The Commonwealth of Nations in the International System: An Examination of Roles

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Abstract

This paper discusses the myriad of positive roles played by the Commonwealth of Nations as an international organization within the international system. The Commonwealth of Nations has since the modern times, come under heavy criticisms, especially by the Third World scholars. Subscribing to the radical approach in their analyses, the critics of the Commonwealth of Nations construct the international organization as a framework colonially created and imperialistically crafted by Britain in its bid to continue her colonial dominance over her erstwhile colonies, in the post-colonial era. The apologists of the Third World school express pessimism over the organization's ability to play meaningful and impactful roles in the international system. The salient point is raised that the organization does not live up to its own name. Inter alia, wealth is not common among the commonwealth member states, majority of which are former British colonies. Against this backdrop, this paper makes the authoritative argument that though the Commonwealth as an international organization has its lapses, it has played, and still plays significant roles in the political, economic, and socio-cultural lives of its members, such that have been contributive in shaping positively, the political landscape of the international system at large.

Introduction

One feature of today's world scene is the existence of many and varied international organizations. These international bodies, as they exist and operate, have been remarkably contributive in shaping the image of the global system via many and varied roles they play. These roles inter alia,

help in generating and stabilizing international cooperation and providing global governance in various areas. The Commonwealth of Nations is one among the legions of international organizations that exist and function in the contemporary international system. The existence of the organization owes its history to the rise and fall of the defunct British Empire. It is indeed a byproduct of the collapse and ruins of the former Empire of Britain. Little wonder it is defined as an association of choice for the nations that emerged out of the former British Empire (Enuka 2019). The Commonwealth of Nations is a voluntary international organization open to all erstwhile British colonies. Since the organization is colonial in orientation, it is by that historical circumstance, limited to those formerly colonized, and who recognize the Queen of England as symbol of the organization. Describing the Commonwealth therefore, Reed Brett wrote "…a family whose children, as they grow up, absorb the ideals of their parents. When they reach manhood, they may leave the home to strike out on their own initiative, but they never cease to be part of the family" (Brett 1941). The relevant documents establishing the Commonwealth, define the aims that engage the organization's existence to include promoting democracy and good governance; respecting for human rights; rule of law; sustainable economic and social development; gender equality; international peace and security, inter alia. Through its institutions and a structure that is based largely on unwritten and traditional procedures, the Commonwealth has, over the years, played some vital roles in the international system that have positively impacted the world scene. However, based essentially on the colonial orientation of the organization, its claim of any good role has been heavily attacked by critics. The Commonwealth of Nations has been accused of being a colonially created mechanism for the exploitation of the poor and weak members to be perpetuated (Okafo 2004). Adopting the realist theoretical construct in their analysis of the organization, some critics hold the view that the Commonwealth of Nations, far from its stated aims, is an instrument in the hand of Britain to maintain her influence over the members of the organization, an attempt to preserve whatever was left of

Britain's past glory (Enuka 2019). The name of the organization, Commonwealth, is not in tandem with the domestic realities of its member states. The organization bears Commonwealth, but there is actually nothing common about the wealth of the nations which are members of the Commonwealth. But inspite of the criticisms leveled against the Commonwealth of Nations and the discordant views held against it, the organization has played varied good and impactful roles that are unarguably hard to ignore. Among other things, the Commonwealth had consistently acted to quicken the process to the independence of colonial territories; it has developed the normative and institutional architecture to promote democracy; it has recorded a number of successes in the field of education which profits members of the Commonwealth; it has served as an interactive arena, by providing a platform where people of different races can interact and relate, etc. This paper highlights and discusses these salient roles of the Commonwealth of Nations as an international organization.

Theoretical Framework

The existence and functioning of international organizations has been explained within the theoretical context of Complex Interdependence Theory. The model of complex interdependence was developed by Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, to challenge the fundamental assumptions of traditional and structural realism (Rana 2015). The theory which became a component of the neoliberal perspective, has been widely used in the analysis of International Politics and International Organizations. As a theory, it tries to understand willingness of states to enter into cooperative alliances with one another under the conditions of anarchy and dependence. Complex interdependence theory offers an explanation as to why states cooperate organizationally. As an analytical framework in international relations, complex interdependence theory describes the situations characterized by reciprocal effects among countries or among actors in different countries of the world. Such situation explains the

relations between and among member states within the framework of Commonwealth. Put differently, the continued age long relationship between Britain or by extension the Commonwealth and its members is best explained and appreciated within the logic of this theoretical framework. The two groups of countries that make up the Commonwealth, Britain, representing the developed North and the rest majorly poor countries, suffer each a desideratum that differs from that of the other, yet possessing what the other desperately needs. While the poor and less developed Commonwealth members are economically weak and not industrialized, and therefore, in dire need of external economic assistance and aid. "It was principally the anticipation for a possible economic benefit from Britain that drove especially the African members of the Commonwealth to join the organization" (Enuka 2019). Britain is comparatively better off economically, but has a teething global aspiration which actualization requires the strategic support of Africa and Asia. Succinctly, Britain seeks to preserve whatever was left of her past political glory, through building an instrumentality that gives her claim of power beyond others in the contemporary world. In Winston Churchill's idea, the organization, "is a means of maintaining British influence in an era of superpower politics" (Adamson 1989: 4). International organizations, including the Commonwealth, just like the international system that creates them, are unarguably characterized by mutual dependence on a multiplicity of areas and issues. In this system of interdependence, states cooperate because it is in their own common interest. Our world is an interdependent one where no nation is entirely sufficient on its own, as states and societies are differently endowed. Lack of all-sufficiency in oneself, propels interdependent relationship among states, as each depends on the other for what is lacked but needed. It is this reciprocal and other form of interests that justifies the existence of international organizations like the Commonwealth of Nations.

The theory seeks to explain states' willingness to advance their interests by creating international organizations and to begin to appreciate the value of norms for behaviour that are created when international cooperation becomes institutionalized. Increased output and high rate of construction, social transformation and cultural diffusion are progressively turning the international system into a global village in which the families of this cosmic village interact constantly. Interdependence therefore, is a common feature of the so-called global village where no nation is an island in the sense of self-sufficiency. In one sense, science and technology which has brought economic, political and social advancement have also brought growing adverse consequences of weapons of mass destruction, nuclear waste dumping, atmospheric pollution through the release of industrial and chemical gases, diseases, crimes, dearth and disappearance of essential amenities. Many of these problems are not restricted to any particular country, but they do transcend national boundaries, leaving virtually no one untouched. This has become a compelling situation to both poor and rich states, which now join hands and efforts to concertedly and organizationally ensure that the planet/world is a safe place for man's dwelling. The many and varied international organizations serve as a forum for presenting these noticeable problems and solving them. Within this theoretical context, the existence and performances of the Commonwealth of Nations is appreciably understood.

Evolution of the Commonwealth

Being a post-empire international organization, the origin of the Commonwealth of Nations is traced to the rise and fall of the former British Empire. It is a common knowledge that Britain at the height of its power, had colonies that covered about a quarter of the world. With the collapse of the Empire, owing to a number of factors and varied explanations, people of diverse culture and races who had been brought under British colonial control, began to regain their political freedom from the British imperialist rule. As free peoples and nations, they were said to have chosen, for

reasons, to retain relationships with Britain, under the framework of the British Commonwealth.

We must note that patterns of colonization and decolonization were not the same in all the British colonies. Some, basically, the Whites and the founding members of the Commonwealth, were decolonized differently from the Blacks and the coloured: Africans and Asians. This difference, defined the different narratives of the stages and patterns leading to the evolution of the Commonwealth, and the history of the different ex-colonies' respective membership of the organization. Especially in the case of the Whites and settler colonies, though the peoples and nations emerged out the collapsed British Empire with full republican status, but were still retained some kind of associational relationship with Britain that was still colonial in some respects, under the then British Commonwealth. With the passage of time, owing to pressure and agitations, some greater levels of autonomy and independence began to be systematically given to these associates of Britain. The earliest event leading to changes and modifications within the British Empire that helped the growth and evolution of the Commonwealth, happened in Canada in 1839. As part of her efforts to resolve the complex political and administrative problems that arose from the British acquisition of multiethnic and multicultural Canada, Queen Victoria, in 1839 sent Lord Durham to the colony, to investigate and recommend solutions to the problems of the colony. Lord Durham, at the end of his findings, made several far-reaching recommendations, the implementation of which led to the emergence of the first colony with dominion status (Wiseman 1965). The Canadian solution, based on Durham's report was to set the pattern for other British colonies. In Faseke's words "A crucial step in the evolution of the Commonwealth was taken…following Lord Durham's famous report that led to the introduction of self-government into Canada and so laid the foundation for the emergence of the first Dominion" (Faseke 2009: 4).

The relationship between Britain and her different colonies were marked by series of periodic conferences. Though conferences of British and colonial Prime Ministers had existed periodically from 1887, but the formal organization of the Commonwealth had its origin in the imperial conferences of the 1920s, especially the 1926 Imperial Conference, when the status of the self-governing colonies was lifted to that of Dominions. The Dominion status was independence of some sort. It allowed the concerned countries to conduct their internal and external matters without reference to Britain. Faseke calls it a self-governing status and a considerable degree of freedom in the conduct of foreign relations (Faseks 2009). According to the Balfour Declaration at the imperial conference, the Dominions were:

Autonomous communities within the British Empire, equal in status, in no way subordinate one to another in any aspect of their domestic or external affairs, though united by common allegiance to the Crown, and freely associated as members of the British Commonwealth (Wiseman 1965).

Britain by this declaration, accepted equality of status with the Dominions as opposed to the hitherto, subjugated relationship. This was formalized in 1931 by the Status of Westminster. Thenceforth, the Commonwealth grew massively to include countries other than the founding members: Britain; Irish Free State; Newfoundland; Australia; Australia; New Zealand; and the Union of South Africa (Enuka 2019).

A significant step in the evolution of the Commonwealth began with the Indian independence, and the subsequent London Declaration in 1947 and 1949 respectively, which saw an influx of the then subject territories into the Commonwealth membership. With a president of her own, rather than the British Crown as her Head of state, the politically independent India opted to be a member of the Commonwealth as a republic. This was accepted and accorded recognition by the London Declaration. Following the Indian example, ex-colonies in African and Asian continents joined the

Commonwealth as full-fledged sovereign countries, recognizing the British Monarch only as the symbol of their association, rather than their Head of state. The Indian case marked a watershed in the organization's history. That decision to retain link with Britain on associational level only, as a fully independent and sovereign state, by securing Commonwealth's membership as a republic, turned radically, the British Commonwealth into the Commonwealth of Nations. The decision was an important single change underlying the evolution of the Commonwealth. Also, happening with this, was the relaxation of the phrase 'common allegiance with the Crown' as a requirement for membership, which speedily paved the way newly independent nations to join the organization. Toeing the Indian path, Pakistan upon attainment of political independence in 1947, joined the Commonwealth. Others like Ceylon (now Sri Lanka, 1948), Ghana (1957), Malaysia (1957), Nigeria (1960), Sierra Leone (1960), Cyprus (1960), Tanganyika (1961), Uganda (1962), Kenya (1964), joined the Commonwealth. Until the India's membership, the organization was not reshaped into its present multicultural form and nature, a complete departure from the outlook of the association prior to the Indian independence. Among other things, the name changed from the British Commonwealth to Commonwealth of Nations. It became less Anglocentric, ceased to be monoreligious, and a Whiteman's club. Rather it became multireligious, multi-colour, and multi-lingual. The Commonwealth has remained an organization in the making. It has continued to grow since after 1949, into a modern multilateral organization, and has performed profound functions in multi-dimensional manifestations that have impacted the international political and socio-economic life.

Roles of the Commonwealth

Since the modern Commonwealth came into being, it has as an organization played some great and important roles in the political, economic and social movements of the modern world. As an international organization, the Commonwealth serves as an interactive arena, by providing a platform

where people of different races can interact and relate. In keeping with the liberal theory of International Relation, this reduces the chances of conflict among states, and promotes cooperation in the international system. The organization has been able to promote unity among states that belong to it by organizing sports competitions and games. A multi-national sports championship called the commonwealth games is held every four years on a rotational basis (Ochman 2013)). The Commonwealth Wealth Games since its origin has been an important medium of social and cultural interactions among the member states of the Commonwealth. The political and diplomatic importance of sports is not in doubt. Sports diplomacy is used to foster the foreign policy objectives of states. "More than just helping the development of sports in and among member states, the Commonwealth Games is much more relevant in the diplomatic and political scene" (Adebawale 2009). Marcin perceives sports diplomacy as the utilization of sports for the sake of rapprochement between states, and the exercise of sports contacts as a tool for maintaining international friendship and cooperation.

The Commonwealth of Nations has been at the center of global efforts to promote democracy. Besides its operational activities, the Commonwealth has developed the normative and institutional architecture to promote democracy. The organization has advanced the development of normative roots of democracy through the Declarations of the organization with democracy promotion mandates; many resolutions by the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting and other activities and pronouncements of the organization. The position and role of the Commonwealth of Nations on the questions of democracy are obvious. The 'Declaration of Commonwealth Principles' in the 1971 Singapore Summit, were in essence, democratic principles. The Declaration stressed in part that:

We believe in the liberty of the individual, in equal rights for all citizens regardless of race, colour, creed or political belief, and in their alienable right to participate by

means of free and democratic political process in framing the society in which they live. We therefore strive to promote in each of our countries those representative institutions and guarantees for personal freedom under the law that are our common heritage (Commonwealth 1987).

In 1991 at Harare, the Commonwealth not only reinforced the earlier principles, but went further to declare that the organization was thenceforth to be committed to the political values of democracy, and human rights. By 1995 at Auckland in New Zealand, the Commonwealth Action Programme on the Harare Declaration was formulated. This led to the formation of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group, otherwise known as CMAG, to deal with serious and more persistent violations of the principles of democracy contained in that declaration (Adeniji 2009). With the Harare Declaration, the Commonwealth organization pledged itself to work with renewed vigour in promoting democracy and democratic processes. It specified collective measures in response to violations of the Harare principles. The organization provides for the exclusion of delinquent governments both from ministerial meetings and from the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings (CHOGM), pending the restoration of democracy, and in exceptional circumstances, suspension from the association (Dokubo and Oche 2004).

Another aspect of the Commonwealth that facilitates the promotion of democracy is the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA). The association is the only means of regular consultation among members of parliament from Commonwealth countries. It exists to foster understanding and cooperation among parliaments and parliamentarians, and to promote the study of, and respect for the institutions of parliament. It pursues these objectives by organizing a variety of conferences, by exchanging delegations and publications, and by providing practical assistance through its Parliamentary Information and Reference Center. The association has placed special emphasis on offering seminars on the

various roles of members of parliament and on parliamentary practice and procedure. These have been held in countries that have just returned to democratic rule, have altered their legislative rule, or have experienced a large turnover of members following an election (Dokubo and Oche 2004).

Global democratic practice has been affected through the organization's commitment to gender issues, human rights, monitoring of election and democratic promotion in member countries. The Harare Declaration committed the organization to a democratic vocation. Though this declaration did not provide the mechanism for the achievement of the objectives of the declaration, the Millbrook Declaration took care of the omission. Commonwealth countries now seek the stamp of approval and credibility by inviting fellow members to watch their elections. They know that a member suffering from a democratic deficit can be suspended pending better behavior. This had imposed some irreducible minimal democratic credentials on all Commonwealth countries. Consequently, the Commonwealth had observed member states' elections, both at the presidential and parliamentary levels. Over the years, the Commonwealth has sent out scores of observer groups to many parts of the world where Commonwealth states exist. The Commonwealth election observers in Nigeria's general election of April 2003, were led by Salim Ahmed Salim, erstwhile Secretary-General of the defunct Organization of African Unity, and a former foreign minister of Tanzania. Subsequent general elections in Nigeria were also observed by delegates of the Commonwealth, selected from different member countries of the organization. Mugabe's electoral victory of 2001, was widely challenged as fraudulent. The Commonwealth monitoring group under the leadership of General Abdulsalaam Abubakar lent credence to this accusation of fraud in its report. This led to the suspension of Zimbabwe from the Commonwealth.

In the sphere of education, many members of the Commonwealth have gained, and continue to gain a lot from the activities of the organization.

The association has recorded a lot of success in this field. The broad similarity in the educational systems of the Commonwealth countries has profited the members of the organization tremendously, particularly through the offer of scholarships to students from less developed member countries, to study in universities in other (wealthier) commonwealth countries. Through this, many people from former British colonies have had the opportunity to further their education in various disciplines. The Commonwealth Foundation set up to develop and promote professional standards among member states and to support educational activities, awards fellowships to Commonwealth professionals for study visits and exchanges. Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) with about two hundred and seventy-five-member institutions in twenty-eight countries of the Commonwealth, is another important unit of the Commonwealth, through which many profound activities that benefit member states are carried out. The association organizes regular meetings in different parts of the Commonwealth, promotes through various schemes, the movement of university academic and administrative staff, and assists the mobility of students between countries by administering a Secretariat of the United Kingdom Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan. The Commonwealth is also involved in distance education project. The Commonwealth of Learning which has its headquarters in Vancouver, Canada, was set up in 1988 to promote collaboration in distance education throughout the Commonwealth. It has assisted in planning a new open university in Tanzania and other countries that requested for such programmes.

Economic and Development Roles have equally been played by the Commonwealth of Nations. There is no doubting the fact that some of the members' economic aspirations had been met through the Commonwealth, principally as a search for better terms of trade and for aid and technical assistance in the members' efforts at promoting economic development and improving the lot of their citizens. The Commonwealth Fund for Technical

Cooperation (CFTC) holds a significant place in the economic development of the less developed countries who are Commonwealth members. Founded in 1971, the CFTC provides skills and expertise in such fields as irrigations, accountancy, nutrition, mechanical engineering, agricultural developments, debt management, petroleum and gas development and so on. Specifically, the CFTC Export Development Programme has benefited Nigeria. It has helped to source markets for Nigeria's products, and has fostered economic relations between Nigeria and the advanced nations such as Australia, New Zealand, Canada etc (Faseke 2009). The Secretariat operates an active Capital Market Programme designed to help developing member countries gain access to international borrowing. It organizes borrower-lender consultations at which senior officials, bankers and officers from lending institutions can make contact. Among other economic activities of the Commonwealth that benefit its members, is that countries retain many preferences for goods from other members of the commonwealth, so that even in the absence of tariff privileges, there continue to be more trade within the commonwealth. Commonwealth maintains a big loans and fund from which economically less developed members can borrow.

The Commonwealth has also distinguished itself in the area of international economic relations. It has, for example, been a pioneer in the area of cooperation for development. The Commonwealth has been behind major international initiatives to assist less developed countries within the Commonwealth. Among such plans was the Colombo Plan for Asia and the Pasific. Members of the Commonwealth have been at different times, beneficiaries of the aid programmes of the developed members of the organization who direct a good percentage of bilateral aid to other member countries. Furthermore, the Commonwealth also had many voluntary organizations actively assisting development, either channeling funds to projects in developing countries, or raising the level of popular support from global action against poverty (Olusanya 1986). The Commonwealth is

seriously concerned with African problems. The Association supports unequivocally South-South cooperation, rejects International Monetary Fund's general stringent conditionalities on less developed countries. At its different meetings and Declarations, the Commonwealth Heads of Government has expressed their collective resolve to seek, through international action, solutions to problems highlighted by the global economic crisis and deep-seated problem of poverty. The Commonwealth seriously advocates the need for greater justice in international economic relationships, and emphasizes the danger of the widening gap between the rich and the poor to the whole world.

Added to the list of many roles of the Commonwealth, is the anti-corruption roles of the organization. The Commonwealth is concerned about good governance and particularly corruption and looting of public treasury. Looting and other forms of financial corruption are obvious among the political class of especially, African members of the Commonwealth. Exacerbating corruption and corruptive practices as has been the case in Africa, no doubt debilitates and frustrates an economy. Where public treasuries in their excess are looted in Africa, the looted funds are allegedly taken to financial institutions in Europe or America for safe keeping. Some of the countries where these stolen monies are kept, are commonwealth members notably, Britain. Corruption and rampant looting of public funds, and the negative implications they portend on economies of states, had prompted the Commonwealth to set up the Commonwealth Expert Group on Good Governance and Elimination of Corruption in Economic Management. The Group is required to examine the problem country-by-country, thus making good governance and anti-corruption another special issue among other concerns of the organization. As explained by Emeka Anyaoku (2012), a one-time Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, the committee is expected to ask questions on how certain wealth was acquired by a certain individual and thereafter deliver judgment on the true source of the wealth, whether it was legitimately or

illegitimately acquired by the owner, with a view to accepting or rejecting such wealth in the foreign bank belonging to member nations of the Commonwealth.

Some commonwealth countries give commonwealth citizens privileges that are not accorded to aliens. For example, in the United Kingdom, the right to vote is given to all commonwealth citizens resident in that country. This is reciprocated in other commonwealth countries, mainly the Caribbean, where in some of the countries resident commonwealth citizens may be elected or appointed to the national legislature. The privileges are largely not on a reciprocal basis. It is up to each country to decide what privileges it accords to commonwealth citizenship. Other privileges that accrue to commonwealth members include access to immigration programmes such as working holiday's visas.

As an international organization, the Commonwealth has consistently acted to quicken the process to the independence of colonial territories. It was the process of decolonization that brought the Commonwealth into being. Therefore, the Commonwealth naturally is opposed to colonialism, authoritarianism, and racism. It is the Commonwealth's shared belief in these values that provided the basis for its concern and contributions in seeking political independence for Namibia. Among other things, there was the Commonwealth Sanctions Committee which kept a close eye on the implementation of the United Nations sanctions against Rhodesia, for unilaterally declaring itself independent. This Committee later got renamed into Commonwealth Committee on Southern Africa, and played quite significant role in helping to bring Zimbabwe to majority rule in 1980. The Commonwealth has also been involved in difficult political transformations in East Africa, notably Kenya and Tanzania, particularly in the northern Island of Zanzibar (Osuntokun 2004). The Commonwealth was present at the creation of the new countries that emerged from the ashes of the settler regimes in Southern and Eastern Africa. Perhaps the greatest plum of the

Commonwealth achievement was the victory of reason over prejudice in South Africa. Although the Commonwealth was not a lone ranger in this, but the fact remains incontrovertible that its role was decisive in persuading the settler regime in South Africa to engage in a fruitful and peaceful transfer of power to the black majority.

The Commonwealth of Nations was practically involved in dismantling apartheid in South Africa, and in returning the country to democracy and political freedom. The apartheid system by the white minority government in South Africa, separated South Africans into racial groups, and deprived non-whites of political, economic, and many basic human rights. For about half a century, fighting apartheid has been one of the world's great moral crusades. South African issues remained in the front burner as the obdurate problem facing Commonwealth leaders, and as a challenge to the ideals which the Commonwealth stands for, as an international organization. The Commonwealth Secretariat made frantic and commendable efforts to sensitize the world about the plights of South Africans under the apartheid regime. Through many of its activities, the Commonwealth demonstrated its outright condemnation of the apartheid regime of the Republic of South Africa, and facilitated the increased interactional campaigns against the apartheid regime. Consequently, in 1961, the Commonwealth expelled the Republic of South Africa because of her apartheid policy and the horror at Sharp Ville massacre, and in 1971, declared an arm embargo against South Africa. The meeting of the Commonwealth Heads of State in Singapore in January 1971 issued a Declaration of Principles which stated inter alia, that "No country will afford to regimes which practice racial discrimination assistance in its own judgment directly contributes to the pursuit or consolidation of this evil policy" (Commonwealth 1971).

Among other efforts by the Commonwealth of Nations to dismantle apartheid in South Africa was the issuance of the Lusaka Declaration in 1979, by the leaders of the organization. This Declaration outlawed racial

inequality in Commonwealth countries, with particular reference to South Africa. This declaration outlawing racial inequality made apartheid South Africa more uncomfortable within the Commonwealth and other international organizations. The Commonwealth formed and deployed to South Africa, the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group (EPG) in 1986 which played a key role in the diplomatic moves that eventually led to the release of Nelson Mandela from prison in February 1990. The Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group was created by the Nassau CHOGM held in October 1985, to promote political dialogue in South Africa. The Nassau Accord, titled the 'Commonwealth Accord on South Africa', called on the South African government to "initiate, in the context of a suspension of violence on all sides, a process of dialogue across lines of colour, politics and religion, with a view to establishing a non-racial and representative government" (Adeleke 2004: 81). It mandated the Eminent Persons Group to leave nothing undone that might contribute to peaceful change. The EPG had the power to dialogue in South Africa and to proffer the next line of action if open discussion and economic sanctions could not produce any meaningful result (Faseke 2009). The Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group comprised Nigeria's former Head of State, General Olusegun Obasanjo, former Australian Prime Minister, Malcom Fraser and former Tanzanian Prime Minister, John Malecela.

Included in the Nassau Accord was programme of economic and financial sanctions. It also set up Nassau Fellowship providing training in Commonwealth countries to apartheid victims. By the end of 1993, there were over one thousand and two hundred (1, 200) fellowships. In 1987 Commonwealth leaders issued the Okanagan (Canada) Statement and Programme of Action on Southern Africa, adding stronger measures to the Nassau Accord. Two years later, the Commonwealth released the Kuala Lumpur Statement, with the title 'Southern Africa: The Way Ahead', reinforcing its opposition to racism in South Africa, and offering support to

countries in the sub-region threatened by the South African apartheid regime.

Beginning from the Lusaka Declaration, to the constitution of the Eminent Persons Group (EPG) to the setting up of Commonwealth Ministerial Committee on South Africa (CMCSA), the Commonwealth throughout the 1980s to the early part of 1990s, played a dominant role in the emancipation of South Africa from the yoke of an apartheid racist regime. As captured by Yakubu,

Following the mentioned trends of events embarked upon by the Commonwealth towards the dismantling of apartheid regime and pressure mounted on apartheid regime in 1990, De Klerk unbanned political organizations, rescinded emergency media regulations, ended restrictions on organizations and individuals, released political prisoners including Nelson Mandela…the first meeting between ANC and South African Government was held, leading to commitment to peaceful transition to democracy (Yakubu 2009: 168).

Conclusion

Discussed by this paper are the profound roles played by the Commonwealth of Nations as international organization and an actor in the international system. Contrary to the expressed pessimism by critics over Commonwealth's acclaimed good roles, the paper demonstrated that through the Commonwealth's active involvement in the struggle for political freedom of some societies of the world; meaningful contributions towards global education, provision of veritable platform for friendly interaction among nations; conflict handlings and mediation; appreciable anti-corruption measures; democracy promotion, etc, the organization has shown itself a responsible player in the international system. That having been said, the organization, if it must live above board, should address the existing gap between the name of the organization and the domestic economic realities of its members. The organization bears Commonwealth,

yet nothing is there to suggest that the wealth of the members are common. This is a score against the Commonwealth, and it poses a challenge for the organization to enhance equal access to wealth, to a common wealth, for its nations.

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