

Foreword

10 December 2008 marks the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – the first and most far-sighted statement of some of the Commonwealth's, and the world's, most basic principles.

As the Commonwealth prepares to celebrate its own 60th Anniversary in 2009, its commitment to human rights is as strong as ever. When our Heads of Government last met in Uganda in 2007, they reaffirmed their determination to promote respect for and protection of human rights in the Commonwealth.

This publication tells us how far we have come, and how far we need to go. The progress is real: in 2008 alone, eight of our member countries – Australia, Jamaica, Kenya, New Zealand, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Samoa and Uganda – ratified major international human rights treaties. But 19 of our member countries are still to ratify both 1966 Covenants, on Civil and Political Rights, and Economic, Cultural and Social Rights.

I warmly commend this publication, and encourage its use by Commonwealth officials in law, justice, gender – and all areas of government which concern themselves with the promotion of human rights. The right to life, the right to a vote, to food, to education, to decent work, to housing and to freedom of expression – these and others remind us that human rights are the concern of the many, not the few.

This book presents a brief country-by-country summary of where we stand. It also points to human rights initiatives that show not only the breadth of commitment across the Commonwealth, but also a range of innovative and good practices that can serve as inspiration to others.

The Commonwealth Secretariat stands ready to support member states, at this important anniversary and beyond.

Our assistance comes in many forms, from providing training on the reporting obligations of the Universal Periodic Review to strengthening national human rights institutions; from assisting in the ratification of human rights treaties to conducting human rights training for those most likely to need and use it, such as police officers.

The Commonwealth Secretariat's Human Rights Unit is at your service: I encourage all of our member governments to draw on its expertise.

Kamalesh Sharma
Commonwealth Secretary-General
London, December 2008