

9 March 2004

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Julian Robert Hunte,
President of the 58th Session of the General Assembly,
to the Model Youth Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting
(CHOGM)**

Madam Chair, National Youth CHOGM, Mr. Secretary General, Mr. Stuart Mole, Director-General of the Royal Commonwealth Society, participants in this model CHOGM, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, good morning:

The Commonwealth's longstanding investment in youth recognizes the key role young people must play in advancing international cooperation, and the importance of preparing them to play that role. Today's model CHOGM focuses on critical aspects of that preparation - consultations, negotiations, decision-making and consensus building.

I wish to commend The Royal Commonwealth Society, a pivotal member of the informal Commonwealth, for its continuing initiative to ensure that youth remain an important focus of Commonwealth Day celebrations. I wish to thank Director-General Stuart Mole and the Society for inviting me to be part of this opening ceremony here in historic Marlborough House. I thank you, the participants, because I share your excitement, as you step into enormous shoes, take up the mantle of government and experience first hand the challenges of leadership in an increasingly difficult and complex world.

Like the leaders you will represent, you will face problems on a global scale. You will come to realize that although problems may be beyond your borders, you must be an integral part of initiatives for their resolution. There is, after all, but one world, and it stands to reason that there is but one global agenda. All those working for the future of multilateralism, including government leaders and heads of regional and international organizations - our Secretary-General Don McKinnon included - know this only too well.

The Commonwealth Day Theme, "Building a Commonwealth of Freedom" focuses on a critical but complex concept in respect of our extensive global agenda of common interests and common concerns. I believe that it addresses fundamentally the "better standards of life in larger freedoms" enshrined in the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. These are also ideals that find expression in Commonwealth Declarations, including the Harare Commonwealth Declaration.

I would strongly counsel you to take a broad based approach to the concept of freedom, which would allow you to focus on all critical aspects of human endeavours. Viewing freedom from this broader perspective will make it clear that it involves much more than keeping the peace, since in and of itself this will not ensure security and freedom. We must act holistically. We must resolve

crisis before they engulf people in conflict and war. After all, conflict management can never be a substitute for conflict prevention. Freedom directs us to cooperate to free people from fear of terrorism, the perils of drug trafficking, and the illegal transfer of small arms and light weapons.

Hand in hand with our efforts to maintain peace and security and to promote democracy and good governance, however, we must develop policy options that respond to the needs and aspiration of people the world over for their human rights to be respected, and for freedom from poverty, ignorance, deadly pandemics including HIV/AIDS and for economic progress. We must ensure gender equality and act to ameliorate the full range of social problems affecting countries, particularly in the developing world. This is especially critical for the Commonwealth, as the vast majority of its Member States are developing countries.

What I am proposing here is not a straightforward matter - it challenges countries, rich and poor, developed and developing, to change the way they perceive their priorities, both nationally and internationally. It also requires governments, particularly those of the developed world, to make and keep commitments particularly in the area of financing for development. Importantly, it underscores that powerful and influential states have an important role to play in meeting the goals and objectives of the global agenda, but should not dominate it.

I want, now, to definitively make the point to which I have alluded throughout my conversation with you this morning. It is that the Commonwealth and the United Nations share the same global agenda, and that the goals and objectives of the Commonwealth are complementary to those of the United Nations, with which it has observer status. Understandably, each body by nature of its membership, structure and functioning approach common problems from a somewhat different perspective, each bringing its particular strengths and capacities to bear on the tasks at hand.

We in the Commonwealth value its approach, particularly its far-reaching tolerance of diversity and its capacity to build consensus around issues of importance to its member states. From this organization has come sustained commitment, for example, on the issue of apartheid, where it has worked alongside the people of South Africa and leaders including Archbishop Tutu. The organization is also to be credited with some of the most focused and innovative approaches to problems of development. Commodities, international cooperation in tax matters, small states, and strategies for setting consistent and realistic economic and social policies - the Commonwealth has provided significant support for its members in all these areas.

Importantly, when the Commonwealth develops consensus on an issue, it can impact the policies of the United Nations and other regional and international organizations. Its fifty-three member states represent more than a quarter of the United Nations membership and are represented in regional and other groups around the world. In that regard, the Commonwealth's development initiatives are particularly important at this time, when member states are increasingly committing to bringing the United Nations development agenda back to center stage.

A Commonwealth worldview - this is the approach I urge you to take to the Model CHOGM. Be creative, be innovative, present the big ideas. A better Commonwealth and a better world is in your hands.

Thank you.