Commonwealth Accredited Associations' Statement to the Committee of the Whole

1. Accredited Commonwealth associations (CAs) ask that Commonwealth Heads of Government, in the Communiqué from their Meeting in Sri Lanka, should:

a) **Affirm the beneficial role that civil society organisations play in Commonwealth endeavours to promote equitable growth and inclusion of all and commit to providing platforms and support to enable their participation as key partners in development processes.** *[see paragraphs 2-4]*

b) **Recognise the value that CAs in particular make to furthering Commonwealth agendas and programmes and encourage the Commonwealth Inter-Governmental Organisations to streamline co-operation mechanisms to take full advantage of CA input.** *[see paragraphs 5-6]*

c) **Ensure due attention and an appropriate Commonwealth response to the several challenges for sustainable human and social development, to which we draw attention in this memorandum and which are further elaborated in parallel submissions from individual associations.** *[see paragraph 7]*

Mobilising Commonwealth Partnerships for equitable and inclusive development.

2. The Eminent Persons Group (EPG) rightly defined the Commonwealth as 'a Commonwealth of the People'. This points to improvement of human and social well-being as the aim of development in member states. In this context, we warmly welcome the decision to retain Social Development as one of the six pillars of the Secretariat's current Strategic Plan. We also welcome the adoption of the Commonwealth Charter and urge governments to enshrine its principles in their policies and actions.

3. As well as being beneficiaries, the citizens of every country must be active participants in the development process, with civil society organisations (CSOs) acting as enablers of this engagement. Their knowledge of the aspirations and needs of different communities and social sub-groups in society allows them both to communicate popular concerns and to harness civic enthusiasm in support of development programmes. Governments, international agencies and the private sector should regard CSO experience and insight as valuable assets in their efforts to achieve inclusive development. We urge Commonwealth Heads of Government to seek active CSO participation as key partners in development processes and to provide appropriate spaces and capacity building support to enable their contributions.

4. We ask Commonwealth member states to strive to complete efforts to meet and review the current MDGs and to ensure that the post-2015 development agenda is firmly grounded in principles of poverty alleviation and equitable and inclusive development. We urge them to formulate coordinated sectoral and inter-sectoral plans of action framed by that agenda. We believe that CSO input to the formation of a new agenda will help to ensure an inclusive process, achievable, locally owned goals and partnerships supporting accountability and delivery. We call on Heads to promote effective channels for such CSO input at all levels of governance.

Contribution of Commonwealth Accredited Associations (CAs) to Commonwealth agendas

5. The recently completed strategic plans of the Commonwealth IGOs emphasise the potential for productive partnership between the diverse infrastructure of Commonwealth inter-governmental and non-governmental (NGO/CSO) organisations and associated networks across all sectors of development. We ask the Secretariat, Foundation and COL to move speedily to develop joint guidelines to frame and facilitate the operation of these partnerships. The potential of its professional networks is one of the Commonwealth's greatest assets, and should be harnessed to further the fulfilment of its development priorities.

6. CAs have a unique place among the civil society actors with which the Commonwealth IGOs collaborate. They have long experience of development in member countries; extensive knowledge of Commonwealth capacities, policies and processes; a wide range of connections across the Commonwealth; and a deep commitment to strengthen the Commonwealth framework. The Commonwealth Foundation's strategic decision to prioritise a wider CSO base poses fundamental questions for Commonwealth handling of CSO relationships and particularly the place of CAs. A co-ordinated approach uniting the three IGOs is needed to ensure productive working relationships and focussed work-plans in future. Governments will no doubt welcome moves on the part of CAs to form a representative grouping to support greater co-ordination.

The Commonwealth's commitment to social and human development

7. The UN Secretary General has commented that a post-2015 era demands a new vision and a responsive framework where sustainable development is enabled by the integration of economic growth, social justice and environmental stewardship. Active civil society participation in developing this framework, at national and regional levels, will be crucial to achieving this. In parallel

submissions to CHOGM, through the Committee of the Whole, our member CAs have drawn attention to specific sectoral concerns with a focus on the post-2015 agenda, and we ask that these memoranda be carefully studied. They contain *inter alia* the following salient messages:

- Inequality, discrimination and injustice increase when **human rights** are excluded from development discourse and practice. This underlines the need for a Commonwealth Secretariat Human Rights Department, as recommended by the EPG, and support for a free, independent and responsible media in all Commonwealth countries. *[see submissions from CHRI, CMG, CBA]*
- Population growth and migration pose significant challenges to development planners and engineers, particularly in developing countries where 90% of urban population growth in the period to 2030 will take place. Rapid urbanisation, population growth and migration, raise critical issues of infrastructure, land acquisition and use, building standards and costs, shelter, health and sanitation, or provision of education and social services. In view of the Commonwealth's commitment to **sustainability** under pillars 5 and 6 of the Secretariat's strategic plan, we call on the Commonwealth to play a leading role in in shaping the post-2015 urban development agenda and to review where, across this spectrum of issues, it can focus its efforts to maximise impact, also noting its particular potential for promoting sustainability in management of global marine resources, related livelihoods and SIDS' development. We ask Commonwealth leaders to support the inclusion of decent work, social protection and respect for workers' rights in the post-2015 development agenda. *[submissions from CHEC, CAA, CAP, CASLE]*
- We commend the timely release of Commonwealth recommendations for the Post-2015 Development Framework for **Education** rightly praised by the international community, and urge CHOGM in Sri Lanka to advocate its adoption internationally. We welcome the decision to retain education as a key Secretariat function and call on ministers to ensure that an adequately resourced, coordinated educational strategy is developed, based on a comprehensive review of the strengths of the many different Commonwealth educational stakeholders, enhancing cooperation *[Submissions from CCfE and Council for Education in the CW]*. We similarly call on Governments to review Commonwealth co-operation and support networks for **culture** and to examine where Commonwealth energies might be most usefully directed. *[submission from CAM]*
- We welcome the retention of health within the Secretariat's strategic plan and ask Heads to reaffirm that their focus on *'Growth and Equity; Inclusive Development'* is premised on a healthy population. Diverse **health** challenges in the Commonwealth range from high infant and maternal mortality rates to underfunded health sectors. We call on member states to combat disability and enhance physical and mental health by: emphasising primary (including oral) health care and preventative medicine and dentistry; increasing funding and improving management and working conditions in the health sector; ensuring sustained availability of safe and good quality medicines; encouraging continuous professional development; enhancing networking amongst Commonwealth stakeholders; and promoting the use of ICT. *[see submissions from CHPA]*
- **Women and girls** represent a development asset that in many member countries is yet to be fully tapped. Full realisation of female potential requires a supportive environment where underlying structural barriers to gender equality have been overcome, gender discrimination is outlawed, and such practices as forced and early marriage or female genital mutilation are ended. The level of violence against women and girls in the Commonwealth is a pressing issue to which we draw Heads' attention and request urgent collective action. Following the commitment made in the CHOGM 2011 Communiqué[1] and welcoming the recommendations arising from this year's 10th Commonwealth WAMM in Dhaka[2], we call on Heads of Government to develop a Plan of Action to end Early and Forced Marriage in the Commonwealth. Acknowledging the CHOGM 2013 theme 'Growth with equity; inclusive development' and recognising that women and girls are major drivers of development, we call on Heads of Government to create the conditions necessary for gender equality and women's socio-economic empowerment. *(see submissions from RCS and CYEC)*
- The current demographic profile of the Commonwealth, with over half of the population aged under 25 years of age, presents a one-time window of opportunity to reap a demographic dividend and achieve higher rates of economic growth. We ask governments to increase targeted investments in the education, health, employment and citizenship of our **Youth**. This will combat growing youth poverty and inequality and is a cost-effective means of realising significant economic, social, environmental and human rights improvements. We ask governments to recognise the transformational potential of young people as partners in sustainable, rights-based development by creating the enabling environment for greater youth participation and encouraging innovative mechanisms for youth consultation and leadership. At the Commonwealth level, the creation of forums like the Commonwealth Youth Council (CYC) and Commonwealth Students Association (CSA) are to be welcomed. The post-2015 Development Agenda is of crucial concern to youth. We ask Heads to have particular regard to inter-generational equity and to endorse the priorities young people have identified through their participation in the post 2015 agenda-setting and at the Commonwealth Youth Forum and CHOGM Youth Dialogue. *(see submission from CYEC)*

[1] Communique CHOGM 2011, pg. 10, 5.f
[2] Dhaka Communique 2013