



University of London

## INSTITUTE OF COMMONWEALTH STUDIES

### **Key Commonwealth Documents: The Langkawi Declaration**

*The Langkawi Declaration on the Environment was signed during the 1989 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.*

We, the Heads of Government of the Commonwealth, representing a quarter of the world's population and a broad cross-section of global interests, are deeply concerned at the serious deterioration in the environment and the threat this poses to the well-being of present and future generations. Any delay in taking action to halt this progressive deterioration will result in permanent and irreversible damage.

**2.** The current threat to the environment, which is a common concern of all mankind, stems essentially from past neglect in managing the natural environment and resources. The environment has been degraded by decades of industrial and other forms of pollution, including unsafe disposal of toxic wastes, the burning of fossil fuels, nuclear testing and non-sustainable practices in agriculture, fishery and forestry.

**3.** The main environmental problems facing the world are the 'greenhouse effect' (which may lead to severe climatic changes that could include floods, drought and rising sea levels), the depletion of the ozone layer, acid rain, marine pollution, land degradation and the extinction of numerous animal and plant species. Some developing countries also face distinct environmental problems arising from poverty and population pressures. In addition, some islands and low-lying areas of other countries, are threatened by the prospect of rising sea level.

**4.** Many environmental problems transcend national boundaries and interests, necessitating a co-ordinated global effort. This is particularly true in areas outside national jurisdiction, and where there is transboundary pollution on land and in the oceans, atmosphere and outer space.

**5.** The need to protect the environment should be viewed in a balanced perspective and due emphasis be accorded to promoting economic growth and sustainable development, including eradication of poverty, meeting basic needs, and enhancing the quality of life. The responsibility for ensuring a better environment should be equitably shared and the ability of developing countries to respond be taken into account.

**6.** To achieve sustainable development, economic growth is a compelling necessity. Sustainable development implies the incorporation of environmental concerns into economic planning and policies. Environmental concerns should not be used to introduce a new form of conditionality, nor as a pretext for creating unjustified barriers to trade.

**7.** The success of global and national environmental programmes requires mutually reinforcing strategies and the participation and commitment of all levels of society, government, individuals and organisations, industry and the scientific community.

**8.** Recognising that our shared environment binds all countries to a common future, we, the Heads of Government of the Commonwealth, resolved to act collectively and individually, commit ourselves to the following programme of action:

- advance policies and programmes which help achieve sustainable development, including the development of new and better techniques in integrating the environmental dimension in economic decision-making;
- strengthen and support the development of international funding mechanisms and appropriate decision-making procedures to respond to environmental protection needs which will include assisting developing countries to obtain access to and transfer of needed environmental technologies and which should take account of proposals for an International Environment Fund/Planet Protection Fund;
- support the work of the UNEP/WMO Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC);
- call for the early conclusion of an international convention to protect and conserve the global climate and, in this context, applaud the efforts of member governments to advance the negotiation of a framework convention under UN auspices;
- support the findings and recommendations of the Commonwealth Expert Group's Report on Climate Change as a basis for achievable action to develop strategies for adapting to climate change and for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, as well as making an important contribution to the work of the IPCC;
- support measures to improve energy conservation and energy efficiency;
- promote the reduction and eventual phase-out of substances depleting the ozone layer;
- promote afforestation and agricultural practices in developed and developing countries to arrest the increase in atmospheric carbon dioxide and halt the deterioration of land and water resources;
- strengthen efforts by developing countries in sustainable forest management and their manufacture and export of higher value-added forest products and, in this regard, support the activities of the International Tropical Timber Organisation and the Food and agriculture Organisation's Tropical Forestry Action Plan, as well as take note of the recommendations of the 13<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Forestry Conference;

- support activities related to the conservation of biological diversity and genetic resources, including the conservation of significant areas of virgin forest and other protected natural habitats;
- support low-lying and island countries in their efforts to protect themselves and their vulnerable natural marine ecosystems from the effects of sea level rise;
- discourage and restrict non-sustainable fishing practices and seek to ban tangle net and pelagic drift net fishing;
- support efforts to prevent marine pollution including curbing ocean dumping of toxic wastes;
- strengthens international action to ensure the safe management and disposal of hazardous wastes and to reduce transboundary movements, particularly to prevent dumping in developing countries;
- participate in relevant international agreements relating to the environment and promote new and innovative instruments which will attract widespread support for protecting the global environment; and
- strengthen national, regional and international institutions responsible for environmental protection as well as the promotion of active programmes on environmental education to heighten public awareness and support.

**9.** We, the Heads of Government of the Commonwealth, resolve to take immediate and positive actions on the basis of the above programme. In this regard, we pledge our full support for the convening of the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development.

**10.** We call on the international community to join us in the endeavour.

*21 October 1989<sup>1</sup>*

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