

Creating communities – building towns in the Commonwealth

Press Release 7 November 2006

The Commonwealth Foundation and the Commonwealth Association of Planners have joined together for World Town Planning Day to remind governments that planning is an essential way to build sustainable urban settlements that are vital to poverty alleviation and slowing the rate of global warming.

The Commonwealth Foundation currently holds habitat issues high on its programme and partners with civil society to implement the UN Habitat agenda which sets a global plan of action towards achieving sustainable human settlements.

The recent publication of the Stern report on the costs of climate change demonstrates just how important it is to plan and manage urban development globally. Every day there are another 60,000 people living in towns and cities in the Commonwealth with increasing numbers living in poverty in slums. Unless this surge of development can be accomplished equitably and in an environmentally responsible manner, the dire predictions in the Stern report will become reality. The impacts of climate change are already evident in many low-lying Commonwealth countries that are vulnerable to sea level rise and extreme weather conditions.

Foundation Deputy Director Vijay Krishnarayan, himself a town planner by background, said: “With 80% of the Commonwealth population living in urban centres, the planning of towns and cities is an extremely important issue affecting people’s households. Decisions on how and where essential services are provided must include the perspectives of those it affects. Planning has long been an area for public participation and can provide good examples to other sectors in promoting participation between governments and civil society.”

The Commonwealth Association of Planners, who recently elected a new South African President, Christine Platt, will be pushing Commonwealth governments to look at strengthening planning as a critical prerequisite for sustainable development, including urban infrastructure. Mrs Platt is the first South African President of a Commonwealth Association and hopes that the CAP will be integral in bringing South Africa to the forefront of this pan-Commonwealth concern.

Ms Platt commented that “The Commonwealth Association of Planners serves as an important conduit for communication between member associations throughout the Commonwealth, as well as between its members and other global players in the planning field, including UN Habitat. It plays the leading role in developing planning and planners throughout the countries of the Commonwealth and a priority in this regard is the strengthening of the Association’s regions.”

On World Town Planning Day, planners can celebrate the fact that after years of being marginalised, planning and the role of planners as a fundamental part of governance for

sustainable human settlement, has been acknowledged on the international agenda. We need to build on this positive development, and to present compelling evidence at CHOGM in Kampala in 2007 and at World Urban Forum IV in 2008 in Nanjing that planners around the Commonwealth have engaged and have responded.

It is the Commonwealth Association of Planners' role to maintain cohesion within what constitutes a substantial part of the global family of planners, and to sustain momentum in the debates relevant to the 21st century, including those around sustainable urbanisation, poverty and climate change.”

World Town Planning Day is celebrated in 30 countries on four continents each November 8 and recognises and promotes the role of planning in creating liveable communities.

Notes to Editors

The Commonwealth Association of Planners seeks to focus and develop the skills of urban and regional planners across the Commonwealth to meet the challenges of urbanisation and the sustainable development of human settlements.

The Commonwealth Foundation is an intergovernmental organisation resourced by and reporting to Commonwealth Governments. It works to enhance the role of civil society organisations in governance, democracy, sustainable development and culture and diversity by strengthening their institutional and human capacity and creating opportunities and space for partnership, participation, advice and leadership. The Foundation was established by Commonwealth Governments in 1965 and is guided by the principles, values and priorities of the Commonwealth.

The Commonwealth is rich in professional networks, with more than 80 such organisations covering professions as varied as parliamentarians, veterinarians and human rights activists. For a full list visit

http://www.thecommonwealth.org/Internal/151814/commonwealth_directory/

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