

## **STOKE ROCHFORD STATEMENT ON HIV/AIDS AND EDUCATION**

**from Ministers of Education of Commonwealth Small States  
September 2, 2004**

### **EDUCATION for a WORLD without AIDS**

We, the Ministers of Education of Commonwealth Small States, have met at Stoke Rochford in the United Kingdom on September 2nd, 2004 to consider the current and potential impact of HIV/AIDS in our countries and the role of education in addressing this serious issue. It is one that threatens to undermine the efforts of many Commonwealth member states to attain the Millennium Development Goals for education.

We believe that small states are particularly vulnerable to the challenge posed by HIV/AIDS because of the limited economic and financial capacity at our disposal and the disproportionate effect that the loss of skilled human resources, through ill health and death, implies for our development. Greater risks of the spread of infection are inevitably associated with transient populations. This poses a particular challenge to our societies, many of which are characterised by a high number of migrants and returners, and which welcome large numbers of short-term visitors from abroad through the tourist trade, so vital to many of our economies.

At the same time the small scale of our societies brings many advantages of close family and neighbourhood connections that can be used to build defences against the spread of HIV/AIDS and support networks to help those afflicted.

In our deliberations we have been mindful in particular of the affirmation of Commonwealth Heads of Government in their Aso Rock Declaration on Development and Democracy in December 2003 that “strong political leadership and education remain crucial components of the multi-sectoral response to combating HIV/AIDS”.

Against this background:

- We acknowledge the responsibility of each of us and of our education ministries to develop and sustain a clear role for education within national, regional and global efforts to halt the spread of the epidemic, to promote awareness of its nature, causes and consequences for individuals and societies, and where appropriate, collaborate in mobilising care and support in this regard.
- We recognise that Education and research are critical tools in the struggle to contain the spread of HIV and AIDS. Education must contribute substantially to our National AIDS Strategies and work closely with the health and other sectors in our countries.

- We reaffirm the commitment made by Commonwealth Education Ministers at 15CCEM in Edinburgh last year “to include compulsory age-appropriate HIV/AIDS education in the curriculum of every education system within the Commonwealth, including teacher education”. It is our aim to ensure that in every educational institution our students will be given information and services necessary to develop attitudes and skills that will reduce vulnerability to HIV infection. Parents should be involved in planning the provision of such education.
- We are concerned to protect access to education of children and older learners affected by HIV/AIDS, whether they are themselves directly infected, or are in a situation where their opportunity for participation in education may be adversely affected by the incapacity or death of family members as a result of HIV/AIDS. We shall endeavour to provide the necessary support mechanisms to schools and families to make possible the retention of affected learners in education.
- We pledge to extend parallel support to teachers and other education employees wherever possible, to make it possible for those directly and indirectly affected by HIV/AIDS to continue to work in schools and colleges as long as they are able beneficially to do so.
- We intend that all our future education sector plans and policies shall take full account of the impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and the necessity to mobilise education programmes to combat it. This includes preparing projections of learner enrolment and teacher supply that reflect the latest expectations of retention and loss due to HIV/AIDS.

Education by itself cannot resolve the issues posed for our societies by HIV/AIDS, but it has a major contribution to make. We recognise that other sectors have an important part to play, and that our societies as a whole may need to face up to a variety of often-ignored sensitive issues including cultural practices, drug abuse, sexual behaviour of young people in particular, the sex service industry and so on.

In the light of the above, we hereby commit ourselves and our Ministries of Education in the small states of the Commonwealth to a heightened and concerted response to HIV/AIDS, which we are resolved to continue until, through education and other means, we enter a **World without AIDS**.