Commonwealth Workshop on

ACCOUNTABILITY, SCRUTINY AND OVERSIGHT

Canberra, 23-25 May 2001

Report, Agenda and List of Participants
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Report

Introduction

Opening Session

The participants were welcomed by the Director of the Political Affairs Division of the Commonwealth Secretariat, Mr Jon Sheppard, and the Director of the Centre for Democratic Institutions, Mr Roland Rich.

Mr Sheppard introduced the theme of the workshop, its aim of promoting best practice concerning accountability, scrutiny and oversight, and the Commonwealth’s work to promote democracy. He pointed out the objective must be to ensure democracy is not thought of as a matter only of ballot boxes on election day, but above all the health of the democratic culture. As the Commonwealth Secretary-General had put it “the task for Commonwealth countries now is to take on board the substance of democracy, not merely the adoption of democratic forms.”

Mr Rich then spoke on the work of the Centre for Democratic Institutions and its particular interest in the Pacific region, home to so many small Commonwealth island states.

The Centre works primarily with Parliaments and Judiciaries in the region with the aim of strengthening those institutions of democracy and thus improving governance practices. The Centre also works with civil society and the media. Accountability and Human Rights are overarching themes that permeate all aspects of the work of the Centre.
Session One
A Culture of Integrity

The discussion opened with participants stressing the importance of a supportive social environment: it was argued that integrity among public officials works best when there is a wider culture of integrity which values integrity in personal as well as community life.

Some of the main components of integrity in public life were outlined:

- Official decision-making and public conduct must be free from undue personal interests
- Public decision-making must show no evidence of partiality or favouritism, and
- Officials must respect the public trust inherent in their office.

All agreed that a culture of integrity is one that builds on these qualities in public life. The absence of integrity opens up the possibility of corruption and allows self-interest, favouritism and inappropriate personal interests to dominate.

Participants emphasised that governments should support a culture of integrity and that political leaders have a responsibility to do all that they can to nurture a culture of integrity. But it is not feasible nor altogether desirable to expect that governments take sole or even primary responsibility for cultivating the appropriate social culture. This task more properly rests with the institutions of civil society, such as the family, schools, the professions, the churches, and the media. A democratic civil society is in part defined by its commitment to cultivating integrity as a primary civic virtue. There was consensus that the office of citizen is fundamental to democratic governance and it is here that the framework of integrity needs to be anchored. Just as political leaders have a responsibility to model and promote the value of integrity in public life, so too citizens can play their part by committing themselves to integrity at a personal level.

The focus of the discussion then moved on to consider some of the challenges facing societies attempting to promote a culture of integrity:

The problem of size: speakers pointed out that strategies that are feasible for smaller nations are not necessarily feasible for larger, wealthier nations. It is unrealistic to expect all national governments to be able to control and shape the affairs of provinces and localities. Decentralisation and devolution might be appropriate prerequisites in order to allow those officials closer to community affairs to take greater responsibility for monitoring and improving frameworks of integrity. Several participants noted that very small states can find it problematic to reform local traditions that are inconsistent with the degree of impartiality required by democratic integrity.

The problem of patronage: patronage can be seen as an aspect of corruption, and it takes considerable political leadership to turn patterns of patronage in the direction of a culture of integrity. Small problems like the management of gifts can escalate into larger problems relating to the purchase of office and influence, unless there is a social recognition that public officials hold offices of public trust designed to promote the wider interests of the community and not the narrow interests of particular individuals or groups.

The problem of secrecy: speakers stressed that democratic government involves a balance between the values of efficiency and equity. That balance works best where
transparency is in place, requiring public officials to conduct public business as
openly and honestly as possible. It was noted that a preference for efficiency can
lead to a culture of secrecy within government. Integrity is promoted through
transparency, even where this leads to some loss in efficiency. The greater risk is
that of policy incoherence if too many checks are placed on the flow of government
decision-making. But this risk can be managed where central policy co-ordination is
placed in institutions that themselves value integrity and transparency. There was
agreement that checks and balances are important requirements of a culture of
integrity in public decision-making.

The problem of party: although there was consensus that political parties are
essential for democratic self-government, participants noted that loyalty to party can
get in the way of commitments to public integrity. Political parties are an important
part of the democratic system but party representatives must understand that public
offices are part of a larger system of public trust. Office holders have a conditional
right to exercise their powers of office, so long as they comply with the public
obligations attached to their offices, accept their public accountabilities and use their
offices primarily to promote the public interests before party interests.

The problem of media control: some participants felt that there are dangers for
democracy where media interests have too great a control over public information
about government. Media concentration is a pressing problem. It was emphasized
that a free press has long been appreciated as a fundamental prerequisite of a free
government, and a plurality of media outlets is important in maintaining the freedom
of comment found in a free press. A culture of integrity is compromised when citizens
find it difficult to check and verify government performance because of media
concentration. Checks and balances are just as important in the structure of business
and civil society as they are in the structure of government.

The problem of codes: there was some debate as to whether codes of conduct and
professional ethics are suitable to improved government. ‘You can’t legislate for
honesty’ is a common and understandable saying. Some participants thought that
there is a danger that, due to their proliferation, codes of conduct can take on a
largely symbolic value. Public conduct draws on the strength of character of
individuals, and codes of conduct are at best adjuncts to the cultivation of character.
Personal integrity develops in many institutions of civil society: the family, school,
churches, professions and related networks. Codes work best as public statements
of the standards expected of individuals in their professional capacity. Codes of
conduct and mission statements can reinforce a sense of public responsibility among
decision-makers but it is unrealistic to think that codes alone can instil integrity.

The problem of cultural reform: participants drew attention to the fact that the
promotion of a culture of integrity can be held back by the belief that traditional
cultures are too entrenched and resistant to reform. But they felt that useful change
does not have to entail a total change of social cultures. Incremental change is good,
particularly if the process of change builds steady momentum. Therefore, at times the
way forward for cultural change is by moderating our expectations of reform and by
striving for improvement rather than perfection. A culture of continuous improvement
is consistent with a culture of integrity. Two important components of cultural change
are popular ‘buy in’ and leadership ‘sign on’: citizens must be part of the change
process and leaders must be prepared to commit themselves and their governments
to the process of change.

The problem of accountability overload: agencies of accountability also have their
own accountabilities. It is possible for accountability agencies to take on too much or
to overreach their responsibilities e.g. in striving to micro-manage other public agencies. It is only fair to ask: who controls the controllers? Accountability and oversight should not be conducted simply for their own sake: they are key safeguards against defective practices of government and should promote a greater sense of responsibility among decision-makers.
Session Two
Parliamentary Checks on the Executive

This session focused on the various ways in which the legislature can most effectively exercise scrutiny over the acts of the Executive. One theme that ran through the discussion was the importance of public awareness of the need for and support of an active and questioning legislature.

Participants noted that parliamentary question time is particularly important, as MPs can direct targeted questions to the executive. Although it was felt that often question time was more about drama and rhetoric than the provision of the information requested, parliamentarians should not forget their obligations to question the acts of the executive. There should be a strong presumption in favour of executive disclosure and freedom of information. It was felt that especially because it was often difficult to attribute specific responsibility for executive decisions, there had to be a reinforcement of the ideal that the legislature has a right to know.

The discussion moved on to an examination of the central role that parliamentary committees have to play in exercising effective scrutiny. The importance of bodies such as a Public Accounts Committee and an Estimates Committee in inspecting and questioning the details of government spending was stressed by several participants. Civil society input into the formation and ambit of committees, and the fostering of a more inclusive approach to scrutiny were suggested as ways in which the legislature could function more effectively as a check on government. There was consensus that parliamentary select committees are a powerful method of ensuring accountability by the executive. Participants agreed that committees need to have wide powers in calling for evidence - whether from public officials or semi-autonomous agencies.

It was felt that there was little public awareness of the crucial scrutiny role played by parliamentary committees. Participants believed that one of the main issues facing the legislature is how to re-engage the electorate, especially young people who often know very little of the workings of the legislature and its crucial role in acting as a check on executive power. It was suggested that more creative use of technology and the multi-media tools available is one way in which the role of the legislature can be illustrated more directly to the people.

Participants also discussed the useful role that can be played by an upper house with wide scrutiny powers, including perhaps broad powers of regulation and impeachment. However, some speakers also thought that a unicameral system where parties were elected through proportional representation is an effective method of ensuring a more representative legislature where the executive did not exercise undue dominance. The view was expressed that this system works well in pluralistic societies where minority groups that would otherwise be excluded from the political process can participate in scrutiny and decision-making, thereby strengthening the effectiveness and credibility as a representative institution of parliament.

Speakers drew attention to particular factors that hampered a thorough exercise of the scrutiny role of legislatures. It was felt that too often, political loyalties are paramount, polarising the legislature and making it difficult for parliamentarians to act on their own views. The party whip system often means that parliamentarians are pressured to act along party lines. The frequent lack of sufficient resources available to MPs was mentioned. In some cases, exigencies of finance means that backbenchers are virtually part-time members of parliament, so that they are not able
to devote sufficient time to playing a role on committees or otherwise investigating executive actions. It was stressed that in such a situation it is even more important for MPs to be conscious of their scrutiny role, and to exercise it vigilantly. The view was also expressed that especially in very large federal states, the public can feel distanced from the state and federal legislature. One answer might be to devolve to the local community level some decision-making powers relating to, for instance, service provision. Locally elected bodies could then exercise effective scrutiny over the matters that affected the community most closely.

It was noted that the Westminster system of government, that has been adopted by many Commonwealth countries, tends to lead towards excessive dominance by the executive, and that in this situation, parliamentarians needed to exercise vigilance. Participants expressed the view that parliamentarians should resist the tendency to avoid scrutiny of government simply because they were members of the ruling party. The increasing role in some Commonwealth countries of special advisors who report solely to the Executive was also criticised. It was argued that such advisors should be made more directly accountable to parliament. There was agreement that parliamentarians of all parties should be conscious that their primary duty lay to the electorate and should therefore carry out their scrutiny role with vigour and commitment.
Session Three
Public Officials as Guardians

Complex modern government requires a range of public officials to undertake specialised oversight roles. Session Three focused particular attention on the institutions of ombudsman and auditor while noting that the lessons would also broadly apply to other public oversight bodies such as human rights commissions, consumer protection commissions, inspectors-general, ethics commissioners, anti-corruption commissions, etc.

Independence
The key requirement, participants agreed, is that these oversight bodies be independent and be seen to be independent. The ultimate success of oversight bodies depends on public support for these institutions. The experience of most Commonwealth countries is of vigorous resort to official complaints-receiving bodies by the public. Even where an oversight body has limited powers, the number of complaints received remains high.

There was a discussion on the various ways in which public officials administering oversight bodies can have their independence enhanced. Some countries established these offices under the Constitution so that they are not subject to having powers withdrawn by legislation. The appointment process was seen as another crucial aspect. Appointment by the Parliament as a whole is one common method. Appointment by the Executive in consultation with the Opposition is another, though this had difficulties associated with it. Long fixed terms of appointment is a method used in some countries. Some countries allow reappointment while others consider that public officials might become less independent as the time of their reappointment nears. The issue of dismissal of public officials is also critical. Security of tenure is important and dismissal should only be for just cause and ideally undertaken only by the parliament itself. Some Commonwealth countries pay Auditors high salaries as another means of achieving independence and competence.

The involvement of parliament in the process is seen as vital. Parliament should be involved in the appointment process, in receiving reports and in defending the integrity of the oversight institution. This also provided part of the answer to the question of who watches the watchdogs.

Powers
The discussion then turned to the powers of oversight bodies. Some offices of ombudsman have been accused of being an ombudsmouse because their findings were only recommendatory. Other oversight bodies had stronger powers to compel testimony and discover documents.

One key to the success of oversight bodies is the support they receive from the country’s leadership. If recommendations are routinely ignored by the Executive, then the effectiveness of an oversight body is diminished. Leaders must a positive example.

Participants noted that one of the greatest weapons at the disposal of such bodies is the power of embarrassment by releasing public reports and having the Executive subjected to criticism in the media or by civil society. One specific issue is whether oversight bodies should have prosecutorial powers. Certain ombudsmen had such powers and thus had an enhanced role.
Speakers stressed the importance of effective freedom of information provisions that enable the public to gain access to information about executive decisions as well as personal information. It was considered important that the culture of secrecy that often surrounds the workings of government be broken, and the Executive encouraged to become more publicly accountable. While implementing access to information legislation can initially be costly, participants pointed out that in their experience, it ultimately encourages the bureaucracy to act more efficiently, cuts administration costs and perhaps most importantly, empowers communities. Public oversight officials could contribute to this process by making their reports freely and widely available.

**Best Practice**

There was general agreement that countries should try to learn from others’ experience. Each country should be open to examples of best practice and should examine the appropriateness of following such examples. In this regard it is important to note the great differences in size, population and economic development among the Commonwealth countries. Participants noted that many small countries are unable to afford the plethora of oversight institutions found in larger, more developed states. The key is to focus on the establishment of essential institutions such as the auditor-general and ombudsman.

Whereas many developed countries focus on performance audit, smaller developing countries have no option but to direct limited resources to financial audits and, even so, many cannot cope. One suggested solution is to contract out financial audits to private sector firms. Another is to undertake five-year reviews of performance while concentrating annual audits on financial aspects.

The discussion concluded by looking at the process of policy transfer. Participants thought that the key is to find appropriate precedents that meet the needs and the capacities of the country. These can often be found in successful regional examples that can be adapted to fit the specific needs of a country.
Session Four
Widening the Sphere of Accountability: ‘Distributed Governance’

The importance of the concepts of inclusivity and openness ran throughout this discussion. Participants stressed the importance of the role of citizens as watchdog against government excess or impropriety and the media, which enables public concerns to be voiced.

Speakers stressed that a free and responsible media is the foundation for an active and engaged citizenry. It was noted that government and civil society both use the media to promote their points of view, and the media bears a heavy responsibility in relation to scrutiny and oversight of executive government. Moreover, in plural societies, where ethnic divisions can and have led to violence, the media have to ensure balanced reporting. Participants also referred to the particular issues faced by small states in relation to a free media. Their relative isolation; lack of a developed infrastructure, which hampered newspaper distribution and television broadcasts; and the impracticality of having numerous sources of news means that the media in such countries is sometimes accused of misreporting. In the face of such difficulties, citizens are turning to non-governmental organisations for their information.

It was suggested that media ownership is a powerful tool for influencing government decision-making and forming public opinion. However, the alternative point was also made that the media is an observer of the community, market and state and consequently a mirror of it. The need to maintain readership and viewers militates against the adoption of a stance that fails to reflect the views of wider society. The maintenance of credibility is fundamental to a flourishing media. Freedom of information legislation was again emphasised by all as the basis for transparent government.

There needs to be effective interaction between public oversight institutions and civil society. Government plays three main roles in relation to the electorate: as facilitator of law and security; promoter of the public good; and provider of essential services. In all these areas, participants underlined the need for greater transparency and communication with the people.

Civil society can also take a more active role in parliamentary processes- for instance by establishing permanent consultative citizens fora within parliament that would report back to constituents about matters of interest to the community, or by including civil society representatives on parliamentary oversight committees. This would help to develop community confidence in the legislative process. Parliament might also be made physically more accessible to people, perhaps by holding public seminars and other activities within it.

The discussion then centred on the question of a definition of civil society. Speakers argued for an inclusive definition - bringing in business, civic groups, the media, academics and non-governmental organisations. It was noted that business is a key element of civil society, although the pursuit of economic interest by business can sometimes constrain democracy.

A problem mentioned by many participants was the increasing disillusionment of citizens with government. Speakers believed that the answer to this lies in civic education about people’s rights and responsibilities as voters and citizens. It was felt that in recent times, traditional pillars of society such as religious institutions, family
and schools have waned in influence among young people. Community networks are perceived as breaking down.

Participants agreed that in some countries an adversarial relationship between government and the non-governmental sector has developed. This needs to be broken down, and government suspicion of non-governmental organisations need to be allayed.

Speakers suggested that using information technology to communicate directly with communities was a way of bringing the workings of government closer to the individual. Several participants agreed that an important first step would be to make policy documents (such as the annual budget) more understandable to the average citizen. Reports on government performance should be produced in a manner that people can understand. The use of plain language and the setting out of clear objectives would do a great deal to encourage citizen interaction with government. This would enable careful and independent scrutiny by civil society of the targets government has set itself.

In a participative democracy it is also important to obtain the electorate’s responses to government’s stated policies, and incorporate those suggestions. Participants noted that politicians should aim to communicate with the vast numbers of people who do not belong to particular interest groups, and to obtain their views on how they feel they are being governed. Participants suggested that government often underestimated the capacity and interest of the electorate in government policy. Government needs to be de-mystified. The fundamental importance of striving for a participative democracy was stressed by numerous speakers.

Participants pointed to the revolutionary impact of information systems such as email. The growth of this medium of communication has helped non-governmental organisations across the Commonwealth communicate with each other and publicise their views.

The rise of civil society as a powerful force for accountability is a development that government is learning to deal with. Non-governmental organisations and the media possess the ability to influence government to raise the standards of accountability. Speakers noted that with the exponential growth of pressure groups and lobbying efforts, government needs to decide how to strike an appropriate balance between rival interests. Government and civil society working together in collective effort towards a common goal was stressed as the basis for a successful society. One of the fundamental points that emerged from this discussion was that it is impossible to have participative democracy without the involvement of wider civil society. Through the growth of civil society, citizens are becoming proactive in their actions rather than merely reacting to government, and in this way, government is learning to respond to the voice of the electorate.
Taking it from here: Conclusions and Proposals

The participants split into three groups to discuss practical proposals for strengthening accountability, oversight and scrutiny powers of parliament, public officials and civil society. Group One dealt with Parliamentary Processes; Group Two looked at Oversight Institutions and Group Three examined the concept of Distributed Governance. The Groups then presented their conclusions to the main session.

Proposals by Group One: Parliamentary Processes
It was agreed that the effectiveness of scrutiny processes depends on the commitment of the elected representatives responsible for working these processes; their personal qualities, integrity and motivation underpin the success of parliamentary institutions.

Proposals:
- The need for increased public awareness of parliamentary institutions: more education is required; parliaments are essential community institutions;
- Strengthening parliamentary committees: they must be freely chosen, include adequate representation of non-government parties and groupings, and must be properly resourced. Adequate parliamentary time must be given for the discussion of committee reports, and government must undertake to respond to reports within a set time period;
- Enhancing parliamentary question time: ministers must be committed to providing open and honest answers to questions about their official responsibilities;
- Protecting the independence of oversight agencies: parliament must provide oversight agencies with adequate budgets, there must be an impartial appointment process and a parliamentary forum for public debate regarding the role and performance of these agencies. Participants also felt that there is a need for regular parliamentary debate over the reports of external regulators (such as the Ombudsman and other accountability agencies). The public expects that parliaments will monitor the performance of the core accountability agencies and provide a supportive framework for their operations. Heads of accountability agencies should be able to turn to parliaments for assistance and guidance on their priorities and performance. Parliamentary committees have the potential to serve as public fora where community representatives can come together with elected representatives and accountability officers to deliberate over common concerns.

Proposals by Group Two: Public Officials and Oversight Institutions
The group emphasised the importance of three characteristics: integrity, impartiality and independence.

Creating the Right Conditions:

The Group expressed the view that there should be effective ‘Right to Information’ legislation, with only limited exceptions (e.g. national security). Courts should have jurisdiction to rule on whether a document relates to security. The onus of proving a document is a security document should rest with the State. The oversight institution or office of the public official should be entrenched in the Constitution of the State and public officials should be impartially appointed- ideally by a two thirds vote of
parliament. Public officials should have security of tenure - removal should be on the same grounds as and via the same process undertaken to remove a member of the judiciary. There should be guaranteed adequate funding and resources

**Powers and Jurisdiction**

The group thought that public officials could also be given jurisdiction over private institutions providing public services. Oversight Institutions should not have prosecution powers. The Department of Prosecutions and the judiciary should enforce those recommendations of the Public Officer and Oversight Institutions which are not implemented by the decision makers.

**Best Practice:** Procedures should be set out in clear language and be clearly available to the public. Reports should be placed on the public record and be well-publicised: and citizens should be informed about their right to make a complaint to a public official and how to do so.

**Proposals by Group Three: Distributed Governance**

Civil society organisations are often at a disadvantage when dealing with parliaments and governments because so many core public institutions are not user-friendly. Community participation in public decision-making should be broadened e.g. Parliament could set time aside during certain events, such as the annual budget, to generate greater community participation. There should be greater transparency within civil society organisations - organisations can present their policy and priorities to a wider public audience through regular reports. Governments and civil society organizations should consult regularly on areas of mutual interest: governments should recognise the rights of citizens to participate in government at all levels, including the highest levels of international meetings of the Commonwealth. A ‘People’s Forum’ could be established which could meet with Commonwealth Heads of Government to present their views. The media has a particular responsibility to publish fair and independent reporting about Commonwealth processes and decision-making. Members of the Group said that the media access to government information is the cornerstone of this system of public information. The media can exercise its leadership by engaging in independent audits of the state of freedom of information regimes across the Commonwealth.

**Summing Up**

In closing, Mr Sheppard and Mr Rich thanked the participants for their contributions and expressed the hope that the report of the workshop would receive the widest possible circulation. Mr Sheppard reiterated his remarks from the opening session regarding the importance of Commonwealth countries adopting the substance of democracy, not merely its forms. He believed that the workshop had made a valuable contribution to the Commonwealth’s work to promote democracy and pledged that the Commonwealth would continue to work actively in this area. There would be two more workshops in the *Deepening Democracy* series - on Money and Democratic Politics and Voter Registration and Electoral Systems. Mr Rich added that the workshop papers would be available on the CDI website.
AGENDA

WEDNESDAY 23 MAY

Opening Session 0930-1000
Jon Sheppard Director Political Affairs Division Commonwealth Secretariat
Roland Rich Director Centre for Democratic Institutions

Session One 1030-1300
‘A Culture of Integrity’: Defining the Issues
Introduced by John Uhr
Chairperson: Jon Sheppard

Session Two 1430-1730
Parliamentary Checks on the Executive
Introduced by Ken Coghill and Italia Johnson
Chairperson: Roland Rich

THURSDAY 24 MAY

Session Three 0930-1300
The Public Service as Guardian: the ombudsman and other public oversight mechanisms
Introduced by Lethebe Maine and Joseph Sammut
Chairperson: Jon Sheppard

Session Four 1400-1630
Widening the Sphere of Accountability: ‘Distributed Governance’
Introduced by Margaret Bell and Wyvolyn Gager
Chairperson: Roland Rich

FRIDAY 25 MAY

Session Five 0930-1230
Conclusions and Proposals
Introduced by John Uhr
Chairperson: Jon Sheppard
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Regional Director
CIVICUS Asia-Pacific
Australia

Hon Rome Italia Johnson MP
Speaker, National Assembly,
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Dr Margot Kerley
Secretary to the
Joint Parliamentary Committee
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Australia

Mr Sarath Cooray
Commissioner, Human Rights
Commission of Sri Lanka
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Dr David MacGibbon
Former Chairman, Joint Standing
Committee on Foreign Affairs,
Defence and Trade and
former Senator,
Australia

Dato’ Dr Cyrus Das
President, Commonwealth Lawyers
Association and lawyer,
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Ms Thokozile Matshe
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National Constitutional
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Deputy Chair, Finance Committee
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Ms Wyvolyn Gager
Former Editor-in-Chief,
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Mr Ian Harris
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Mr Lethebe Maine
Parliamentary Ombudsman,
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Mr Steve Mworia
Former member, Presidential
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Mr Victor Perton MP
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Ms Maiava Visekotu Peteru
Former member of Parliament
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Mrs Camille Robinson-Regis MP
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Mr Joseph Sammut
Parliamentary Ombudsman
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Principal Secretary, Government
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PAPERS

- Ministerial Responsibility and Accountability
  Dr Ken Coghill

- Accountability Mechanisms: Judicial Checks on Government
  Dato’ Dr Cyrus Das

- Jamaica: Struggles with Accountability
  Ms Wyvolyn Gager

- Ombudsman’s Report of April 2001
  Mr Lethebe Maine

- The Internet, Accountability and Parliamentary Accountability
  Mr Victor Perton MP

- Democratic Accountability-An Overview Paper
  Dr John Uhr
DEEPENING DEMOCRACY

This was the seventh in a series of Commonwealth Secretariat workshops on the theme Deepening Democracy, whose purpose is to assist member countries in their efforts to make democracy as real and as deep as possible.

The first workshop on The Role of the Opposition – was held in London in June 1998, in co-operation with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and with financial support from the United Kingdom government. The second- the Workshop of Commonwealth Domestic Election Observers – was held in Jamaica in May 1999. A third workshop on Gender and Democracy was held in Namibia in February 2000 and a fourth, on Democracy and Small States was held in Malta in May 2000. The fifth workshop, on Decentralisation and Devolution, took place in Scotland in June 2000; and the sixth, on Broadcasting and Democracy was held in Canada in April 2001. The reports of these workshops are available from the addresses below.

Future workshops will consider Money and Democratic Politics and Voter Registration.

For more information on these and other Commonwealth Secretariat activities to promote democracy contact:

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This is the report of the Commonwealth Workshop on Accountability, Scrutiny and Oversight, which took place in Canberra over three days in May 2001.

The workshop participants—parliamentarians, academics, and senior figures in civil society from fifteen Commonwealth countries—considered how accountability mechanisms and oversight institutions can be strengthened and made more effective.

The workshop was the seventh in the Commonwealth Secretariat’s *Deepening Democracy* series and was organised with the Centre for Democratic Institutions of the Australian National University.