



## **INDEPENDENT FORUM OF COMMONWEALTH ORGANISATIONS**

### **STATEMENT ON GLOBAL RELATIONSHIPS AND DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE**

The Independent Forum of Commonwealth Organisations expresses concern about the threats to global solidarity and to the framework of the global rules-based order (which has been designed as a protective framework for ordinary people), as well as the cuts and reductions in development assistance by certain countries and the apparent reshaping of international relationships and global alliances. In light of this, IFCO notes that:

- international aid is an investment, not a cost. Cutting it will lead to a more unequal and unstable world — resulting in higher costs for governments and greater expense in the long run,
- cuts and reductions in development assistance are expected to further hinder progress on health, human rights, climate, biodiversity and development goals, which are already falling short of expectations. This includes:
  - ❖ the lack of progress toward the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, which is already evident and will contribute to worsening global instability and conflict,
  - ❖ increasing global inequality and poverty,
  - ❖ continued global warming and a failure to achieve agreed climate goals,
  - ❖ collective failure to deliver 'health for all' and wellbeing for the global population,
  - ❖ continued threats to human rights and rule of law, including attacks on freedom of expression, assembly and association, and the harassment, intimidation and killing of human rights defenders, and those from vulnerable and marginalised communities,
  - ❖ shrinking space for organised and informal civil society activities in many jurisdictions.

Commonwealth Organisations and outreach networks already note the following repercussions on our communities:

- lives put at risk when life-saving medications, medical procedures, and essential research have been withdrawn without time to put alternative arrangements in place,
- increased violation of human rights and security of human rights defenders most at risk,
- serious impact on children, women, older people, people with disabilities, LGBTI+ communities, indigenous peoples and others in vulnerable and marginalised communities, whose lifelines and safety are already compromised,
- breakdown of rule of law and democracy programmes,
- immediate cessation of programmes and the consequential closure of organisations and agencies, dispersal and unemployment of staff, and loss of infrastructure built up over decades, which will be costly and probably impossible to replace,
- leading to significant hardship for the people who benefit from those programmes.



Acknowledging the importance of the principles and aspirations set out in the Commonwealth Charter, and recognising the value and positive impact that development assistance has brought to the peoples of Commonwealth countries as an investment in their futures, the Independent Forum of Commonwealth Organisations calls on:

- governments to urgently restore life-saving medical and humanitarian assistance, to enable governments and organisations to adapt, and people to survive,
- governments to urgently exclude aid from budget-cutting measures and continue supporting struggling organisations and communities in their work,
- governments to continue to support the strengthening of governance institutions in line with SDG commitments to the rule of law,
- each Commonwealth member state to evaluate the impact of the reduction in aid and to prioritise support to those in need of immediate intervention to save lives and prevent harm,
- the Commonwealth Secretary General and Secretariat to work with the United Nations, inter-governmental and international institutions (such as WHO, UNESCO, UNICEF, and others), Commonwealth member states, and other relevant agencies to facilitate the collection of data and other information to identify the short-, medium- and long-term impact of the reduction of aid on individuals, groups, communities and countries,
- the Commonwealth Secretariat to convene member states to create relevant mechanisms to deliver development assistance for the future, including working together with the International Financial Institutions, WTO and other multilateral organisations to enable developing countries to meet the needs of their peoples,
- Commonwealth member states to support each other in responding to the immediate crisis, including the provision of short-term assistance,
- the Commonwealth Foundation and Commonwealth civil society to use their resources and networks to support the Commonwealth response, recognising the opportunities for developing alternative, long-term and sustainable service delivery arrangements to meet the needs of individuals, groups, communities and countries.

The current situation underscores the urgent need to build capacity in affected and impacted countries to mitigate these risks. Co-creation of solutions, involving accredited organisations, is key, ensuring that responses are locally relevant and sustainable. This moment presents an opportunity for the Commonwealth to take a leading role in fostering sustainable development with a focused and strategic approach, ensuring resilience against future disruptions. The Independent Forum of Commonwealth Organisations welcomes the invitation to an urgent meeting with the Secretary General and senior staff, and offers support, assistance and network outreach in order to:

- support efforts to map the impact of these developments and the implications for peoples of the Commonwealth, and
- develop strategies for replacing suspended/terminated services and programmes to sustain global developmental progress.

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For further information please contact: IFCO <https://www.ifco.online/contact-us>