

THE IXTH COMMONWEALTH STUDY CONFERENCE

AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND
18 - 29 OCTOBER, 2003



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During late October 2003, for about two and a half weeks, the Ninth Commonwealth Study Conference was jointly hosted by Australia and New Zealand, bringing together 210 participants from Commonwealth nations around the world.

The conference aims to provide participants with an experience that leaves their assumptions challenged, and the benefit of an enlarged comprehension as a result of working and talking with people from different backgrounds, cultures and perceptions.

It was started in 1957 by HRH the Duke of Edinburgh and was first held at Oxford. Thereafter it was held once every six years, reducing to once every five years in recent times. Throughout its history the conferences have been held in Canada, Australia, India and the UK, and on each occasion it was graced by the presence of HRH Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh.

The 2003 conference marked a break with tradition as it was instead graced by HRH Princess Anne, the Princess Royal, who turned out to be most befitting for the occasion.

Malaysia was represented by seven participants at the 2003 Commonwealth Study Conference (CSC2003), and I was lucky enough to be one of those selected.

The 2003 conference started in Melbourne with the gathering of all



171003.26 Malaysian Delegation presenting plaques to Richard Warburton, Chair, Organising Committee CSC2003 and Brian Pickett, Executive Director, CSC2003 on Day 2 of the Conference at the Sheraton Hotel, Melbourne

participants for the opening plenary sessions, followed by a break-up into 14 groups of fifteen participants each, that embarked on different pre-arranged study tours all round Australia and New Zealand, finally coming together again in Sydney for the closing sessions.

The conference has always maintained representation of a good balance of professions. CSC2003 had representatives from trade unions, many different areas of government, business, uniformed personnel, education, banking, NGO's, and healthcare.

People First in the Global Community was the theme of the CSC2003 conference, and the opening plenary sessions, over two days, set the direction for this somewhat broad theme.

Some of the issues that we were being called on to investigate were

sustainable development, opportunities for indigenous people, community development, rural education, regional healthcare, industrialisation, the effects of globalisation, future challenges for art, research frontiers in science and medicine, and shifting economic fundamentals.

On day three we began our week long study tour. My group was destined for the Northern Territories and far north Queensland.

Whilst in Darwin we visited, amongst others, the Port of Darwin's new East Arm Port – which is integrated with the transcontinental AustralAsia Railway link to southern Australia, Powercorp - a wind power station developer, the Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation – an indigenous group development enterprise, the Northern Territory University, the Menzies School of Health Research, and the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory.



Briefing at Powercorp on innovative developments for the industries

We also visited the Department of Business, Industry and Resource Development, where we were briefed on the LNG plant development and other offshore oil and gas exploration activities.

And, at the Northern Territory Parliament House, we were welcomed by the Minister for Business, Industry and Resource Development and other Members of the Legislative Assembly and business and community representatives.

At every opportunity, during the visits on our packed learning programme, we posed questions and sought the views of community, political and business leaders, such that at the end of our four full-program days in Darwin we were beginning to feel an information overload. We were invigorated by what we had learnt, yet confused about how to connect all the multifaceted bits of information to the theme of the conference.

From Darwin we moved on to Cairns in northern Queensland where we visited the Queensland Govt Tropical Public Health Unit, the Wet Tropics Management Authority – entrusted with managing the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area including in it the Daintree Rainforest and Mossman Gorge, and Green Island in the Great Barrier Reef – a welcome respite nonetheless despite having to endure briefings on green issues and brown issues at this wonderful tourist resort.

After Cairns we crossed Australia's northern cape, to the



Study Tour Group 8 at Comalco Bauxite mine in Weipa

mining community of Weipa, the site of several of the world's largest bauxite deposits. Comalco has mined bauxite here for twenty years without regard for the claims of the traditional owners of the land.

In recent years, however, following government intervention, it has entered into a landmark agreement to mine the reserves with shared benefits for the community. The Western Cape Communities Co-existence Agreement (WCCCA) currently stands as a model agreement for other mining communities in Australia, and perhaps elsewhere in the world. It recognizes Native Title rights and provides support for the community and sustainable mining development. Under the terms of the agreement a portion of the mining proceeds is returned to the community through a trust, whereby 60% of the sum is placed in restricted investments for 20 years, 35% is disbursed in sub-regional trusts for community development programmes (education, vocational training, healthcare, enterprise development, etc.), and 5% is used to cover administration costs.

Finally we journeyed back to Sydney to reconvene with the rest of the conference members that had journeyed elsewhere, and to reflect on the study tour which had, in effect, moulded our group into a single synergized unit that experienced a wonderful learning experience collectively. Along the way we had also come to know and respect each individual in the group a lot better by acknowledging each individual's strengths and leadership values.

The closing plenary sessions were held at the Sydney Opera House and attended by the Princess Royal, Commonwealth Study Conferences alumni, and invited guests. Throughout all the presentations emerged a common thread of response to the theme of the conference – what each group perceived as qualities or actions needed to empower people first for the sake of the global community.

On our part, our group postulated:

- We can all make a positive difference to people around us without necessarily compromising on our corporate goals.
- We think that putting people first requires humility and proactivity on the part of each of us wherever we are.



Study Tour Group 8 at Comalco Bauxite mine in Weipa

- As leaders we may still be required to set direction but, ultimately, we should be judged not just on the outcomes, but also on the process by which we each achieve our goals.

Back in Melbourne, at the start of the conference we had each shared our personal expectations for what we expected to gain from the conference and on that final day in Sydney we knew that those expectations had far been surpassed for most of us. Far from being just another conference it gave us all an extraordinary learning experience and a unique passport to a global network of study conference alumni that continue to support this wonderful initiative.

A tenth study conference is now being planned for 2007. As a privileged alumnus now, I most certainly hope for many more candidates to be given the opportunity to attend this conference which is rather more of a unique learning program. ■

Further information about the Commonwealth Study Conferences is available on the following websites:

<http://www.csc2003.org>;
<http://66.220.30.235/alumni/uk/home>

In Malaysia, the Commonwealth Study Conference Association of Malaysia (COSCAM), maintains affiliation with other associations of Commonwealth Study Conferences in other countries, and manages the selection of candidates for conference participation.

COSCAM also carries out programmes throughout the year to foster relations among the Commonwealth community in Malaysia.

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