

UGANDA NATIONAL SCIENCE WEEK

Pre-CHOGM Symposium on Science and Technology

13th – 15th September 2007

“The Contribution of Science and Technology to Socio-economic Transformation in Uganda”

**Welcoming remarks by Mark Collins,
Director, Commonwealth Foundation**

Honourable Minister for Higher Education, Vice-Chancellor of Mbarara University for Science and Technology, fellow supporters and sponsors of the Symposium, Friends and Colleagues from across the Commonwealth and beyond, I am delighted to welcome you all and to see such a large attendance at this important symposium.

Recognising that there are participants here from beyond the Commonwealth, who may not be sure what the Commonwealth is and what “CHOGM” means, let me say a word or two of explanation. The Commonwealth consists of 53 nations who associate freely in order to progress shared principles and goals of good governance, participatory democracy and cultural exchange and understanding. The two intergovernmental bodies established by the Commonwealth in 1965 were the Commonwealth Secretariat, which carries out the political programmes, including meetings of Commonwealth Ministers and Heads of Government, and the Commonwealth Foundation, whose aim is to strengthen civil society organisations, support professional networks and enhance cultural exchange.

This year the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) will be held in Kampala under the theme “Transforming Commonwealth societies to achieve political, economic and human development”. In advance of the CHOGM, civil society activists, human rights specialists, environmentalists and many others will join together for the Commonwealth People’s Forum (CPF) under the banner “Realising People’s Potential”.

Participants in 20 workshops will be asking what it takes to transform societies so that poverty and hunger are defeated, disease brought under control, education brought within everyone’s reach, problems of urbanisation resolved and environmental impacts reduced. They will emphasise that transformation needs more than aid, more than trade, it requires rights and opportunity for all people to play their part and realise their full potential in nation-building.

They will also be saying that the old ways of development are not necessarily suited for today and the world of the future. The carbon-fuelled industrial revolution that brought us transportation, industry and the economies of the modern world need to be replaced by new technologies to fuel our machines and bring us energy. Progress will be achieved through knowledge-based industries and the application of new

information and communications technologies. Waste control and recycling will be needed to conserve natural resources and reduce environmental impacts.

Scientists and technologists need to show the way through innovation, research and development. Many ideas can flow from this meeting, and I want to close by explaining some of the context for the meeting, and how we can take forward our messages to policy-makers and world leaders.

First of all, this Pre-CHOGM Symposium is one of several that the Commonwealth Foundation has initiated and sponsored together with our partner the Uganda NGO Forum. Debates such as these have been convened across Uganda on subjects such as climate change, peace and conflict, human rights and children's rights, amongst others. Messages from these meetings will go forward to workshops at the CPF, and the message from this particular meeting on science and technology will be an important element of the CPF workshop on "Knowledge and Innovation for Economic Transformation" which I hope a number of delegates from here will attend.

The People's Forum will prepare a civil society statement that will be used in drafting the final CHOGM Communiqué from the Heads of Government. It is one of our concerns to ensure that science and technology for innovation is raised in that communiqué, particularly in the context of development in Africa. This in turn will help us to take forward our message to all Commonwealth governments, that transformation must be embedded in innovative and appropriate technologies that help people everywhere to reach their full potential.

Thank you, and I wish you a very successful meeting.