

## Unique set of principles for local democracy

**More than 40 Commonwealth countries have come together and reached a consensus on a unique set of key principles on what is effective local democracy.**

The 500 delegates agreed that crucial to a strong democratic system at local level are legal recognition, political freedom, spheres of government working together, subsidiarity, participative decision-making, adequate resources, accessibility, inclusiveness, scrutiny, accountability, openness and transparency.

The consensus, which forms the Aberdeen Agenda: Commonwealth Principles on Good Practice for Local Democracy and Good Governance, was drawn up at the third Commonwealth Local Government Conference, held in Aberdeen from 15-17 March 2005 and was endorsed by the CLGF General meeting on 18 March. The theme of the conference

was Deepening Local Democracy.

Delegates involved in the discussions, and who heard about a number of case studies and examples, included local government leaders and mayors, senior officials and 20 national ministers with responsibility for local government from across the Commonwealth.

Newly elected CLGF chair Cllr John Otekat said:

“Local democracy and good local governance are key to development and achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Without local democracy there can be no effective democracy.

“A number of organisations have been looking at indicators, but this is the first

time such an important group of practitioners has come together to agree on a set of principles thanks to CLGF.

“Through the Commonwealth network, the Commonwealth Local Government Forum has a leading role in taking this agenda forward. It should become as building block for governments and encourage people to exchange best practice.”

CLGF will be working up an action plan to take forward the Agenda, including presenting it to the next Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Malta in November.

*Conference 2005 special report ... see inside*

### Otekat takes top CLGF position

Cllr John Emilly Otekat, President of the Uganda Local Government Association (ULGA), was elected as CLGF's new Chairperson at the CLGF Board meeting on Friday 18 March.

The new vice chairs are Mayor Hon Cllr Robert Montague from the Association of Local Government Authorities of Jamaica and Hon Chris Carter, Minister of Local Government, New Zealand.

The CLGF General Meeting of members on the same day elected CLGF's full Board for the next two years. See back page for a full list.

### New Zealand next stop for CLGC

Auckland in New Zealand will be the location for the fourth Commonwealth Local Government Conference in 2007.

After a close contest with bidders from Africa and elsewhere, New Zealand was selected at the CLGF Board meeting on 14 March. The bid was made by a partnership of the Ministry for Local Government, Local Government New Zealand and local councils.

Further details of the conference, on how social, economic and environmental development can be delivered through local leadership, will be formally announced later this year.

### CLGF celebrates 10th anniversary

Since it was established in 1995 the CLGF has made great strides as the voice of local government, in sharing experience and supporting members. More than 4,000 senior policy makers and practitioners have participated in CLGF events around the world.

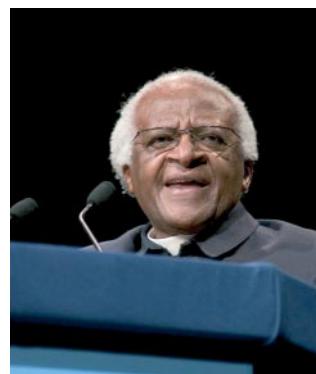
A DVD video detailing these achievements is available free to members from CLGF. Contact [info@clgf.org.uk](mailto:info@clgf.org.uk) for further information.

## Time for local democracy says Archbishop Tutu

“I wish to commend to you your Aberdeen Agenda and I hope that you will be as keen to implement the principles for good local democracy in the Commonwealth. For the time for local democracy is now,” said Nobel Peace Prize winner Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu.

Addressing delegates at the Commonwealth Local Government Conference in Aberdeen, Archbishop Tutu said that elections are the means for people to punish politicians who err or perform poorly:

“Regular free and fair elections are the sine qua non of smooth working local communities and of well-run regional and national government. They make for



accountable governments at all three levels.

“The electorate at all levels should punish corruption sharply. After all it is their money, their resources that are being

squandered.”

“The price of freedom is ceaseless vigilance for power tends to corrupt.”

Archbishop Tutu, who has said that his objective is “a democratic and just society without racial divisions”, endorsed the principles for local democracy drawn up at the conference and said that local government matters to ordinary people. The bread and butter services delivered by local government are what matter to people most, said Archbishop Tutu.

Archbishop Tutu was guest speaker at the conference in view of his work in promoting racial justice and speaking out against apartheid.

## Commonwealth news in brief

### CMAG reviews Pakistan

The Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group on the Harare Declaration (CMAG) met in London on 10-11 February 2005. It received a report from the Secretary-General on developments in Pakistan since its last meeting in New York in September 2004. Recalling its earlier statements, the Group expressed its serious concern and regret that President Musharraf had not met his commitment to relinquish his role as Chief of Army Staff by 31 December 2004.

CMAG requested the Secretary-General to continue to maintain high level contacts with Pakistan and encouraged the Chairperson of CMAG, Commonwealth countries and the Commonwealth Secretariat to assist Pakistan in the further strengthening of democracy, good governance, stability and institution-building.

CLGF Secretary General Carl Wright visited Islamabad in January to discuss strengthening local democracy with representatives of the Pakistan government and local government.

### Advance warning networks

The Commonwealth and three regional intergovernmental organisations have agreed to work together to examine ways to reduce the future impact of natural disasters by strengthening advance warning networks across international borders.

The Secretaries-General of the Commonwealth, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the Indian Ocean Commission and the Pacific Islands Forum extended their sympathies to all those affected by the earthquake and tsunami which struck the Indian Ocean region on 26 December 2004.

The Commonwealth Secretariat will facilitate the work of developing inventories of the advance warning resources and systems available in each of the Caribbean, Indian and Pacific Ocean regions, and identifying aspects of these systems which need strengthening. The Secretaries-General will consider concrete proposals at their next meeting in London in July 2005.

### Commonwealth Information Centre opens

A new Commonwealth Information Centre in London was opened on 7 February 2005 by HRH The Prince of Wales. Located at Quadrant House, Pall Mall, the Information Centre is a place where journalists, students, researchers and the general public will find up-to-date information about the Commonwealth. Computers will provide access to a network of online resources, and publications detailing various aspects of the Commonwealth's work will be on display.

*"This can be a real opportunity to share experience and ideas about how in all our states we can reform and modernise our institutions of democratic local government so that they meet the needs of citizens everywhere.*

*The 1997 Edinburgh CHOGM, which I chaired, recognised that 'effective, elected local government is an important foundation for democracy'. Legitimate and well-functioning local democracy is key to the delivery of the basic services - water, sanitation, education, health, transport and so on, which are vital to tackling poverty and helping governments to deliver the Millennium Development Goals. The importance of local government in the delivery of these goals has been highlighted by CLGF in its input into the Commission for Africa.*

*The challenges for local government everywhere remain. Above all they are how to make a real difference on the ground to the lives of our citizens, how to help to eradicate poverty and to improve the quality of life for all in a way that is long term and sustainable. The challenge for CLGF is how it can make this happen."*

Extract from message to conference from  
**Rt Hon Tony Blair MP, Prime Minister of the UK**

The conference also received messages from: **President Obasanjo of Nigeria**, Commonwealth Chairperson-in-Office, **President Kufuor of Ghana**, and **Dr Anna Tibajuka**, Executive Director of UN-Habitat.



The third Commonwealth Local Government Conference was held in Aberdeen from 15-18 March 2005. Attended by more than 500 delegates from 40 countries, delegates were greeted by snow one day and the hottest day on record at that time of year the next day.

The theme of the conference was Deepening Local Democracy. Delegates discussed what constitutes a healthy democracy and looked at the core principles and norms that underlie what is considered best practice in local democracy and good governance.

Plenary sessions addressed the shape and health of local government in different regions of the Commonwealth,

the links between freedom, development and local democracy, and the role of democratic local government in delivering the UN Millennium Development Goals. Delegates heard from mayors of cities such as Toronto in Canada, Tshwane in South Africa, Freetown in Sierra Leone, St Mary in Jamaica and from ministers from across the Commonwealth.

Delegates also attended 12 breakaway sessions to discuss specific issues and themes around principles for democracy including: central-local relations, electoral systems, scrutiny and checks and balances, fiscal issues around decentralisation, increasing voter turnout, accountability and transparency,

inclusiveness, e-governance and how more democratic local systems result in better service delivery. These sessions received presentations from high profile speakers from International, UN, Commonwealth and local government organisations

Delegates were also able to attend one of ten study tours to see a range of projects in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire which looked at education for citizenship, community involvement, widening participation in decision-making and planning, the political process in practice, and the Scottish model of devolution.

## Pushing forward democracy

"Today the great majority of the citizens of the 53 Commonwealth countries enjoy democratically elected government.

Many countries are pushing forward the boundaries of democracy by experimenting with new forms of inclusiveness and representation, to create a truly grass roots democracy.

Of course, the local democratic system is far from perfect in many countries: local government can fall prey to rigid elites, inefficiency, remoteness and corrupt practices.

There is now a growing realisation, as delegates at the conference agreed, that the Millennium Development Goals can only be achieved by having effective, democratic local government structures:

local government provides a key vehicle for pushing forward pro-poor development strategies. Likewise, the terrible tsunami disaster has highlighted the importance of local systems of disaster management and reconstruction.

The 2005 Commonwealth Local Government Conference provided a unique occasion to discuss all these issues and formulate the principles for local democracy that are reported in this special edition of the Bulletin. We are very grateful to all the speakers and delegates for their important contributions.

I would also like to thank our partners who hosted the conference and put on the excellent social events - Aberdeen City Council, Aberdeenshire

Council, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Scottish Executive. My heartfelt thanks to them and all their staff for their hard work in helping to make the conference such a success.

The task now for CLGF and for delegates to the conference and all our members is to take forward the Aberdeen Agenda and look at how we can develop and implement them in our member countries. We also look forward to presenting the principles to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Malta later this year, as well as to other key partner organisations such as the EU and UN."

Carl Wright, Secretary General, CLGF

## Delegates endorse Commission for Africa report

Delegates at the Commonwealth Local Government Conference have endorsed the recommendations of the recently published Commission for Africa report.

A Scottish launch of the report was held at the conference by the Commission for Africa in conjunction with the UK Local Government Alliance for International Development. An audience of more than 270 delegates from Africa and the UK, including senior mayors, leaders and minister with responsibility for local government, welcomed the report and said they would like to see swift implementation of the recommendations, particularly those relating to local government.

Speaking on behalf of Commissioner Anna Tibaijuka, UN-Habitat's Paul Taylor said:

"It is in our common interest to help develop local democracy in Africa for the benefit of its people and the rest of the



world."

Through its networks and partners, the UK Alliance, of which CLGF is a founding partner, will seek maximum local government support for the report of the Commission in the lead up to the G8 Summit later this year. CLGF will also consult

members and partners in Africa on how best to implement the report's recommendations in terms of strengthening the capacity and accountability of local government structures, and local government's role in meeting the Millennium Development Goals.

## Tsunami paralysed local services

The impact of the tsunami disaster on the local government in Sri Lanka has been profound, Mr Chandrapala, Secretary to the Ministry of Provincial Councils and Local Government in Sri Lanka, told the conference.

Altogether 70 local authorities - including four municipal councils, eight urban areas, and 26 pradeshiya sabha in coastal regions were affected and the total damage is estimated as 2,833 million rupees (approximately £15 million).

"It has totally paralysed the connectivity, service delivery mechanism and the local authority level infrastructure including thoroughfares and sanitation facilities. Destruction caused by the tsunami has made local authorities unable to deliver the services for the people living in their areas," said Mr Chandrapala.

He also told how loss of income through rates and taxes has dragged them into a deplorable situation, with the scope and damage to assets beyond their capacity for reconstruction.

Mr Chandrapala described the rehabilitation and reconstruction plans and developments so far, and the help of neighbouring local authorities in

assisting with emergency plans. He thanked UK authorities and others for their support.

"Now our responsibility is to translate this preparedness and will to support into the real assistance and comfort to the victims of the catastrophe.

"I wish that the intervention initiated by the CLGF will re-strengthen the weakened local authorities and make them effective again in their service delivery, which is essential for the well-being of the community," he said.

■ A meeting of UK local authorities was convened in January by the CLGF in conjunction with the UK Local Government Alliance for International Development, UK local authorities pledged urgently needed technical and consultative support to India and Sri Lanka, two of the countries worst affected by the tsunami disaster on 26 December.

Following a joint mission on 20-23 January by CLGF and the UK Local Government International Bureau to the devastated regions in India and Sri Lanka, UK local government has agreed practical support to local authorities in the area to help with reconstruction work. LGIB Vice Chair Cllr Shakespeare,

LGIB Director Mike Ashley, and CLGF Secretary General Carl Wright met the mayors of Cochin and Trivandrum in India, and the mayors of Colombo, Galle and Matale in Sri Lanka. They also had discussions with Sri Lanka's Minister of Provincial Councils and Local Government Janaka Tennakoon MP during their visit.

This was followed up by a technical mission by CLGF and LGIB to Sri Lanka in February.

Support will focus on

- technical and consultative work to assess damage and help in reconstruction planning
- psychological care and counselling, including support for orphaned children, and
- restoring the capacity of local authorities, many of which had lost essential staff, information systems and infrastructure.

A number of UK authorities have already established partnerships in India and Sri Lanka. CLGF and LGIB are working with the UK Alliance to see how they can support the UK Department for International Development and other development agencies in longer term reconstruction work.

## Scotland launches international development strategy

Scotland's new international development strategy focuses on support for Scottish NGOs, assistance during times of international crises, and ensuring that Scotland's domestic policies have a positive impact on the developing world.

Launching the Scottish government's international development strategy during the opening session of the Conference, Scotland's First Minister Jack McConnell MSP said:

"This policy builds on our long-standing historical role of looking beyond our borders to both gather and exchange knowledge. And it acknowledges Scotland's collective efforts and aspiration - as a prosperous, but caring, nation - to play its part in tackling global inequality."

The First Minister will be visiting Malawi in May, and looking at how Scotland can help support the country's health and education systems.

## Reaffirming the power of democracy

Commonwealth Secretary General HE Rt Hon Don McKinnon also emphasised that local democracy can play an important part in promoting development, eradicating poverty and improving quality of life.

Speaking on the second day of the conference, Mr McKinnon described how the Commonwealth Secretariat and CLGF are working together on a number of projects to support and strengthen local democracy, including election observing, training and institution building.

"In an age of increasing scepticism about politics and politicians, it is crucial to reaffirm the power of democracy to change people's lives".

"The CLGF plays an important role in ensuring that all citizens feel they have ownership of their local democracy," he said.

## Supporting local democracy and good governance

"In May I was part of a Commonwealth observer team during the Sierra Leone local government elections.

These were the first democratic local elections in 30 years. Our presence was a powerful signal as to the importance of these elections, a powerful endorsement of that democratic process," said Mayor Hon Cllr Robert Montague.

"Being there also allowed us to identify ways in which future electoral processes can be improved upon and make recommendations in this regard.

"I was very pleased that CLGF took the initiative in organising the first national policy event for the newly elected local representatives in Freetown in July.

"It is good to see a sizeable Sierra Leone delegation at the conference and to know that discussions will be held on how Commonwealth partners can work with our Sierra Leone colleagues in support of local democracy and good governance"

## Complete guide to Commonwealth local government

The *Commonwealth Local Government Handbook 2005* - provides a complete guide to local government throughout the Commonwealth.

This fourth edition of the Handbook covers all 53 countries of the Commonwealth. It is a complete reference book and allows easy comparison from country to country. It gives full profiles of the local government systems; how local government is organised, local government structures, election systems, legislation, service responsibilities, funding, e-government, relationships with central government and forthcoming reforms.

Speaking at a special launch of the Handbook at the Commonwealth Local Government Conference in Aberdeen last month, UK Minister for Local Government and the Regions, Rt Hon Nick Raynsford MP said:

"This is the latest edition of the Handbook, showing the rich diversity in arrangements and structures in each of the 53 countries."

"It is essential that we make best use of the information. It is a catalyst for spreading best practice and setting up partnerships to bring together local government organisations in all the 53 countries," he said.

The Handbook also publishes a paper on enhancing local democracy, prepared by the Commonwealth Policy Studies Unit for CLGF as a background paper for the Commonwealth Local Government Conference 2005.

*Commonwealth Local Government Handbook 2005* is published by Publications UK for the Commonwealth Local Government Forum and can be bought online at

<http://www.publications.thecommonwealth.org/>; orders can also be made through e-mail or by post. Price £50, pre-payment is essential by sterling cheque, international money order, postal order or bank draft accompanying order. Payment should be in sterling, drawn on a UK bank and made out to the Commonwealth Secretariat. Post and packaging charges should be added to every order thus: UK orders: 15 per cent of order value (minimum charge £2.00). Non-UK orders: 25 per cent of order value (minimum charge £3.50).

Orders should be sent to: Domini Bingham, Publications Section, Commonwealth Secretariat, Marlborough House, Pall Mall, London SW1Y 5HX, United Kingdom. Tel: +44 (0)20 7747 6342; Fax: +44 (0)20 7839 9081; E-mail: [d.bingham@commonwealth.int](mailto:d.bingham@commonwealth.int)

■ **Local Democracy and Good Governance in the Caribbean:** report of the regional symposium held in Montego Bay, Jamaica, April 2004 and **Local Democracy and Good Governance in the Pacific:** report of the regional symposium held in Suva, Fiji, December 2004 are published by the Commonwealth Secretariat in conjunction with CLGF. Delegates at the symposiums will each receive a copy of the publication. Further copies are available from CLGF. An administration fee of £5 will be required to cover postage and packing.

# Local solutions are best says Pacific symposium

**Solutions to the challenges facing local government in the Pacific region need to be developed locally, delegates recommended at a Commonwealth symposium in Suva, Fiji Islands, held from 4 - 8 December 2004.**

They also encouraged central governments to ensure that appropriate policy, as well as a legislative and financial environment, is in place to enable local government to function effectively.

The Regional Symposium on Local Governance was organised by the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Fiji Government and the CLGF with support from the New Zealand Agency for International Development. Around 100 participants, including elected representatives and government officials from the Pacific region, attended the meeting.

Among the topics the symposium addressed were promoting local democracy and good governance; the impact of urbanisation on local governance; local governments and the



traditional governing structures in the Pacific; and effective local governance for improved service delivery.

Delegates made 14 recommendations. These included suggestions that communities be encouraged to take a participatory approach to local government and that women be more

actively involved in local governance. Participants also urged the enhancement of donor co-ordination in local governance and urban management, and called for the formation of a Pacific region association of local governments with assistance from CLGF.

## The CLGF Board

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#### Africa:

Cllr John Emily Otekat, President, Uganda Local Government Association, Uganda\**Chairperson*  
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\*Member of Sub-Committee on Finances and Membership