International Women’s Day Centenary Celebration

8 March 2011

Women as Change Agents for Development and Democracy

Concept Note

Background

The Commonwealth celebrates International Women’s Day (IWD, as acknowledged by the United Nations) on 8th March. This year will be an important occasion as it marks 100 years since the day was honored for the first time following Clara Zetkin’s proposal for an International Women’s Day at the second International Conference of Working Women held in Copenhagen in 1910.

A great deal has changed since one million women and men attended rallies in March 1911 to campaign for women’s rights to work, vote and hold public office. The early years of the twentieth century were times of great turbulence and great unrest among women who had limited rights in relation to work, politics, marriage, inheritance, ownership of land and property.

IWD commemorations globally are about respect and appreciation for women's economic, political and social achievements - the progress made by women in their struggles for democracy, development and peace. Commemorations also focus on what remains to be done to ensure there is equality for all.
Commonwealth Day Theme 2011

The centenary celebration of IWD resonates with the Commonwealth Day Theme 2011 -- *Women as Agents for Change*. The Commonwealth believes that empowering women to be key change agents is the most critical element to achieving the end of hunger and poverty, the first mandate of the Millennium Development Goals. The Secretariat, through its programmes aims to support women and enhance their capacity to bring about socio-economic and political change.

The Commonwealth, with its shared histories, including common values of democracy and development, is guided by the recognition that democracy and development are interdependent. The Commonwealth’s commitment to gender equality is enshrined in the Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality 2005-2015 (PoA) which member governments adopted in 2005. The PoA provides the framework within which all our countries contribute to advancing gender equality, building on past achievements, addressing challenges and responding to global changes especially in a post crisis world.

The PoA sets out four critical areas for Commonwealth action:

1. Gender, Democracy, Peace and Conflict
2. Gender, Human Rights and Law
3. Gender, Poverty Eradication and Economic Empowerment
4. Gender and HIV/ AIDS

Given the Secretariat’s achievements towards strengthening gender equity in democracy and development processes, this concept note outlines the Secretariat’s proposed plan to convene an interactive panel on Women as Change Agents for Development and Democracy to commemorate the centenary IWD.
Centenary IWD Event

The Gender Section, Social Transformation Programmes Division (STPD) of the Secretariat will be convening an interactive panel to commemorate the Centenary International Women’s Day on 8 March 2011 focusing on the theme: **Women as Change Agents for Development and Democracy.**