



17th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers



Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 15-18 June 2009

Kuala Lumpur Communiqué

The Government of Malaysia hosted the 17th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (17CCEM) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on 15-18 June 2009. This marked the 50th anniversary of the first CCEM, and was attended by 40 countries, 37 of which were led by Ministers.

2. The Conference was opened by the Hon Dato' Sri Mohamed Najib Tun Haji Abdul Razak, Prime Minister of Malaysia, who emphasised the importance of education as a transformational tool to mould and determine the destiny of nations. The meeting was co-chaired by the Hon Tan Sri Muhyiddin Mohamed Yassin, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Education Malaysia, and the Hon Dato' Seri Mohamed Khaled Nordin, Minister of Higher Education Malaysia.

3. The Hon Nahas Angula, Prime Minister of Namibia delivered the Keynote Address, on the theme of *Commonwealth Youth and Students in Times of Uncertainties*.

4. The overarching theme of the Conference and its various forums, was "*Education in the Commonwealth: Towards and Beyond Global Goals and Targets*".

5. The Conference included four parallel forums: Stakeholders Forum, Youth Forum, Teachers Forum and Vice Chancellors Forum, which brought different perspectives to the discussions and supported Ministers' deliberations on the overall theme.

6. Ministers noted with concern the effect of the global economic downturn on social sectors such as education, particularly in poorer countries and small states. Ministers recognised that education provides a fundamental tool for self-improvement and national development, and is a basic human right. It also helps countries prepare for recovery, by helping people re-tool and develop the necessary skills to meet the future needs of the economy. Accordingly, Ministers affirmed the importance of maintaining both the quantum and flow of resources, as well as aid commitments for education, and for national governments and the international community to work together to mitigate risks to this sector.

7. Ministers highlighted the need for all children to have equity of access to quality education, regardless of geographical location, resources, gender, ethnicity and ability, in order to equip them to interact effectively in a global community. Ministers committed themselves to working towards this end as a priority, while recognising the need to tailor approaches to take account of socio-economic and cultural diversity across different member countries.

8. Ministers acknowledged the progress towards, and reaffirmed their commitment to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All (EFA) goals by the 2015 deadline. However, they noted that one-third of Commonwealth countries have yet to achieve universal primary education and gender parity. They agreed to prioritise the challenge of reaching some 27 million Commonwealth children, who do not currently receive schooling, and those do not complete the primary education successfully, to make universal primary education a reality. They also agreed to work to eliminate gender disparities in education where these still exist. Ministers also recognised that in many cases, it is essential to improve quality in the provision of primary school education.

9. While stressing the overriding importance of maintaining a focus on achieving internationally-agreed goals, Ministers recognised the importance of preparing the groundwork for moving beyond these goals at the same time as striving to achieve them, and of looking at education more holistically and as a continuum. Indeed, they affirmed that the achievement of the international goals is dependent on looking forward, while noting the importance of innovative delivery mechanisms in light of resource constraints in this area. Ministers emphasised that the expanse and quality of secondary and higher education not only determine the number and quality of primary school teachers, but are also critical for providing innovative solutions; for enhancing quality and equity in the delivery of education; and for delivering socio-economic development. In this regard, Ministers recognised the importance of delivering:

- Improved access to Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE);
- Improved access to secondary education;

- Expanded access to skills development and higher education;
- Improvements in the quality and professionalism of teachers;
- Good governance in education administration; and
- “Gender mainstreaming” across all interventions;

10. Ministers welcomed the report by the Secretariat on the delivery of its workplan 2006-2009, and the progress made.

11. With regard to the Secretariat’s programme for the new triennium 2009-12, Ministers emphasised that there was a need to prioritise the work to take account of global trends, and to focus on those areas where the Commonwealth has a comparative advantage and a proven track-record. In this light, Ministers urged the Secretariat to focus its work on the following areas:

- i. Advancing education in Small States through a variety of capacity-building and research initiatives;
- ii. Continuing work on the Commonwealth Teacher Recruitment Protocol and comparability of teacher qualifications, focusing on the quality and professional status of teachers;
- iii. Continuing work on the identification and training of school leaders, based on their demonstrated leadership abilities;
- iv. Promoting gender-related work in schools, including on boys’ underachievement, and girls’ access and completion;
- v. Fostering education for Respect and Understanding based on core Commonwealth values;
- vi. Education for sustainable development, with particular emphasis on climate change;
- vii. Enhancing the delivery of multi-grade teaching; and
- viii. Strengthening HIV and AIDS education.

12. Ministers stressed the importance of developing and utilising partnerships with a range of stakeholders in order to maximise effectiveness and optimise the use of resources.

13. Ministers commended the Commonwealth of Learning on its work since 16CCEM; endorsed the three year plan for 2009-12 “Learning for Development”; and reiterated commitments to continued financial support. Ministers especially praised the work of the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC), and encouraged its expansion in terms of capacity-building in the use of ICTs in education, and the development and delivery of courses, with particular emphasis on mechanisms for quality assurance.

14. Against the background of the Mandate from Heads of Government in the Munyonyo Statement on Respect and Understanding, Ministers agreed that education has a vital role to play in promoting a greater understanding of our rich, multiple identities, and in encouraging mutual respect. This is especially valuable in helping to prevent and resolve conflict. Broadening participation in education, as well as creating a favourable environment and a supportive curriculum, can help overcome the marginalisation of specific groups. Ministers recognised that there is a need for intervention at all levels of education to deliver these aims. They welcomed the exchange of views at the Conference, and the sharing of important experiences of policies, programmes and practices that had been instituted by members at the national level to promote social cohesion. Ministers requested the Secretariat to draw on this discussion to strengthen its work programme on Respect and Understanding in education, and for its report back to CHOGM later in the year.

15. Ministers reaffirmed their strong support for the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan (CSFP). Ministers were encouraged to learn that initial commitments of around £1.4 million have been made towards the CSFP Endowment Fund in response to the fiftieth anniversary appeal. Ministers welcomed the pledges from Malaysia, the United Kingdom, Kenya and Maldives. More member governments were invited to consider making contributions during the coming year.

16. Ministers noted the desirability of providing access to students of smaller states, who face cost constraints, to higher education institutions in Commonwealth countries, and agreed to explore possible ways of doing so.

17. Ministers welcomed the findings of the Working Group which had investigated the possible establishment of a Tertiary Education Facility for the Commonwealth, and agreed to the proposed commencement of work in this area. A final decision on the future of the Facility would be made at 18CCEM, based on experience over the next three years.

18. Ministers noted the issues highlighted by the parallel forums – Youth, Vice Chancellors, Teachers and Stakeholders - and the consistent messages that had emerged. Ministers agreed to the need for partnerships at all levels. Ministers endorsed the forums' recognition of the vital role that teachers play and the need to provide them with necessary support structures. Ministers further acknowledged the emphasis placed by the forums on the need for promoting ECCE, on ensuring diverse and inclusive education, and on the importance of involving communities. Ministers recognised the benefits of engaging youth at all levels of policy dialogue and curriculum development. The importance of ICTs was reiterated by the parallel forums; and emphasis was placed on ensuring ICTs are blended appropriately with essential first-hand experiences.

19. Ministers appreciated and thanked the Government of Malaysia for its hospitality and for its organisation of the Conference in collaboration with the Secretariat. They welcomed the offer from the Bahamas to host 18CCEM in 2012. Ministers also noted the expressed wish of Mauritius to host 19CCEM in 2015.