

COMMONWEALTH YOUTH FORUM FINAL COMMUNIQUE

The Commonwealth of Nations has a responsibility to develop youth as one of its most valuable assets in the best interest of the Commonwealth and to ensure our future prosperity. In order for the Commonwealth to be relevant and accountable to the needs of its 1.2 billion youth, it is critical that youth directly participate in all levels of decision making and budget allocation, not only in policy and program design but also in implementation and evaluation.

In a time of great political, social, economic, technological and environmental challenges, we call for immediate action to rectify failures and build upon successes of the past.

- The Commonwealth and its Member States are expected to promote peace. Youth believe that the Commonwealth has the responsibility to act quickly and appropriately in the best interests of its citizens. This should be in accordance with the Commonwealth's guiding principles that relate to democracy, development, diversity, peace and human rights.
- Health is a fundamental right, imperative in accessing other human rights, and achieving economic development. Youth are concerned about the lack of progress in addressing health inequities, and believe that outcomes for vulnerable groups must be prioritised in a culturally appropriate manner. We call on the Commonwealth to increase investment in health, including health systems strengthening and addressing the social determinants of health.
- Commonwealth Member States should strengthen their commitment to investing in youth through a transparent mechanism, ensuring access to information communication technology, education and funding for skills and enterprise development.
- Youth call on the Commonwealth Member States to urgently prioritise environmental challenges, including climate change, and work together to evaluate, establish and implement policy frameworks and improve budgetary allocations to address these challenges. We request that within one year of the culmination of each Commonwealth Youth Forum a right of reply regarding the progress and input on each recommendation is provided by Commonwealth Heads of Government to the Commonwealth community. We will take responsibility for ensuring that recommendations from the Commonwealth Youth Forum are followed up by the Commonwealth and Member States and inform peers of progress made in regards to the recommendations emanating from the Commonwealth Youth Forum.

Core recommendations

We therefore recommend the following:

- That the Commonwealth Heads of Government support the establishment of an independent youth led governing body to oversee the administration of a youth development fund.

In addition to our above core recommendation, the following supporting recommendations should be pursued in a formal partnership between the Commonwealth Heads of Government and the youth of the Commonwealth with the intent of driving progress and building momentum. Our core recommendation initiative reflects a

desire for young people to be active participants in the call to action which can be achieved through initiating the above-mentioned governing body, as well as addressing and implementing the supporting recommendations below. This partnership is an acknowledgment of the shared responsibility between the Commonwealth Heads of Government, its Member States and the Commonwealth youth.

We ask Commonwealth governments to support the drafting of Guidelines for Governance for national youth structures, designed by young people across all Commonwealth nations within one year of the CYF 2011 Communiqué.

Supporting recommendations

Peace-building and conflict-management

- The youth call on the Commonwealth to design a Charter inclusive of the principles of good governance, rule of law and respect for human rights to which member states must be signatories. An independent body without any political affiliation and one which includes youth representation must ensure compliance of member states in upholding these principles. When in breach, the independent body should make recommendations that may include suspension of errant member states.
- The youth call on the Commonwealth to support their active participation in peace building initiatives at the local and Commonwealth levels, and enhance youth solidarity networks amongst member nations to strengthen and sustain national policies and initiatives that promote peace and uphold human rights.
- The youth call on the Commonwealth Nations to promote the use of arts and sports as non-formal tools for conflict prevention and transformation at the national and regional levels.

Health

- We call for the establishment of peer education programs on healthy sexual practices and improved access to contraception and sexual health services in all Commonwealth countries, recognizing the abhorrent state of sexual reproductive health in Commonwealth youth, in particular HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections. These peer education programmes should be implemented by the CYMM in 2012.
- Given the poor health outcomes experienced by women, children and minority groups affected by violence, Member States should increase investment in primary prevention and behavioural change initiatives, and strengthen access to services for victims. The Members of the Commonwealth who are yet to ratify and comply with mechanisms that support the rights of victims of violence, including the UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child should do so in an appropriate and genuine timeframe.
- Members of the Commonwealth should take leadership in the promotion of healthy lifestyles to increase positive mental and physical health. Member states should create a social policy environment that encourages positive behaviours such as physical activity, healthy diet, smoking cessation and moderation of alcohol consumption, but not at the expense of support services for differently abled youth and those with existing chronic illnesses. We suggest that Member States consider taxation to curb harmful behaviours where these are not in place.
- Youth of the Commonwealth call upon Member States to create structural mechanisms for dialogue on impacts of climate change on global health, between government departments responsible for health,

environmental and economic sustainability. Recognition of both the health impacts of climate change, and the health co-benefits of mitigation should be considered in international negotiation and risk-benefit analyses, including at the Rio+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development and beyond.

Youth enterprise, ICT, Sustainable livelihoods & economy

- Youth owned enterprises will be encouraged and supported by the proposed youth development fund, business development tools, resource centres and the provision of tax incentives to ensure greater economic sustainability.
- The time has come to recognize access to information and communication through technology as fundamental to human development. We call upon governments and civil society of the Commonwealth to commit to set a time-frame to provide a minimum level of access to Information Communication Technology for all citizens.
- We call for a pan-Commonwealth youth enterprise scheme which must include civic education and financial literacy as key outcomes. Youth must lead and drive the establishment of this Programme and develop measurable outcomes that have set time-frames in partnership with relevant stakeholders.

Environmental sustainability

- The youth of the Commonwealth recognise the urgent need to address climate change and therefore call upon the Commonwealth Heads of Government to strengthen efforts to mitigate climate change and support research for appropriate adaptation measures with a priority focus on the most vulnerable Member States.
- We call upon Commonwealth Heads of Government to fully engage youth in the decision making processes on environmental issues through the Commonwealth Youth Climate Network and support their active representation in the Commonwealth Consultation Meetings on Environment and all international negotiation processes.
- That Commonwealth Member States should ensure that regional and international policies and agreements promote cross-cutting environmental policies at the national level. Further, we call upon our Member States to establish a climate change and environmental assessment taskforce through the Commonwealth Consultation Meetings on Environment to evaluate and monitor environmental sustainability policies in Member States.

Youth Impact and Participation in Decision-making

- We recommend that Commonwealth Member States support the drafting of Guidelines for Governance, designed by youth, in consultation with civil society, to assist in the establishment, continued development and review of national youth structures across all Commonwealth nations within one year of the CYF 2011 Communiqué. This is to ensure that the structures remain relevant and accountable to the youth of their respective Member States.
- We recommend that the Commonwealth governments provide support to their national youth structures, including funding, technical and administrative support and partnership opportunities, at the discretion of national youth structures.