

## ACCREDITATION TO THE COMMONWEALTH

### 1. Introduction

The Commonwealth has an outstanding record in engaging civil society. Links and working relations between the Commonwealth intergovernmental organisations and other non-governmental organisations including civil society and associated organisations have existed for many years. The 2002 High Level Review of the Commonwealth recognised that ‘the networks for sharing expertise, information and experience among organisations, the people-to-people links and the existence of a wider Commonwealth civil society are valuable assets that give the Commonwealth a depth and reach that is unique’. The review made a number of recommendations aimed at strengthening the intergovernmental Commonwealth’s relations with civil society, including a recommendation that new criteria should be developed for accrediting non-governmental organisations<sup>1</sup> to the Commonwealth and its official meetings.

### 2. Criteria for accreditation

Organisations wishing to be accredited to the Commonwealth must meet the following criteria:

(i) *Committed to the Commonwealth’s fundamental values*

These principles are enshrined in Commonwealth Declarations, notably the Singapore Declaration on Commonwealth Principles (1971) and the Harare Commonwealth Declaration (1991). The Harare Declaration confirmed the Commonwealth’s commitment to promoting democracy and good governance, human rights and the rule of law, gender equality and sustainable economic and social development. The Commonwealth’s strong and abiding commitment to these fundamental values and principles was reaffirmed at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Trinidad and Tobago in 2009.<sup>2</sup> The Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG)<sup>3</sup> has also expressed the expectation that all Commonwealth organisations act in conformity with the letter and spirit of these values. Organisations will therefore be required not only to confirm their commitment to these values, but also to indicate what they do to promote and implement them.

(ii) *Representing the true diversity of Commonwealth countries*

Organisations must recognise and respect the diversity of the Commonwealth’s membership and be open to exchanging information and collaborating with like-minded organisations in all Commonwealth countries. Diversity will be demonstrated, inter-alia, by an organisation providing evidence that it has a presence, membership and activities in at least three of the

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<sup>1</sup> The term ‘civil society and non-governmental organisations’ is used to broadly describe all the non-state and non-business organisations that the Commonwealth works with in different ways to further its objectives and interests. This group comprises the full range of formal Commonwealth professional associations, trade unions, human rights organisations, advocacy groups, humanitarian assistance organisations and a growing number of international and regional organisations engaged in development work with a focus on the Commonwealth. Taken together, they are often referred to as the Commonwealth Family of Organisations.

<sup>2</sup> **Trinidad & Tobago Affirmation on Commonwealth Values and Principles**, Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, Republic of Trinidad & Tobago, 27–29 November 2009.

<sup>3</sup> **Strengthening the Role of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG), September 2011**, Point B 19 (viii) – all Commonwealth organisations would be expected to act in conformity with the letter and spirit of decisions by CMAG, as already called for in the 2009 *affirmation*.

four Commonwealth regions<sup>4</sup>. In very exceptional circumstances, the Accreditation Committee may consider an application from an organisation that does not meet this criterion.

*(iii) Accountability and Transparency*

Organisations seeking accreditation should demonstrate transparency in their governance arrangements, decision-making processes and activities. They should show that they have systems to ensure accountability to their members, including by making the governing body's decisions visible to all members and by providing regular and reliable reports to the membership and other stakeholders on the organisation's activities and finances.

Once accredited, organisations are expected to submit reports on their activities and audited accounts to the Commonwealth Secretariat, at least once every two years.

*(iv) Open to all Commonwealth members*

To be eligible for accreditation, all applicant organisations should be open to permitting eligible individuals, organisations or associations from other Commonwealth member countries to join or associate with them.

*(v) Activity track record*

An organisation applying for accreditation should normally have been existent for at least 2 years and demonstrate a track record of activity during that period.

### **3. Benefits of accreditation to the Commonwealth**

The following benefits may be available to organisations accredited to the Commonwealth:

#### **3.1 Visitors' access to Marlborough House, the headquarters of the Commonwealth in London**

- Access, on request, to Marlborough House.
- Arrangements for informal discussions with Commonwealth Secretariat and Commonwealth Foundation staff on matters of special interest.
- Opportunity to consult with Secretariat and Foundation officials on matters of mutual interest in a field of activity related to the Commonwealth's work programme.
- Accommodation for small meetings on work of direct relevance to the Commonwealth, subject to availability of space. Because of the very limited number of formal rooms in Marlborough House, access is limited and priority is given to Commonwealth official meetings. A special small room (up to 25 people) is available to accommodate meetings of accredited organisations. A reduced charge may be levied.

#### **3.2 Access to general information**

- Access, upon request, to all public information not already available on the internet.
- Access to Commonwealth information materials (e.g. posters, pamphlets etc.).
- Access to the *Commonwealth News*, the electronic newsletter of the Commonwealth Secretariat, and *Commonwealth People*, the electronic newsletter of the Commonwealth Foundation. Where possible this information will be sent

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<sup>4</sup> The Commonwealth regions are: Africa, Asia-Europe, Caribbean-Canada and the Pacific.

electronically, although hard copies can be provided to organisations that require them or do not have access to the internet.

### **3.3 Access to consultation processes**

- Able to participate in consultative mechanisms that advise the Commonwealth on its work. This is currently done in a variety of ways, including sector focus group meetings.
- Invitation to attend special consultations from time to time according to the subject area.

### **3.4 Access to official meetings**

The Secretariat holds a Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) every two years, in addition to and regular Commonwealth ministerial meetings in specific policy areas. Accredited organisations may be eligible to attend these, as well as other high-level meetings.

#### **(i) Commonwealth ministerial meetings**

Accreditation to Commonwealth ministerial meetings is by invitation, and the benefits of being accredited vary according to the nature of the meeting. They range from access to documents and the opportunity to submit documents, to participation in discussions as an observer. Accreditation to meetings normally requires being accredited to the Commonwealth, plus working in areas of direct relevance to the Commonwealth and being known to the Commonwealth Secretariat or Foundation, through programme collaboration.

In special circumstances, accreditation to individual Commonwealth ministerial meetings may sometimes be extended to an organisation if it has a working relationship with the Commonwealth, whether or not it is an accredited organisation.

#### **(ii) Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings**

All organisations accredited to the Commonwealth may apply to be registered to participate in certain events of the CHOGMs.

Benefits include:

- Able to submit papers;
- May receive reports approved by Heads of Government;
- Invitation to the opening ceremony of the CHOGM and other social events, subject to limitations of the venue; and
- May submit proposals through the Commonwealth Foundation or Commonwealth of Learning.

## **4. Follow-up**

Accreditation will be conferred initially for a period of five years. The Accreditation Committee (AC) will review the status of all accredited organisations on a regular basis. This review would pay attention to the results and outcomes of organisational efforts and especially how they contribute to Commonwealth objectives, amongst other issues. Based on the satisfactory completion of a status review, organisations will have their accreditation reaffirmed, or withdrawn if they are not complying with the accreditation requirements. The

AC reserves the right to advise the Board of Governors to withdraw accreditation status for an organisation which, after due notice, fails to meet its obligations.

## **5. Application procedures**

New applications for accreditation are reviewed by the Commonwealth Accreditation Committee at least twice every year. The Committee may arrange to meet more often should the need arise. Accredited status will be reviewed periodically to ensure that accredited organisations remain in compliance with the accreditation criteria.

Organisations wishing to become accredited should write an application letter on their letterhead setting out their request to become accredited. They should also submit the following information:

- Proof of registration in a Commonwealth country.
- The most recent annual report
- The most recent audited accounts (a satisfactory statement of accounts may be accepted in lieu of audited accounts);
- The constitution or founding document of the organisation;
- A statement confirming the organisation's commitment to Commonwealth values, and how the organisation promotes and implements these values, including information about any Commonwealth-related activities recently undertaken by the organisation;
- A statement setting out any other intergovernmental organisations to which the organisation is accredited;
- A statement setting out how the organisation is governed, including a full list of all office bearers, their designations and country of nationality; and
- A list of the countries in which the organisation is active and/or has members/affiliates.

## **6. Contact information**

For more information, please contact:

**The Secretary**  
**Commonwealth Accreditation Committee**  
**C/o Strategic Planning and Evaluation Division**  
**Commonwealth Secretariat**  
**Marlborough House, Pall Mall**  
**London SW1Y 5HX**  
**UK**  
**E-mail: [secretary.ac@commonwealth.int](mailto:secretary.ac@commonwealth.int)**