

Strengthening National Human Rights Institutions

As the Chairperson of the Commonwealth Forum of National Human Rights Institutions (CFNHRI), I would like to applaud the significant role that national human rights institutions (NHRIs) play in the promotion and protection of human rights at the national level. NHRIs are national institutions established by governments but independent from them with a mandate to preserve, promote and protect human rights. Different approaches are taken to fulfil this important aim, such as investigating human rights violations, holding governments accountable for their human rights failures and providing human rights training to key state actors.

In recognition of this important role, the CFNHRI was formed in London during the Commonwealth Conference of NHRIs in February 2007. In November 2007 at the first meeting of the Forum during the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), Uganda was elected as chair.

Unique to this forum is a structure that is informal and inclusive, encompassing both Commonwealth NHRIs and other accountability mechanisms with a human rights mandate. It is complementary to and supports the activities of existing international and regional coordinating or accrediting bodies, such as the United Nations and the Asia-Pacific Forum.

The Forum was formed to strengthen the capacity of NHRIs to promote, monitor and protect human rights in the Commonwealth. This is done by using the Forum as a mechanism to share information and best practices, to ensure cooperation on matters of joint interest, and to increase dialogue between institutions and governments.

The next Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Trinidad and Tobago beckons, and it is anticipated that the Forum will be recognised as a separate entity that can participate in the CHOGM processes and interact with Commonwealth Heads of Government. It will be an opportunity to follow up on the recommendations made to the Commonwealth Heads of Governments in November 2007, which included strengthening NHRIs through increased funding, implementing their recommendations in a timely fashion, and establishing mechanisms of engagement and adequate support.

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Chairperson of the CFNHRI