



Speech by the Chairman of the Standing Committee on Commonwealth Forestry

A speech by

Mr Tim Rollinson

Opening of the 17th Commonwealth Forestry Conference
“Forestry’s Contribution for Poverty Reduction”
28 February – 5 March 2005, Colombo, Sri Lanka

Welcome

Hon. Prime Minister, Hon. Minister of Environment and Natural Resources, Hon. Deputy Minister of Environment and Natural Resources, Professor Jeff Burley, Chairman of the Commonwealth Forestry Association, Your Excellencies, High Commissioners for the Commonwealth countries, Mr Leelaratne, Secretary, Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources, Mr Fernando, Conservator General of Forests, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen.

We are most honoured this morning by the presence of the Prime Minister of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka to open this, the 17th Commonwealth Forestry Conference.

Prime Minister, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Commonwealth Forestry, I express our appreciation for the warm welcome we have all received from the Government and people of Sri Lanka.

I have two duties this morning. The first is to deliver a message from the Commonwealth Secretary-General, His Excellency the Right Honourable Don McKinnon who unfortunately cannot be here today. The second, in my role as Chairman of the Standing Committee on Commonwealth Forestry, is to set out our hopes for this Conference and the future.

I will now deliver the message from the Commonwealth Secretary-General.

[Message Delivered]

On behalf of the Standing Committee and all the delegates attending this important Conference, I would like to add our sympathy to the people of Sri Lanka who have suffered as a result of the Tsunami that caused so much destruction. Despite this, our hosts have been working hard to ensure that the Conference can go ahead as originally planned. I know that you will all enjoy the warmth and hospitality of Sri Lanka.

The 17th Conference

This, the 17th Commonwealth Forestry Conference, is the first to be held in Sri Lanka. Delegates from countries across the Commonwealth and from international organisations are continuing a tradition that began in London over 80 years ago. The original aim of the Conference was to bring together foresters from Commonwealth Forest Services to exchange knowledge, ideas and experience. The Conferences are still a valuable forum for foresters to maintain contact and share ideas, and I know that this one will be no exception.

The theme of the Conference, *Forestry's Contribution for Poverty Reduction*, could not be more topical – or important. There are 4 themes:

- The changing world – and the challenge of poverty reduction
- Governance – for optimising forestry's contribution to poverty reduction
- Forestry goods and services – securing what is needed for poverty reduction
- Stakeholders – developing vision and working together for poverty reduction.

There will be opportunities for a wide variety of contributions, invited and voluntary, formal and informal, to capture a range of experiences and perspectives from around the Commonwealth, and to stimulate debate.

The Standing Committee and the organisers have arranged a series of Group Sessions where participants will discuss a number of case studies. I believe this focus and discussion of practical forestry issues and ways forward is very important. We need to make clear links between those responsible for policy at the national and international level and those who practice at the field level and are responsible for implementing what we agree needs to be done. The flow of information both ways from policy makers to practitioners is vital if we are to make real progress on the sustainable management of our forests. This move - from policy dialogue to action and implementation on the ground - is now a strong theme of the current international debate on forests.

The International Context

As the Secretary-General said in his message, forests are a huge resource in many Commonwealth countries, and can play an important part in reducing poverty. All of us involved in forestry know that we cannot deal with trees without dealing with people. The social and economic uses of forests are essential for their conservation in so many parts of the world. The Commonwealth has a vast range of experiences and, therefore, a huge amount to offer to the international forestry community.

Since 2003 the United Kingdom has been working with a wide range of partners on the issue of Forest Landscape Restoration. The partners, which include governments, organisations, communities and individuals, all recognise the valuable contribution that restoration of our forest resources can make to enhancing peoples' livelihoods. Through a variety of activities they have been promoting action at local, national, regional and global levels. The next key event will be a global workshop in Brazil at the beginning of April where we will draw together the key lessons learnt and facilitate the exchange of information and experience between policy makers and practitioners I spoke about earlier.

In May this year, countries from around the world will be meeting at the 5th Session of the United Nations Forum on Forests in New York to discuss the future international arrangements on forests. In September last year and in January this year, I was pleased to be invited to co-chair international meetings to explore the options for a future international arrangement. While there are differences of view about whether a future arrangement should be legally binding or not, there is a very strong view that the current arrangement needs to be strengthened. Commonwealth nations have made a substantial contribution to these discussions and I have been encouraged by how those present from Forest Services have been willing to take part in an open exchange of views, bringing their undoubted experience to the debate.

Concluding Remarks

Prime Minister, Ministers, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen, there is no doubt that, for the forest sector, the eradication of poverty is one of our biggest challenges. Eradication of poverty and hunger is at the heart of the Millennium Development Goals and we need to examine the ways in which forests can contribute – to explore Forestry’s Contribution for Poverty Reduction. That is our task for this week.

The deliberations and discussions that will take place here in Colombo, can make an important and real contribution to the improvement of people’s livelihoods and to the sustainable management, conservation and development of the world’s forests.

I am confident that the Commonwealth is well placed to make an important contribution to developing our understanding – by sharing and building on the lessons we have learned, creating awareness, exchanging experiences and disseminating information. Networking is an excellent way of extending hard-won practical knowledge - and this is a Commonwealth strength.

We will be preparing a report of the Conference with clearly targeted recommendations to convey to the wider forestry community.

Thanks

I would like to finish by conveying thanks to our hosts.

These Conferences require a huge deal of planning, effort and resources by the host country, before, during and after the event. Despite the tragic events of recent months, the Government of Sri Lanka, the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources and staff of the Forest Service have worked tirelessly to ensure the success of this Conference. I know you will all wish to join me in thanking them.

There are many sponsors of the Conference and I want to thank them all, especially those who have provided assistance for a number of delegates to attend from developing countries.

These gatherings of the forestry community from across the Commonwealth are special. Like you, I am looking forward to an interesting week, to sharing our experiences with you, and to learning from your experiences. May I wish you all a successful, memorable and enjoyable Conference.

Thank You.