs. Please help us to meet the printing deadline by forwarding your letters and articles to the Editor before the stipulated date.

Enjoy!

Did you know?



The Parliament of South Africa has launched its new logo in Cape Town on 27 March 2007. The new emblem is an important step in the new identity for the democratic Parliament, representing its values, vision and mission.

For more information on the new emblem, please visit: <http://www.parliament.gov.za/live/splash.php>

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Creative Corner

CARRY WITH YOU THESE GIFTS OF THE HEART...

Hope is not the closing of your eyes to the difficulty,
The risk, or the failure.

Trust...that whatever happens,
There is someone who will understand.

Honesty....the feeling that you,
Never need to hold back.

Peace...in being accepted for who you really are.
Beauty.....in outlook more than appearance.

Freedom....to be yourself,
To change, and to grow.

Joy.....in every day, in every memory,
And in your hopes for the future.

Love.....to last a lifetime,
And perhaps beyond.

HAPPY INTERNATIONAL WOMEN DAY!!!

By TJ MOAGI



Minister Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma chairing a meeting of UNSC as rotating President for March 2007

REFLECTIONS ON SOUTH AFRICA'S PRESIDENCY OF THE UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL - *by Xolisa Mabhongo*

During March 2007 South Africa assumed the presidency of the United Nations Security Council for the first time. This was an important political milestone for South Africa given that, until very recently, South Africa itself had been one of the conflict-afflicted countries on the agenda of the Security Council. In fact, apartheid South Africa's destabilisation of the southern African region, its nuclear weapons programme and its illegal occupation of Namibia had long been amongst the most divisive issues before the Council that had pitted some Western countries against the rest of the international community.

In March 2007, at an early stage of South Africa's term in the Security Council, our representatives in New York therefore found themselves presiding over the very body that, for over four decades, the leaders of the anti-

apartheid movement had petitioned to discharge its duty to maintain peace and security in southern Africa.

The symbolism of South Africa's presidency serves as a beacon of hope for those conflict-afflicted countries that are still on the agenda of the Security Council and as a sober reminder that it takes a considerable amount of time and sustained international support to make the transition to democracy and sustainable peace.

Given South Africa's own history, its current role on the African continent and its international responsibilities as a member of the Security Council, it followed that the focus of South Africa's efforts during its presidency would be on conflict resolution on the African continent.

South Africa used the presidency as a platform for launching a discussion on ways to strengthen the rela-

tionship between the UN and regional organisations – and in particular the African Union – in the maintenance of international peace and security. Minister Dlamini Zuma delivered a statement on 28 March 2007 in which she drew attention to the increased reliance on regional organisations to deploy peacekeeping missions, especially in situations where the UN is unable to intervene due to doctrinal or other issues. In these cases, the Security Council can not absolve itself of its responsibilities and should rather explore new ways to strengthen its partnership with regional organisations involved in peacekeeping, in terms of Chapter VIII of the UN Charter.

South Africa was successful in convincing the Security Council to request the Secretary-General to pre-

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pare a report setting out options for sharing the burdens associated with peacekeeping between the UN and regional organisations. The AU Summit in January 2007 had deliberated on this matter and called upon the UN Security Council to find ways of deepening the partnership between regional organisations and the UN.

South Africa intends to sustain its initiative on Chapter VIII peacekeep-

importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts towards the maintenance of international peace and security, including in decision-making positions with regard to conflict prevention and resolution. The statement also stresses the importance of mainstreaming a gender perspective in peacekeeping. South Africa hopes to build on this with further initiatives on gender issues.

permission of the host country for the deployment of UN peacekeepers is not forthcoming.

While March 2007 demonstrated the opportunities associated with holding the presidency of the Security Council, it also revealed the constraints any elected member faces in this role. The agenda of the Council is largely determined according to the priorities of its permanent members.



DFA staff on the UNSC led by Ambassador George Nene (insert). left to right: back row: Megan Govender, Patrick Tsholetsane. front row: Mpho Baleni, Ncumisa Notutela, Ilia du Buisson, Xolisa Mabhongo, Simon Cardy, Malusi Mahlulo.

ing arrangements throughout its tenure of the Security Council. A series of workshops involving key academics, think tanks and members of civil society is being arranged to help generate ideas to enrich the debate in the Security Council. The first of these workshops, organised by ACCORD, the Department of Foreign Affairs and the High Commission of Canada, is scheduled to take place in Durban on 11 April 2007.

Another South African initiative was the Council's decision to issue a presidential statement on 'women, peace and security' on the occasion of International Women's Day. In this statement, the Council *inter alia* reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peacebuilding and stresses the

Country specific African conflict situations also featured prominently on the Security Council's agenda during March. The Council discussed Sudan, Somalia, Liberia, Guinea Bissau, Côte d'Ivoire, the Great Lakes region and cross border issues in West Africa. In the case of Côte d'Ivoire, South Africa, France, Belgium and others drove an initiative to secure the Security Council's support for the Ouagadougou agreement between the Ivorian parties. This was significant as it sent a signal that the Council is supportive of home grown agreements. The inability to proceed with the hybrid AU/UN peacekeeping operation proposal, on the other hand, highlighted the difficulties the international community faces in trying to stem the violence in Darfur when the

In this case, the priority of the five permanent members was to adopt a new resolution with punitive measures against the Iranian government in reaction to Iran's non compliance with the Council's demand to suspend its uranium enrichment work and its nuclear programme.

As has been the practice in recent years for all the most important issues (from a Western perspective), the draft resolution on Iran was negotiated by the major powers outside New York and then brought to the Security Council as a *fait accompli*. Despite assurances that the elected members would be afforded the opportunity to participate in the negotiation process and a formal decision of the full Security Council that consultations on the new resolution would begin on a

specified date, the Western powers decided to steamroll the resolution through the Council.

As president of the Council, South Africa had to balance the twin objectives of guiding the Council towards a genuine consensus outcome in the negotiations on a new resolution on Iran, whilst also advancing its national positions on an issue that affects the entire international community.

South Africa had a number of problems with the draft resolution on Iran. Amongst these was its view that the contents of the resolution bore little relationship to the declared objectives of the co-sponsors, who claimed that the resolution was designed to promote a peaceful resolution of the nuclear issue and that the sanctions measures would be “proportionate, incremental and reversible”. The draft resolution actually sought to create a much broader sanctions regime that targeted the Iranian government, military and the economy rather than the nuclear programme. Consequently, South Africa proposed a number of substantive as well as technical amendments in an effort to bring the resolution in line with international law and the stated purposes of the co-sponsors.

The Western powers responded with a degree of hostility towards the South African proposals, as well as to the far more modest proposals put forward by Indonesia and Qatar. In the end some concessions were made,

which allowed for the unanimous adoption of the resolution. The process leading to the adoption of resolution 1747 (2007) on Iran highlighted the urgent need to reform the Security Council and its decision-making processes.

On other issues little progress was made. The release of a key report from the Secretary-General on the status of the Sheba's Farms, which is occupied by Israel but claimed by Lebanon and regarded as Syrian territory by the UN, had to be delayed due to Israel's refusal to co-operate with the UN cartographers. The monthly debate on 'The Situation in the Middle East including the Palestinian Question' also once again ended without any action by the Security Council.

The Security Council's subsidiary bodies dealing with counter-terrorism issues, meanwhile, continued to battle with heavy workloads and highly technical reports. Developing countries have found that their small delegations are inundated with routine technical work and that there is little opportunity for strategic interventions and discussions on substantive political issues.

In summary, our assessment of South Africa's presidency of the Security Council is that South Africa succeeded in helping guide the Council towards consensus positions on a wide range of issues. South Africa also added substantive value to the

outcomes to some debates in its national capacity - and in particular it helped to reenergised the debate on the relationship between regional organisations and the UN.

Looking ahead to April 2007, four issues in particular could prove controversial. The most pressing issue is perhaps the status of Kosovo, as the Security Council is expected to decide on a proposal by the Secretary-General's Envoy to grant the territory 'supervised independence', without the permission of Serbia. A second critical issue is the allegation that Iran and Syria are supplying weapons to Hezbollah, Hamas and resistance groups in Iraq. With two key reports on Lebanon due from the Secretary-General this month, the debate over Iran and Syria's role in Lebanon will intensify. A third divisive issue relates to the UN's role in Western Sahara at a time when Morocco has released another plan to grant the territory autonomy, rather than independence. Finally, the British presidency of the Council intends holding a thematic debate on 'Energy, Security and Climate' to explore the threats to international peace and security generated by climate change. Although no immediate action is sought by the British from this debate, it will move the Security Council into terrain that has traditionally belonged to the General Assembly and specialised multilateral bodies dealing with environmental issues.

“TB anywhere is TB everywhere” ...and only people can stop Tuberculosis (TB)

Individuals with immune systems damaged by AIDS have a higher risk of developing active tuberculosis, either from new exposure to TB or reactivation of dormant mycobacterium. In addition, without the aid of an active immune system, treatment is more difficult and the disease is more resistant to therapy.

Signs and Symptoms

- Persistent cough
- Fatigue
- Unintentional weight loss
- Coughing up blood
- Fever and night sweats
- Phlegm – producing cough

Additional symptoms that may be associated with TB.

- Wheezing
- Excessive sweating, especially at night
- Chest pain
- Breathing difficulty

If you experience any of the symptoms, go to your nearest health facility for a check-up or contact the EWC for assistance on where to go. **NB. TB can be cured, even if one is HIV positive**

Share the information with family members, neighbours, etc an SAVE LIVES. STOP TB... because you can.

Extracted from the World Health Organisation website.



COMMONWEALTH DAY 12 MARCH 2007



Head of the Commonwealth, Queen Elizabeth II

Commonwealth Day is celebrated each year all over the Commonwealth on the second Monday in March. This year Commonwealth Day was therefore celebrated on Monday, 12 March 2007. Each year the Head of the Commonwealth, Queen Elizabeth II, sends a message to people of the

Commonwealth, not to Governments, and each year she takes as the theme of her Commonwealth Day message an issue of importance to the Commonwealth on which she thinks the people can have an impact. This year she chose the theme "The Commonwealth: respecting differences, pro-

moting understanding".

The day is typically marked by various celebrations world-wide and statements made by the Heads of Government of Commonwealth countries, also based on the chosen theme of the Queen. South Africa also participated in celebrating this day and President Thabo Mbeki used the opportunity to renew South Africa's commitment to the Commonwealth's shared values of tolerance, respect, and equality and to uphold the fundamental principles of democracy, human rights, the rule of law and sustainable socio-economic development to illustrate South Africa's solidarity with the ideals of the organisation. The President reiterated in his message that South Africa "continues to hold aloft the principles to which the Commonwealth adheres as constituting a correct and desirable foundation for a better world we all seek to build". Referring to the current state of the international environment President Mbeki pointed out that "Today more than any time in the past, there is a dire need for multilateralism as an indispensable way to address global challenges of all kind. Naturally, the application of this valuable principle is predicated on the important fact that no state, no matter how small or weak, is of no consequences enough to be disregarded in the international arena of multinational discourse".

The modern Commonwealth is an international family of 53 countries spread throughout Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Europe, North America and the Pacific with a combined population of 1, 8 billion (a quarter of the world population), making up 1/5th of world trade. It has evolved from its colonial past into an international partnership of sovereign nations dedicated to co-operation and governed by mutual respect. It provides an op-

portunity for its members to promote matters of common interest. The tradition and history of the Commonwealth, including the designation of representatives of its member countries, are important uniting factors. Notwithstanding the geographical, religious and cultural diversity of its membership, the Commonwealth is united by its shared ideals and common traditions and manifested in similar structures of governance, public administration and law, a common working language, commercial and business practices and understanding. In his Commonwealth statement President Mbeki describes the role of the Commonwealth as the “glue that holds together our nations and consolidates our common areas of interest even as it recognizes our differences, because of our common heritage of historical commonalities, links, and the common benefits we collectively stand to gain from forging closer links.”

As mentioned above the Head of the Commonwealth is Queen Elizabeth II of Britain. The Queen’s role carries no formal function, but has great symbolic significance and has helped to underline the sense of the Commonwealth as a family of nations. The Commonwealth has no formal constitutional structure. It works from understood procedures, traditions, and periodic statements of belief or commitment to action. Inter-governmental consultations is its main source of direction, enabling member governments to collaborate to influence world events and setting up programmes carried out bilaterally or by the Commonwealth Secretariat, the association’s main executive agency.

The Secretariat, first set up in 1965 and located at Marlborough House in London, is headed by the Commonwealth Secretary-General who is elected by Heads of Government for no more than two four-year terms. The Secretary-General and the two Deputy Secretaries-General direct the divisions of the Secretariat. The present Secretary-General is Donald McKinnon, a former New Zealand Foreign Minister, who took office on 1 April 2000. Mr. McKinnon’s successor will be elected at the next CHOGM.

The Secretariat is guided in its

“glue that holds together our nations and consolidates our common areas of interest even as it recognizes our differences, because of our common heritage of historical commonalities, links, and the common benefits we collectively stand to gain from forging closer links.”

work by a Board of Governors and an Executive Committee. All member governments are represented on the Board of Governors, and a 17-member Executive Committee was constituted by the board in June 2002. These arrangements were intended to further improve efficiency and transparency, as well as strengthen governments’ direction and oversight of the total resources they contribute to Commonwealth activities. The Board of Governors meets annually and provides strategic direction and reviews the Secretariat’s implementation of mandates from Heads of Government as well as approving strategic plans, work programmes and budgets. The Executive Committee meets every three months and makes policy recommendations to the Board and oversees budgets and audit functions. The Committee includes the eight largest contributors to the Secretariat’s total resources. These contributors are Australia, Canada, India, New Zealand, Nigeria, South Africa and the United Kingdom. Other member countries are elected to the Executive Committee on a regional basis, to serve two-year terms at a time.

The work and the functions of the Commonwealth evolved to accommodate the needs and aspirations of its members. To assist with this objective

the Commonwealth Foundation was established in 1965. The Foundation is mandated to strengthen civil society in the achievement of Commonwealth priorities including, democracy and good governance, respect for human rights and gender equality, poverty eradication and sustainable development, people development and the promotion of arts and culture. To encourage development and sharing of open learning and distance education knowledge, resources and technology, the Commonwealth of Learning was established in 1988. The Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation (CFTC), launched in 1971, is instrumental in the task of channeling skills for development. Through technical assistance the Commonwealth developed particular skills in assisting countries in such areas as the advancement of women, protection of the environment and participation of young people in development.

The Commonwealth role in international politics also grew over the years and the association became one of the major centres of global pressure against racism especially against countries with Commonwealth connections, for example South Africa, Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) and Namibia. The Commonwealth’s stance on racism is best illustrated by apartheid South Africa’s withdrawal from the Commonwealth in 1961 because it became clear that a reapplication for membership after it became a republic would be rejected. After the democratic elections of 1994, South Africa was naturally welcomed back into the Commonwealth.

The Commonwealth has also made contributions on international economic issues, notably through its expert group reports on subjects such as the world financial and trading systems, and the debt of developing countries. These reports are prepared by specialist from both rich and poor countries and represent a consensus between North and South on the way to make progress in global debates on these issues. The Commonwealth has also embarked on the road of economic development in the establish-

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Argentina



Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma signs an agreement with Argentinean Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr Jorge Taiana at the Presidential Guesthouse, Pretoria



Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma with Argentinean Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr Jorge Taiana during the latter's arrival at the Presidential Guesthouse, Pretoria



Iceland



Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma with Iceland Foreign Minister Valgerdur Sverrisdottir during bilateral political and economic discussions at the Presidential Guesthouse, Pretoria



South Africa and Iceland delegates in discussions at the Presidential Guesthouse, Pretoria



Chief Executive Officer of the National Nuclear Regulator Mr Maurice T Magugumela and Argentinean Ambassador to South Africa HE Mr C Sersale di Cerisano

Argentinean Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr Jorge Taiana shakes hand with Minister of Sport and Recreation Mr Makhenkesi Stofile after signing a sport agreement



THE STRATEGIC PLAN ON HIV, AIDS AND STI 14-15 March 2007

The National Consultative Conference demonstrated a collective effort and united action in addressing HIV and AIDS. It was a critical step towards finalising the national strategic plan.

- The National Consultative Conference brought together a wide range of government, non-government, academic, corporate and community perspectives in reviewing the draft National Strategic Plan on HIV, AIDS and STIs 2007 - 2011.

- The process aims to achieve a high level of agreement on key priorities over the next five years including efforts to intensify existing programmes and develop new strategies which could further accelerate progress.

- At the same time, the process recognises the evolving nature of the epidemic and the need to continue to involve other interest groups. The Plan must therefore retain the flexibility for continuing review and input.

The NSP raises the comprehensive intervention plan in addressing HIV and AIDS to a higher trajectory.

- The National Strategic Plan includes ambitious targets to reverse the course of the epidemic over the next five years. These targets establish clear indications of the resources required to implement strategies to meet them.

- With time-bound benchmarks of progress, these bold targets reflect the commitment of Government to combating HIV, AIDS and STIs, recognising that less ambitious targets will not turn the tide of the epidemic.

- Reaching these targets will require intense collective effort by every one. It will equally require individual behavioural change and responsibility from all of us.

There is no known cure for AIDS: Together we can overcome! Let us join hands in a partnership of hope!

By The Presidency

GEPF - COMMON PROBLEMS

It has happened in the past that many a member of the GEPF who have had problems with their pension benefits would blame the organisation for taking too long to make a payment. These kinds of complaints are received constantly at the GEPF Call Centre and the Walk-In Centre. While the GEPF cannot claim to be without fault in the handling of benefit claims, it has become apparent to the organisation that many members do not bother about their pension or pension records, until such time that they retire or resign.

Through the common difficulties that occur when one exits the Fund, the GEPF has noted that a lot of the members of the organisation, especially those who are far from retirement, are less interested in pension related matters. Such members are generally the last to update their address details with the GEPF when they move to another area. As a result, these members fail to receive GEPF newsletters, which carry a lot of valuable information. Most of these members are not even perturbed by the fact that their colleagues receive GEPF correspondence, while they do not. It is these same members who fail to claim for such benefits as the Funeral Benefit, due to lack of information.

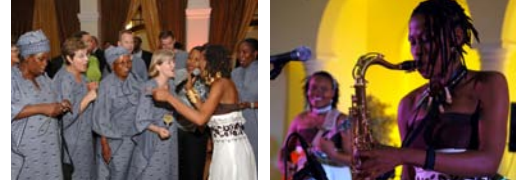
The GEPF is making a plea to all members who receive its newsletters on a quarterly basis to inform their colleagues about it and encourage them to make contact with the GEPF to ensure that they also receive it. It would be beneficial to both your colleagues and the GEPF if they were to receive the newsletter regularly. Receipt of the newsletter implies that one's address details are correct at the GEPF and that one is constantly kept abreast of developments within the organisation. Such, seemingly minor things, matter a lot when a member decides to exit the Fund because then, the GEPF would want to corroborate all the information provided with that held by the organisation. Should there be a lot of discrepancies between the two, then the processing of documentation may be delayed while the GEPF tries to clarify the incongruous information.

Now and then, the GEPF reminds members to complete their nomination forms to make provision for the distribution of pension benefits, should they die before retirement while still in the public service. Those who do not receive the newsletter and those who choose to ignore its contents would obviously miss such information. When a member passes away however, the organisation finds itself with benefits that have not been apportioned to the various beneficiaries. On certain occasions, when there is more than one eligible beneficiary, the payment of benefits will be delayed while a solution is sought as to the distribution of such funds. An example of this scenario is that of a man who passes away after being married twice. If the children from the previous marriage are eligible dependents, they will also be entitled to a portion of their father's benefits along with the children from the second marriage. Due to the absence of the father, it may happen that the former wife and the current widow may not agree on the paternity of the children. Should this happen, then the GEPF would have to defer payment of benefits until paternity has been proven.

Recently, the GEPF received notification of the passing-on of one of its members. The member, it emerged, had appointed his brother as an executor of his estate. In terms of this arrangement, the GEPF had to do everything through the brother and not the wife. On various occasions the GEPF requested the brother to supply certain documentation, which he did not. In the meantime, the man's widow phoned the GEPF and complained that the organisation took too long to finalise the payment of benefits. The GEPF could however, not make any payments when there were documents missing.

These are some of the common problems that the organisation encounters on a regular basis. It is therefore important that the GEPF should have all the relevant information while a member is still in employment. This will assist a lot in the finalisation of payments when a member exits the Fund.

INTERNATIONAL FAIR PAYOUT FUNCTION 2007



The Department of Foreign Affairs together with City of Tshwane organised a Payout Function following the International Fair hosted last year in November 2006 at the grounds of the Union Buildings. The event was held at the Presidential guest House on the 26 March 2007. The function was co-hosted by Deputy Minister Sue van der Merwe and Dr. Gwen Ramokgopa, Mayor of Tshwane Metropolitan.

Twenty-five embassies participated in the 2006 International Fair and all contributed an amount of R500 participation fee. As the main purpose of the event was to raise funds, Missions were requested to sell items on the day to raise money that will be donated to Charity Organizations of their choice. Most Missions were able to sell items on the day and they raised an amount of R30 958.00. Missions that participated were as follows:



International Fair handout ceremony at the Presidential Guesthouse. Deputy Minister Sue van der Merwe (right) and Tshwane Mayor Gwen Ramakgopa (left) hosted the event, with H E Mr S Rahardjo (centred), Indonesia Ambassador receiving a trophy.

1. Embassy of the Democratic People's Republic of Algeria
2. High Commission of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
3. High Commission of the Republic Botswana
4. Embassy of the People's Republic of China
5. Embassy of the Republic of Colombia
6. Embassy of the Republic of Croatia
7. Embassy of the Republic of Cuba
8. Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia
9. Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran
10. Embassy of the Italian Republic
11. High Commission of the Federation of Malaysia
12. Embassy of the Union of Myanmar
13. Embassy of the United Mexican States
14. High Commission of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan
15. Embassy of the State of Palestine
16. Embassy of the Republic of Philippines
17. Embassy of the Republic of Poland
18. Embassy of the Arab Democratic Republic of Saharawi
19. Embassy of the Republic of Serbia
20. High Commission of the Republic of Singapore
21. Embassy of the Slovak Republic
22. Taiwan Liaison Office
23. High Commission of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago
24. Embassy of the United Arab Emirates
25. Embassy of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam

Our Department together with the City of Tshwane raised an amount of R124 688.30 that was donated to the Charity Organization selected by the department. The money that the department raised came from sponsorship, Missions participation fees, exhibitors and entrance tickets fee.

The Charity Organizations were selected based on the theme we had last year which was "Building human bridges and extending the age of hope". As we were celebrating the 60th Anniversary of the women's march to the Union Building and the 30th Anniversary of June 16th, it was agreed that the charity organizations should be selected on the basis that their focus is around women, children and youth issues. Each Charity Organizations received a minimum amount of R6000.00 towards their work.

by Sibongile Mabasa, Directorate Marketing

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ment of the Commonwealth Business Council (CBC), the Commonwealth Private Investment Initiative and the Trade and Investment Access Facility. The CBC work to enhance trade and investment by providing a bridge between the private sector and Governments, between developed and emerging markets and between large and small business.

At the end of the 1980s, the Commonwealth became actively involved with a new dimension of work, namely helping countries to strengthen their democracies. In this respect the Commonwealth assists with observing elections, training officials and giving technical and legal help. Most recently Commonwealth expert teams observed the Lesotho Parliamentary elections in February 2007 and the preparations for the elections in Sierra Leone. Assistance is also given with the training of officials in member countries on the subject of good governance. The Commonwealth also has a self-disciplinary mechanism, through the Millbrook Programme and the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group, to deal with serious or persistent violations of the Harare Commonwealth Declaration, which is the association's second general statement on beliefs and the core values to take the Commonwealth into the twenty-first century and beyond.

The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings, held every two years since 1971 in different Commonwealth countries on a regional rotational basis, are also known by the acronym CHOGM. These summit meetings are normally organized by the host government in collaboration with the Commonwealth Secretariat. The immediate past CHOGM was held in Valletta, Malta and the next CHOGM is scheduled to take place in Kampala, Uganda from 23 to 25 November 2007.

The Commonwealth CHOGM meetings are the association's ultimate policy and decision-making forums with three broad objectives:

- To allow Commonwealth leaders

to review international political and economic developments, to decide, where appropriate, what action the association will take, and then to issue a communiqué stating the Commonwealth position;

- To create an opportunity for leaders to examine avenues for Commonwealth cooperation for development, considering both the work done over the previous two years, and agreeing priorities and programmes for the future;
- To provide a platform to strengthen the sense of the Commonwealth itself, as an association which has characteristics of friendship, business partnership and stabilizing ballast in a world of change and turmoil.

Since rejoining the Commonwealth in 1994, South Africa has interacted closely with the work of the Commonwealth. In November 1999 South Africa hosted the 1999 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Durban. More recently the Department of Education hosted the 16th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers from 11 to 14 December 2006 in Cape Town. Under the theme, "Access to Quality Education", Ministers reviewed the progress in education across the Commonwealth, while for the first time at a Commonwealth Education Ministers Conference, three parallel events namely, the Teachers Forum, Stakeholders Forum and Youth Forum were hosted to address education problems from the perspective of teachers, academics, national and international agencies as well as the youth.

South Africa will also actively participate in the next Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting that will be held in Kampala. The agreed theme for this event is "Transforming Commonwealth Societies to achieve political, economic and human development". South Africa is working closely with the Ugandan government to achieve the goals set for the Kam-

pala CHOGM. As host of the 1999 CHOGM and various major international conferences, a South Africa delegation shared in January 2007, at the bilateral level, with the organizers of the Kampala CHOGM experiences with international conferences, especially CHOGM.

South Africa sees each CHOGM as an opportunity to share best practices and experiences with countries that have transformed and modernized their societies politically and economically and give members the opportunity to replicate the successes throughout the Commonwealth. The 2007 CHOGM convened on African soil, will provide a good forum to discuss the African perspective as it relates to the theme and thus an opportunity to advance the African Agenda.

The importance of the Commonwealth for South Africa was reflected in the Commonwealth Secretary-General's Commonwealth Day message when he reminded member nations, in the words of former President Nelson Mandela's famous statement in 1994, that "The Commonwealth makes the world safe for diversity". The continued commitment of South Africa to the Commonwealth can best be summarized by the President's closing remarks of his Commonwealth Day message namely that "The government of South Africa feels confident that through our Commonwealth networks we can strengthen international unity by understanding and respecting diversity and building platforms for peace and prosperity world-wide".

Sources:

- *Media Statement - President Thabo Mbeki, Commonwealth Day, 12 March 2007*

- *Media Statement - Commonwealth Secretary-General, Mr. Donald McKinnon, 12 March 2007.*

- *Media Statement and Press Kit: Head of Commonwealth, Queen Elizabeth of Britain, 12 March 2007.*

- *Malta Declaration on Networking the Commonwealth for Development.*

- *The Commonwealth Yearbook 2005*

Where were you...?

