

Secretary-General's message, Commonwealth Day 2011

11 March 2011

A message from Commonwealth Secretary-General Kamalesh Sharma

The Commonwealth theme for 2011 is 'Women as Agents of Change'.

Commonwealth Day is celebrated on the second Monday in March, a day when every school in the Commonwealth is open, and a day on which we hope soon that every child in the Commonwealth, across continents and oceans, will have the opportunity to be in school.

Most schoolchildren know their fractions, and a simple one is this: one-half of the world's population may be made up of women and girls; yet women and girls bear two-thirds of the world's problems.

Two-thirds of those out of school worldwide are girls; and two-thirds of those who are illiterate, or out of work, or living with HIV/AIDS, are women.

Girls should have the chance to grow up and become healthy, educated women who can make a positive difference to their own lives and to the lives of others.

Women are the barometers of society: they are an indication of its internal pressure levels, and their fortunes can be the clearest forecasts of good or bad things to come.

Where women prosper, societies prosper; and where women suffer, so too do the societies in which they live.

By investing in women and girls, we have seen that we can accelerate social, economic and political progress.

The evidence is clear.

The Commonwealth has given practical help to women in entrepreneurship; it has supported the role of women in peace-keeping, and in local and national politics; and it has argued the case for empowering women – from putting young girls through school, to ensuring that women have access to trained midwives.

We have pioneered amongst our member governments a gender consideration to every aspect of national life, and hence a need for policies and funds to match.

Women are the people who can bring about real and lasting transformation at every level in society. Unlocking this limitless but locked potential is the first challenge before the human community. It can open the doors of opportunity for all in the Commonwealth and the wider world.