

Conference of Commonwealth Scout Associations

A meeting of representatives of the Scout Associations in the Commonwealth was held on Sunday 7 July 1996 in Oslo, Norway, immediately prior to the 34th World Scout Conference. Those present were:

- Australia – Richard Simpson, William Wells
- Cameroon – Francis Nguene
- Canada – Bob Butcher, Jack Sinclair
- Cyprus – George Ioannides, Tony Papantoniou
- Malta – Kenneth de Martion, James Rizzo
- Mauritius – Ismail Bawamia
- New Zealand – George Fairbairn
- Papua New Guinea – Joshua Muan, Duane Williams
- Singapore – Anthony Thng
- South Africa – Nkwenkwe Nkomo, Timothy Zulu
- St Vincent and the Grenadines – Christopher Grant, George Bailey
- Trinidad and Tobago – Barrington Soares, Vin Rose
- United Kingdom – Tony Kirwan, George Purdy, Nick Higgins, John May, Garth Morrison

Apologies were received from: Beluze, Seychelles, Tanzania. Several countries indicated their support, but were unable to attend: Botswana, Kenya, Malaysia, Maldives, Sierra Leone.

1 Introduction

With the agreement of the meeting, John May [International Commissioner of The Scout Association of the United Kingdom] assumed the chair as he had convened the meeting. He explained that he had invited colleagues to meet in response to a number of approaches, suggesting that Scout Associations in the Commonwealth should get together. It was convenient to do so on the eve of the World Scout Conference.

An agenda had been produced in order to help to make the meeting effective but it was up to the participants to accept it or not. Similarly, John said he did not intend to chair a formal meeting and he hoped that all participants would discuss the issues as colleagues and friends.

2 World Scouting and the Commonwealth

John introduced Garth Morrison, a member of the World Scout Committee. Garth explained that he had recently retired as Chief Scout in the United Kingdom and had accepted an invitation from John to join his International Team, taking special interest in Commonwealth matters. He was therefore pleased to be present in both capacities and with the full knowledge of the World Scout Committee.

Garth reported that he had met Chief Emeka Anyoaku, Commonwealth Secretary General, on two occasions and that Jacques Moreillon, Secretary General of WOSM had also met him last year. The Commonwealth Secretary General had expressed his general support for Scouting and had stated his view that the Commonwealth was a ready-made network for Scouting to use to develop international contacts and methods of co-operation. There was also the possibility that the Commonwealth could help Scouting's development through national governments and through other projects. Furthermore, the Commonwealth itself was keen to develop its relationship with non-governmental organisations [NGOs] and had established an NGO Forum at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings [CHOGMs] for this purpose. The next CHOGM would be held in Edinburgh, UK in 1997. A youth forum alongside the CHOGM was being proposed by community organisations in Scotland and it was possible that Scouting's experience of youth forums could be called upon.

There had previously been a Commonwealth Association of Scouting which had been dissolved in 1972. This no doubt the right decision at the time but circumstances had changed since then and Garth believed that it was now appropriate to re-establish some sort of structure for Scouting in the Commonwealth. It was important that this structure did not cut across any of WOSM's existing communications and decision-making structures; rather it should strengthen and reinforce communications between Associations with a common bond. Its purpose would be to help more young people to enjoy good Scouting. Garth left after this point to rejoin the World Scout Committee meeting.

3 A network of Scout Associations

The meeting considered the potential benefits of a network of Scout Associations throughout the Commonwealth. It would be possible, for example, to propose exchanges of young people and adults, secondments of experts, adult training courses, development projects and so on. However, this would only be advantageous if a Commonwealth grouping brought something extra by providing access to additional financial resources.

Nick Higgins reported to the meeting the substance of his early exploratory discussions with the Commonwealth Foundation, an organ of the Commonwealth based in London, which provided funding for certain categories of projects and to specific pan-Commonwealth organisations. They give travel grants for 'south-south' co-operation as well as supporting eligible professional bodies. An information leaflet was also distributed.

It may be possible for national Scout Associations to apply direct for travel grants but the Foundation staff had initially been dismissive of Scouting's eligibility for funding as a professional body. The meeting that they could possibly be persuaded of

Scouting's effectiveness and track record of youth development, its professional approach, its large membership throughout the Commonwealth and so on. It could also be necessary to present to them a properly constituted organisation active throughout the Commonwealth.

4 Organisation and Constitution

The meeting was clear in its view that additional bureaucracy was undesirable. It also wanted to be sure that any Commonwealth grouping of Scout Associations could not act as a power bloc within the World Organisation's structures, nor be perceived as doing so.

However, the potential need was recognised for some sort of lightweight structure to satisfy the requirements of the Commonwealth Foundation and to facilitate communications. The meeting agreed that no fees would be charged for the organisation, in order to strictly limit its bureaucracy.

It was agreed to pursue the possibility of involvement in the NGO Forum and the youth forum at the CHOGM. Garth would be asked to provide information about the youth forum to Scout Associations in the Commonwealth, so that they could lobby their national governments for representation. He would also be asked to approach the Commonwealth Secretariat for information about the NGO Forum.

5 Votes

At this stage, the meeting felt that it would be inappropriate to consider a constitution or to elect any officers. If required, further work would be carried out in this area by The Scout Association of the United Kingdom, with a view to formalising an organisation at the next World Scout Conference in South Africa in 1999, if appropriate.

6 Actions 1996-1999

6.1 Notes of the meeting would be produced by The Scout Association of the United Kingdom and distributed to all Scout Associations in the Commonwealth, along with a list of Commonwealth countries.

6.2 Further research would be carried out by The Scout Association of the United Kingdom into the possibility of recognition by the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Commonwealth Foundation.

6.3 Scout Associations would send to The Scout Association of the United Kingdom details of their experience of past co-operative projects between Scout Associations in Commonwealth countries, along with any proposals for future projects. This information would then be compiled into a report to be used for the information of the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Commonwealth Foundation.

6.4 In the meantime, Associations would be encouraged to act on any bilateral or multilateral proposals which met their needs and aspirations.

7 Conclusions

Whatever the outcomes of the investigations into the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Commonwealth Foundation, the meeting thought it would be useful to meet again just before the next World Scout Conference in 1999.

Nick Higgins
The Scout Association of the United Kingdom
July 1996