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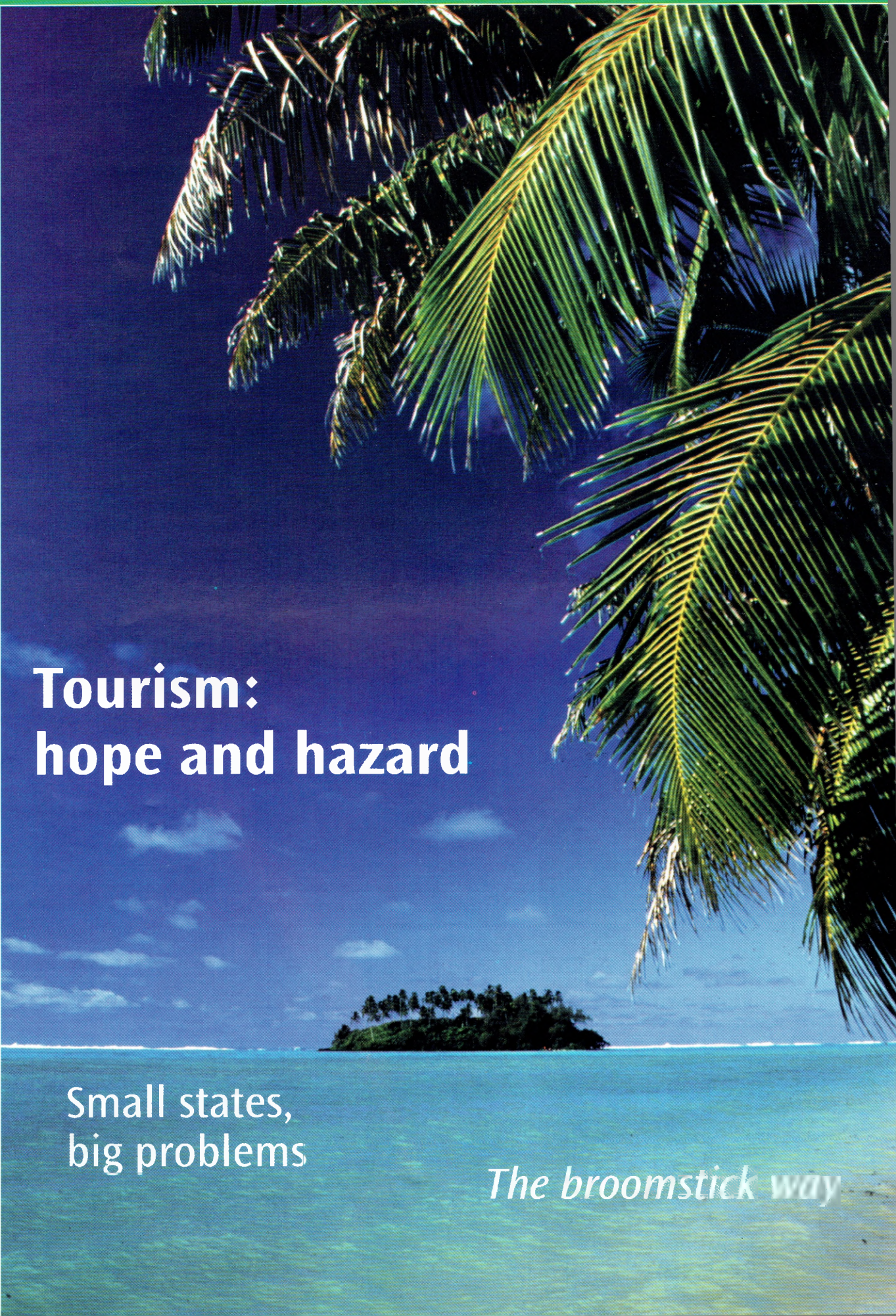
CURRENTS

COMMONWEALTH

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big problems

The broomstick way



In the field

The Commonwealth Secretariat, through the CFTC, places experts in the field to assist in the sustainable development of member countries. Between 20 October 1997 and 27 January 1998, the following short- and long-term experts began assignments in the following countries (appointment dates in parenthesis):

British Virgin Islands *Mr R P Srivastava* of India has joined the Development Planning Unit of the Chief Minister's Office in Tortola as a price indices economist (24.10.97 to 23.10.98)

Cayman Islands *Mr T N Bainbridge* of Australia has joined the Ministry of Community Development, Sports, Women's Affairs, Youth and Culture as a project co-ordinator (14.1.98 to 13.1.99)

The Gambia *Professor A Chandra* of India has joined the Personnel Management Office in Banjul as a Human Resources Planner (2.12.97 to 1.12.99)

Grenada *Dr J J Samuel* of Britain has joined the T A Marryshow Community College in St George's as an adviser to the Principal (10.12.97 to 9.12.99)

Fiji *Mr J F Wilson* of Britain has been appointed First Parliamentary Counsel in the Parliamentary Counsel's Office, Suva (13.1.98 to 12.1.00)

Jamaica *Dr R P Aneja* of India has joined the Ministry of Agriculture and Mining as a dairy development adviser (9.11.97 to 8.11.99)

Namibia *Dr E S Taylor* of Jamaica has joined the Ministry of Higher Education, Vocational Training, Science and Technology as an adviser on science, technology and research development (26.10.97 to 25.10.99)

St Lucia *Mr E K Mollel* of Tanzania has joined the Environmental Health Branch of the Ministry of Health in Castries as a public health adviser (22.11.97 to 21.11.99)

Samoa *Ms Jan Sinclair* of New Zealand has been appointed editorial and publications officer to the South Pacific Regional Environmental Programme in Apia (1.12.97 to 30.11.99)

Solomon Islands *Mr M R Lewino* of Australia has been appointed as an adviser in civil aviation to the Civil Aviation Division of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (2.11.97 to 1.11.99)

Tonga *Mr A R Zikonda* of Zambia has been appointed industrial property adviser to the Ministry of Labour, Commerce and Industries in Nuku'alofa (2.11.97 to 1.11.98). Also in Nuku'alofa, *Mr S Evans* of Britain has been appointed Chief Hydrographer at the Tonga Defence Services (15.1.98 to 14.1.00)

Righting human wrongs in East Africa

Women are the main victims of human rights abuses and most suffer in silence because of their ignorance of the law, a Commonwealth workshop on human rights was told recently.

Lucy Paul Nambuo of the Tanzania Women's Legal Aid Centre also said that widows in her country are sometimes robbed of their property by in-laws, and only those who know their rights – and are bold enough to act on them – take the matter to court.

The workshop, held in Dar es Salaam from 10-12 November last year, was one of a series in East Africa organised by the Commonwealth Secretariat and funded by the CFTC. They were in response to requests by the Ugandan and Tanzanian governments for technical assistance for their fledgling national human rights institutions and demonstrated among other things the complexities of women's rights.

"Many women suffer human rights abuse because of their economic

weakness," Ms Nambuo said, adding that it is often a product of their comparative lack of educational opportunities – "itself a product of customs and traditions which oppress women."

So, reinforcing their women's rights might include challenging tradition, ensuring that education is available, providing legal help and making business capital available.

Gad Mjemwa, a legal adviser with Tanzania's Permanent Commission of Inquiry (the country's equivalent of an Office of the Ombudsman), said that some domestic problems were aggravated or caused by women. Urging a joint approach, he warned that women-only organisations or groups dedicated only to issues affecting women were discriminatory and contributed to an atmosphere of confrontation.

"You cannot eliminate the problem of oppression of women without involving men who are mostly accused of causing it," he advised.

He and other participants were told that a lack of networking by the numer-

ous organisations connected with human rights caused overlapping and duplication of work, which wasted resources.

Donors were partly to blame, argued Mr Mjemwa. They avoided co-ordinating their funding, because they each wanted to take all the credit for any achievements.

It was vital for human rights organisations "to collaborate and co-ordinate in educating people on their human rights," he emphasised.

A second workshop in Morogoro on 13-15 November also looked at the rights of people with AIDS, people with disabilities, children, prisoners and of refugees from Burundi and Congo Kinshasa, and at ways of developing co-operation between the judicial and security services, between the government and the non-governmental organisations, and at how to increase the effectiveness of the Government's Permanent Commission of Inquiry.

A similar workshop has been held in neighbouring Uganda. There the willingness to tackle sensitive and controversial topics was shown by the inclusion of a session on human rights in armed conflict, designed to highlight problems arising from fighting between the army and anti-government rebels in the north.

As Mr Mjemwa told the Dar es Salaam workshop, the Permanent Commission of Inquiry – set up to investigate administrative action which is allegedly illegal, contrary to the rules of natural justice or due process, or an improper exercise of discretion – was hated by many civil servants.

"If a messenger has been denied their rights, we summon the Principal Secretary for interrogation on the matter and the big boss does not like to be disturbed just because of a subordinate staff."

The Commission was also criticised by non-governmental organisations for its failings, he observed, "but those NGOs who say we don't do our job should know that they are funded by institutions or governments richer than ours."

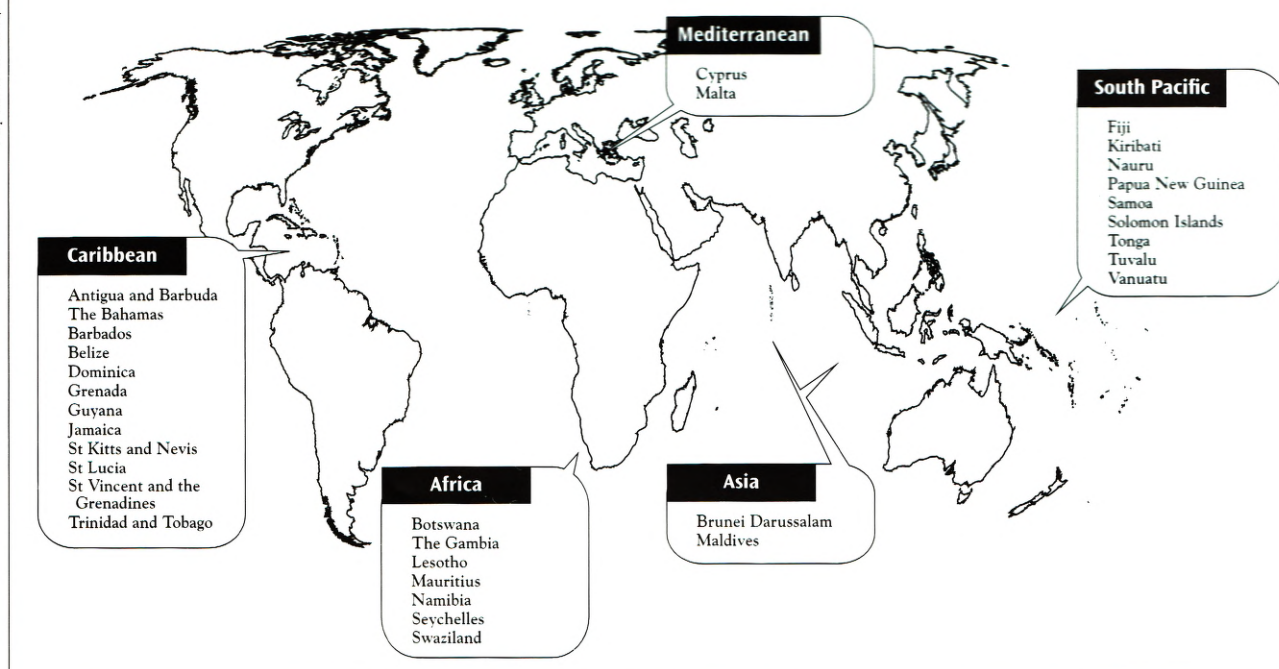
A key aim of the workshops, explained an official in the Commonwealth Secretariat's human rights unit, "was to strengthen mechanisms for the promotion and protection of human rights at the national level."

"It is an honest start," he says. "They might face some initial problems, but they are surmountable."

The unit is charged with promoting human rights throughout the Commonwealth, which is now a global leader in this area.

Commonwealth small states

Of Commonwealth's 54 members, 32 are classified as small states



Dependence is a general condition affecting many developing countries. For small states, and particularly the smallest among them, it is a way of life ...

These characteristics are interrelated and provide an overview of the most important elements of security for the majority of small states. None of them individually are exclusive to small states, but collectively they provide insights into why the security of small states is different in degree rather than in kind to larger states ... It is not, however, entirely a negative story. Many small states possess significant advantages. They have resilient political structures, good social capital, large Exclusive Economic Zones and an openness to the outside world which allows them to adapt to changed circumstances. This provides them with the opportunity to fashion policies which minimise disadvantage and maximise

potential. The record of success in small states shows they can achieve levels of security and development above the average. While small states remain vulnerable, they do not remain helpless.

To be vulnerable is to be especially susceptible to risk of harm. Since all societies are subject to risk, all societies are vulnerable. What makes vulnerability a focus of concern is that some societies are more at risk than others. The baseline for comparison can be societies in general or some comparator group of societies. In the current context the vulnerability of small states is a subject of concern because of the presumption that small states are more at risk than states in general or more at risk than 'big' states ...

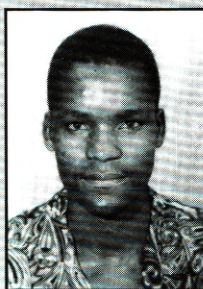
Given that resilience has been identified as a feature of many small states their vulnerability, in some respects, is correspondingly reduced. At the same

time it is clear that resistance to threats is governed by size, especially when one considers the number and magnitude of risks and threats faced by small states. Some small states will face high levels of risks/threats which they will be unable to resist: they will be acutely vulnerable to harm. Others will face lower levels of risks/threats which they can manage with difficulty but without irreparable harm: they will be moderately vulnerable. Finally some will face minimal threats or be sufficiently resistant to them to avoid significant harm: they remain inherently vulnerable even though they are not significantly at risk.

A Future for Small States: Overcoming Vulnerability, 196 pages, can be ordered from Vale Packaging Ltd, 420 Vale Road, Tonbridge, Kent TN9 1TD, Britain. Tel: +44 (0)1732 359 387; Fax: +44 (0)1732 779 620. £12.99.

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A special platform for our readers.



Mkuleko Hikwa

It was during his college internship at the Southern African Research and Documentation Centre (SARDC), in Harare, Zimbabwe, in 1994, that 25-year-old Mkuleko Hikwa first came across *Commonwealth Currents*. After completing his studies in Library and Information Management at the Harare Polytechnic College, Mr Hikwa joined the staff of the SARDC as a documentalist. He is also on the National Executive Committee of the Zimbabwe Library Association, with editorial responsibilities on the journal of the association. As somebody working in information management, Mr Hikwa said, he appreciates the "comprehensive, objectively compiled and broad based range of *Currents*." Some of his favourite sections are: Opinion, Development Co-operation, News In Brief and Diary.

Do you want to be featured in this column? If so, please write and tell us about yourself as well as your views about this magazine and on Commonwealth matters, not forgetting to mention how you got your first copy of this magazine. Write to: The Editor, *Commonwealth Currents*, Commonwealth Secretariat, Marlborough House, Pall Mall, London SW1Y 5HX, Britain.

Bill of Rights defeated – Handshin's Government toppled

In one of those surprise votes which make parliamentary politics so exciting, a coalition partnership of Environmentalists and Direct Democrats, led by the upstart MP Jeremy Mitchell of Australia, has toppled the minority government of Prime Minister Mia Handshin's Youth Party over its proposed Bill of Rights.

Confused? Don't be. The government defeat took place at the Granada television studio's replica House of Commons in Manchester, Britain. The participants were young people from across the Commonwealth at the first Youth Parliament, sponsored by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA).

Forty-two branches of the CPA nominated young people to participate in the event which took place on 24 November last year, resulting in a chamber made up of 89 MPs, including 36 women MPs. Three single-issue political parties were created in the fictitious 'Commonwealthland', and MPs were carefully watched over by the Speaker, John Sweetman, a former Clerk-Assistant of the real House of Commons in Britain.

The day before the parliamentary session, the participants met in caucus to hammer out the finer points of their party platforms, name their cabinets and draft questions and bills. The next morning they debated the future of the Commonwealth following an address by the Head of State (played by Mr K Srinivasan, the Commonwealth Deputy Secretary-General for political affairs).



The 89 parliamentarians of the first Commonwealth Youth Parliament

The afternoon was spent in presenting party bills, voting and asking questions during Question Time. The governing Youth Party presented its own Bill of Rights for young people which was unexpectedly defeated and prompted the Government's downfall.

The Sergeant at Arms, Selwyn Figueras of Gibraltar, even had to escort a recalcitrant young MP from the chamber when he refused to withdraw his unparliamentary language.

All eight regions of the CPA were represented including young parliamentarians from India, Malta and Pakistan.

"We were deeply impressed at the way in which the young people so naturally

adjusted to the parliamentary forum and by the very high quality of their contributions," says Diana Reynolds, Assistant Director responsible for project development at the CPA.

"If these young people are typical, then the safe future of both the Commonwealth and parliamentary democracy is assured."

The CPA is producing a video of the event and is happy to share its experiences of running a youth parliament with any interested parties. Please contact the CPA Secretariat, Suite 700, Westminster House, 7 Millbank, London SW1P 3JA, Britain. Tel: +44 (0)171-799 1460; Fax: +44 (0)171-222 6073.

Two-minute silence planned for millennium

Following the success of Britain's observance of a two-minute silence on 11 November 1997 – Remembrance Day – the Royal British Legion, the United Nations Association (UK) and the British Commonwealth Ex-Services League are joining forces to encourage other countries to adopt the practice in 1999 and 2000.

Officials at these organisations hope the two-minute silence on 11 November 1999 will be used to commemorate all those who died in wars during the 20th century. The following year, the silence would be used to reflect on the next 100 years and how the mistakes of the last century might be avoided.

The UN Association has prepared a draft resolution which could go before the General Assembly of the United Nations, and the Legion has been in touch with different groups in

Commonwealth countries, including Australia, Canada and New Zealand. Belgium, France and the United States might also take part.

The two-minute silence originated in South Africa during the First World War with the personal backing of King George V. In Britain, it was revived in 1995 and has proven remarkably popular.

In 1997, around 60 per cent of schoolchildren participated in the silence. Major department stores and airports also took part, and in some places traffic came to a standstill.

"The silence has had a remarkable effect in this country and it is an effect that could be reproduced worldwide," Ian Townsend, the Legion's Secretary-General told one newspaper. "I cannot think of a single nation that has not suffered in some way from war."



Traders on the Liffe Futures Exchange in the City of London observing the two-minute silence on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month



Commonwealth No. 1 and No. 2 at the UN

The two top positions at the United Nations are now filled by Commonwealth personalities.

Canada's former Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Louise Fréchette (*right*), 51, has been appointed the UN's first Deputy Secretary-General, the 'Number Two' position established by the General Assembly last December. The Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, is from Ghana.

Ms Fréchette, a career diplomat, has been Canada's Deputy Minister of National Defence since June 1995. From 1992-94 she served as Canada's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the UN in New York. Prior to that she had also served in other capacities in her country's UN



UN/DP/IM/Grant

delegations in New York and Geneva.

She comes to the job with a wealth of experience in politics, administration and diplomacy, and has served in various divisions of Canada's Department of External Affairs. Among other things, between June 1985 and September 1988, she was Canada's Ambassador to Argentina, with concurrent accreditation to Uruguay and Paraguay.

Born in Montreal, Ms Fréchette received a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1966 from College Basile Moreau, in Canada. In 1970 she earned a *licence des lettres* degree in history from the University of Montreal, and a postgraduate diploma in economic studies from the College of Europe at Bruges, Belgium, in 1978. In 1993 Saint Mary's University in Halifax, Canada, conferred on her an Honorary Doctorate of Laws.

Guyana's first woman President takes office



Janet Jagan (*above*) was sworn in as Guyana's first woman president in December, following presidential and parliamentary elections. She was the wife of the late President Cheddi Jagan, who led Guyana from 1992 to 1997, and his constant political aide. Her election sees her taking up the mantle of her husband, who was succeeded for a short while by Mr Sam Hinds.

During her more than 40 years in Guyanese politics, she has held successively higher posts including Minister of Home Affairs and Prime Minister. She was first appointed to the Cabinet in 1957 as Minister of Labour, Health and Nursing and she has also served as Deputy Speaker.

A nurse by training, she was born Janet Rosenberg in Chicago, USA, where in the 1940s she met her future husband when Dr Jagan, a Guyanese dentist, had

recently finished his training. In 1943 she went to live with him in Guyana, working in the dental practice that he opened. In 1950 she and Dr Jagan, together with Mr Forbes Burnham, founded the People's Progressive Party (PPP), of which she was made General Secretary.

She was first elected to parliament in 1953. Her husband became Prime Minister, and held that position for seven years. In 1955, a split in the PPP

led to the emergence of the People's National Congress (PNC) under the leadership of Mr Burnham, who led Guyana to independence in 1966. In 1970 Guyana became a republic with Mr Burnham as President, a post he held until his death in 1985. After more than 28 years in opposition Cheddi Jagan's PPP, which now included a civic element (hence the name PPP/C), won the 1992 elections and he became President, holding that office until his death in March 1997.

O B I T U A R Y

Former President of Ghana dies

Frank Martin/Guardian



Former President Hilla Limann (*left*), Ghana's third civilian President, died on 23 January in the Ghanaian capital, Accra, of a heart ailment, aged 63.

Dr Limann was elected President in 1979 but his government was overthrown in 1981 when the then Flt-Lt

Jerry John Rawlings, Ghana's current President, staged his second *coup d'état*. A former diplomat, he was a political unknown at the time of his election as the candidate of the People's National Party, the successor to the Convention People's Party of Ghana's first President, Dr Kwame Nkrumah.

His election followed the three-month rule of the first Rawlings administration, the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council, which had taken over power but allowed scheduled elections to be held, and which Limann's party won. However, on 31 December 1981 Limann's government was overthrown by Rawlings and Limann was detained for one year. He was released in 1983 and subsequently returned to politics, forming another party to unsuccessfully contest the 1992 elections.

Born in Gwolu, Northern Ghana, Dr Limann was educated at the London School of Economics and the Sorbonne in Paris, France, before joining his country's foreign service in 1963. He is survived by his wife, Dora Fulera, and five children.

Women on women

International Women's Day was observed throughout the world on Sunday 8 March. This year, the themes for the Day were taken from the 50th anniversary celebration of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and were: women in armed conflict; women's human rights; the rights of the girl child; and violence against women.

At the Commonwealth Secretariat in London the centrepiece of the celebration was a women's panel discussion at Marlborough House on women's human rights. The panel included four prominent Commonwealth women: Ms Cheryl Carolus, High Commissioner for South Africa; Baroness Valerie Amos, former chief executive of the British Equal Opportunities Commission; Ms Juhana Khamu Loqueman, winner of a Commonwealth Award for Best Practice in Women's Health; and Ms Tina Jorgenson, senior information officer at the UN Information Office in London.

The panel members spoke on the themes from their personal and professional perspectives, after which there was a lively discussion with the audience.

The United Nations began observing 8 March as International Women's Day in 1975, the International Women's Year.

A special commitment

The Commonwealth's special role in helping small landlocked and island states was emphasised by the Commonwealth Secretary General, Chief Emeka Anyaoku, in his New Year's message. This commitment, which affects well over half the Commonwealth's 54 members, sets the association apart from other international groupings in its specific attention to the concerns of small and vulnerable countries.

In discussing this aspect of the Commonwealth's work, Chief Anyaoku declared that the Commonwealth was entering 1998 more strongly committed to the task of helping all member countries deal with the complexities of international life. He described 1997 as a memorable year in every aspect — political, economic and social development — and said he was confident that in 1998 the advantages of Commonwealth membership would be made even clearer. The association was, after all, a catalyst for positive change that linked its ideals and principles to programmes on the ground that benefit everyone.

Shipley at New Zealand's helm



Universal Pictorial Press

New Zealand, the first country in the Commonwealth to give women the vote, back in 1893, now has a woman at its helm.

Jenny Shipley (*above*), 45, the conservative and tough-minded Minister of

Transport and Women's Affairs, has been appointed the country's first female Prime Minister following the resignation of Jim Bolger. She took up her post on 8 December.

Mrs Shipley has earned wide respect for her hard work, unflinching determination and ability to come to grips with difficult issues. As Social Welfare Minister in 1990, she presided over cuts of up to 25 per cent in the country's social benefits system. She also supported tough economic reforms, notably in public health delivery.

Mrs Shipley, from the country's South Island, trained as a school teacher before marrying Burton Shipley, a farmer. They have two children, both at university. She has been a Member of Parliament for 10 years and gained her political skills, she says, by being a mother.

The change in leadership means that both of New Zealand's main political parties are now headed by women. The Labour Party is led by Helen Clark.

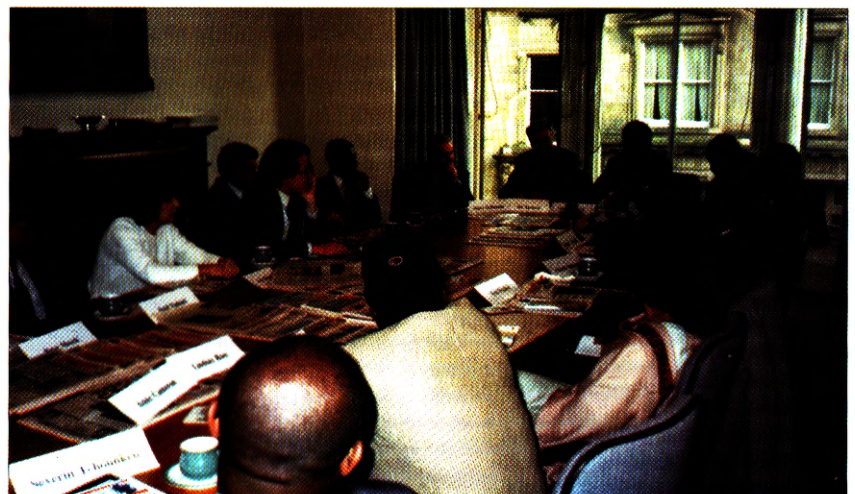
Mr Bolger, 62, served as Prime Minister for seven years and was leader of the National Party for nearly 12.

Editors in interesting times

It's not often that you find editors in the classroom. But recently some Commonwealth editors exchanged their editorial chairs for seminar hall seats at the University of Stirling, in Scotland, the venue of the first seminar for editors organised jointly by the Commonwealth Press Union and the University. Titled 'Journalism in Interesting Times', the three-day seminar was attended by 18 senior editors. Subjects discussed ranged from reporting national tragedies and the role of the ombudsman, to the relationship with proprietors.

Among other things, the participants recommended that at their next meeting more attention should be given to laws which diminish press freedom, and time should be set aside to develop strategies to improve press freedom.

The participants came from Australia, Bangladesh, Cameroon, Canada, Ghana, Guyana, India, Malawi, Malaysia, Mozambique, Namibia, Pakistan, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Swaziland, Tanzania and Zimbabwe.



The editors at one of the sessions