

ADDRESS BY CARL WRIGHT, SECRETARY-GENERAL, CLGF
LOCAL GOVERNMENT NEW ZEALAND 2008 CONFERENCE, ROTORUA

Allow me to bring you warm greetings from your local government colleagues in some 44 Commonwealth countries across the world- from Canada to Jamaica, from the UK to Cyprus, from The Gambia to South Africa, from Pakistan to Malaysia and of course from the many Commonwealth countries of the Pacific.

I would like to start by paying a warm tribute to your President, Basil Morrison. Basil has taken local government in New Zealand to new status which is the envy of local government outside your own shores. He has also, as the Chairperson of the Commonwealth Local Government Forum, CLGF, ensured vital recognition for local government internationally and has been a powerful champion of local democracy and good governance worldwide.

You may recall that Basil, with generous support from your Government, secured the hosting of the 2007 Commonwealth Local Government Conference for Auckland and helped to ensure that this was the most successful and best-attended CLGF event ever, with some 600 senior delegates included several heads of government and more than 30 national ministers in attendance: and New Zealand really a great host!

Basil subsequently headed the official CLGF delegation at the 2007 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Kampala, Uganda and helped to secure formal endorsement of the CLGF *Auckland Accord* by Heads of Government. He has taken a strong and active role in recent missions to Islamabad, New Delhi, Port Moresby and Canberra, where we met the new Australian government ministers in April.

Above all he –and the very able team at LGNZ- has assisted CLGF in securing vital NZAID resources for our expanding programme in the Pacific, designed to promote local democracy and strengthen local government capacity in Fiji, PNG and many other countries in the region. I am also very grateful for the active involvement in our Pacific programme by a growing number of New Zealand councils whose commitment and expertise is invaluable. I hope many more will join us!

Let us remember that being an elected mayor or local leader is a dangerous occupation in many countries. I have just come from Pakistan where political engagement can cost you your life, especially if you are a woman. I will travel to Fiji on Wednesday where democracy remains under threat.

Perhaps nowhere are the dangers greater at present than in Zimbabwe where the MDC opposition swept the March local elections and deserve our every support. Only a few weeks ago political thugs came to murder the mayor-elect of Harare and, finding only his wife and 4 year old son at his home, abducted them and brutally killed the wife. I am proud that CLGF has provided direct support to democratic local government in Zimbabwe and my Board- led by Basil- has confirmed our commitment to continue to provide solidarity. This solidarity is badly need and I call on your help and support.

I look forward to working closely with your new President and officers in continuing our joint efforts to support local democracy everywhere and conclude by inviting you most warmly to attend our May 2009 CLGF Conference in Freeport in the Bahamas.