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## ***Learning to Live Together***

A Response from Civil Society in the Education Sector  
to the

Report of the Commonwealth Commission on Respect and Understanding *Civil Paths to Peace*

### ***The Bangi Conference***

1. The Commonwealth Consortium for Education (CCfE) is a grouping of two dozen pan-Commonwealth voluntary and professional organisations committed to promoting educational co-operation and development in the Commonwealth. The Consortium held its third general Conference on the theme *Learning to Live Together: Education for Social Cohesion* at Bangi-Putrajaya, Malaysia, on June 12 and 13 2009, on the eve of the 17<sup>th</sup> Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers, 17CCEM. Its partner and generous host was the National University of Malaysia, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. The conference was supported by the Commonwealth Foundation.

2. The gathering was attended by participants from 14 Commonwealth countries and representatives of Commonwealth and other international organisations. A keynote address was given by a member of the Commonwealth Commission on Respect and Understanding, Dr Kamal Hossain, former Foreign Minister and Minister of Law of Bangladesh.

3. The Conference deliberations were informed throughout by the Report of the Commission, *Civil Paths to Peace*. Chapter 7 of the Report is devoted to the role of education and youth which Commonwealth Heads of Government identified in their 2007 Munyonyo Statement as having critical roles in strategies to promote social cohesion.

4. Heads of Government asked for the development of concrete steps to give practical effect to the Report, building on and extending existing programmes; and for the exchange of best practices and experiences of Commonwealth countries.

### ***The basis for a response from the Commonwealth's education sector***

5. At the Bangi Conference the following points were given particular emphasis;

- 5.1 There is a close connection between progress towards the goal of Education for All and the achievement of Commonwealth values of respect, diversity, human rights, democracy and good governance, and development.
- 5.2 A disproportionate part of the global deficit in universal basic schooling and literacy (especially among girls and women) is to be found in Commonwealth countries of South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.
- 5.3 Commonwealth countries need to move 'towards and beyond global goals and targets in education' if they are successfully to promote a culture of respect and understanding and to achieve the benefits of economic and social development

- 5.4 In implementing educational policies, particular attention should be given to inclusion of women and girls, disadvantaged groups and those with special needs.
- 5.5 Educational activity directed to promotion of social cohesion should embrace the policies and programmes of Commonwealth international organisations, national and local governments, education institutions, and civil-society bodies. It should pervade all levels and forms of education.
- 5.6 Educational policies and programmes cannot on their own eradicate societal dysfunctions of inequality, violence or alienation. Harmonised approaches through inter-sectoral collaboration are essential for creating social cohesion.
- 5.7 The Commonwealth has a well developed infrastructure for collective action in education, including inter-governmental organisations and programmes and a wide range of pan-Commonwealth civil-society associations, professional bodies and teachers' organisations that can be mobilised in a co-operative approach to addressing challenges of cohesion, nationally and internationally.
- 5.8 Investment in human development should be given high priority. New strategies should be developed to meet the challenge of financing educational provision for all citizens especially during the present period of economic recession.

### ***Proposals for Action***

#### **6. Against that background, this Conference requests Commonwealth education ministers**

- 6.1 to ensure that education contributes to the full development of human personality, basing it on the four pillars of education: to be, to know, to do, and to live together (the Delors Report 1996).
- 6.2 to implement strategies and programmes in the education sector, at both national and pan-Commonwealth levels, for the promotion of social cohesion and a culture of peace and international understanding.
- 6.3 to give special emphasis in such strategies and programmes to:
  - education in war- and conflict-affected areas and the adoption of alternative educational models where formal education cannot be provided.
  - development of policies and actions that respond to the impact of HIV/AIDS on the provision of education, on teachers and learners, and on their communities.
- 6.4 to develop a framework for collective action, linking the activities of Commonwealth inter-governmental organisations and civil society, and making full use of the Commonwealth's institutional, professional and youth organisations as partners.
- 6.5 To work with sister organisations in the UN family, as well as with regional organisations, drawing on their insights and experience and co-operating in the design and delivery of programmes to promote respect and understanding of diversity and difference.

#### **7. The Conference further suggests that the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Commonwealth of Learning and the Commonwealth Foundation should give priority to developing and strengthening of programmes of exchange, including**

- 7.1 Teacher and youth exchanges between Commonwealth countries.
- 7.2 Links between schools, colleges and community organisations in different countries
- 7.3 Inter-university partnerships for teaching and research on inter-cultural understanding and Commonwealth values, and support of relevant Commonwealth professional networks.
- 7.4 Expansion of the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan to provide more opportunities for exchange of scholars, particularly with developing countries. Institution of a special

category of awards for research and professional development in the area of social cohesion could be considered.

**8. Finally the Conference advocates development and extension of co-operative programmes, exchange of experience, and support for national capacity-building, in the following areas:**

- 8.1 Promotion of education about the Commonwealth and the values that it espouses.
  - 8.2 A focus on education for responsible citizenship for children and adults to encourage active participation in political processes and service to the community.
  - 8.3 Dissemination of information and publications about Commonwealth education policies and good practice in education for respect and understanding, with a particular focus on the inclusion of marginalised groups, and on language policy.
  - 8.4 Provision of resource kits for curriculum development and assessment in the field of history/social science/civics and human rights education and of case studies for building socially cohesive societies, and facilitating the healing processes after conflicts (“Kits for TRIPS” – Teaching Respect, Inclusion, Peace and Solidarity).
  - 8.5 Development and dissemination of teaching and learning materials on e.g ‘Commonwealth heroines and heroes of peace’ (such as Gandhi, Maathai, Mandela, Tutu), identifying role models in sport, the arts and public and community service.
  - 8.6 Compilation of Commonwealth guides to literature, film and other resources that foster respect and understanding, the resolution of conflicts in different cultures, and the promotion of freedom of expression, critical thinking and responsible action.
  - 8.7 Use in schools and adult education of the full range of resources – in literature and poetry, art, music, sport, drama, - within different cultures, with recourse to museums, libraries, and craftsmen.
  - 8.8 Teacher education and professional development programmes to support teachers and principals facing the challenge of working in multicultural classrooms, confronting difficult environments for education, and tackling controversial issues.
  - 8.9 Appointment of ‘youth ambassadors for peace’, including especially those from minority groups, and creating awards and prizes for distinctive contributions by teachers and students in this area
  - 8.10 Encouragement to young people, with their interest and expertise in modern communication technology, to take advantage of these new possibilities to engage in contacts across cultures and other social divides, and to become agents for the exchange of knowledge and skills in the area of respect and understanding.
  - 8.11 Promotion of a culture of accountability among policy-makers, managers and other leaders in the education system, requiring them to set an example as role models
  - 8.12 Improvement of data bases at all levels of education on access and inclusion for members of different groups in society, including those defined on an ethnic, linguistic, social, economic and religious basis so that the overall situation and the impact of intervention measures can be monitored and policies adjusted where necessary.
9. **In expressing our own endorsement of the recommendations of *Civil Paths to Peace* in respect of education and youth, members of the Commonwealth Consortium for Education affirm their own full commitment to working in partnership with Commonwealth inter-governmental organisations, Ministries of Education and other partners to ensure the effective implementation of priority programmes in this area approved by 17CCEM.**