



The Commonwealth Conversation

HOSTED BY THE ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY



Two billion people. 53 countries. One conversation. Join in!

The Commonwealth Conversation

The Commonwealth turns 60 in 2009. This landmark year offers the perfect opportunity to reflect upon the past and to consider what the future may hold for the association.

Encompassing two billion people the world over, the Commonwealth's true potential lies in its continued relevance to its citizens. With this in mind, the Royal Commonwealth Society (RCS), the oldest and largest civil society organisation devoted to the Commonwealth, is facilitating a global public consultation on the future of the association. This is the Commonwealth Conversation.

This is your chance to have your voice heard; your chance to shape your Commonwealth.

What you tell us will be presented to the world's leaders when they gather at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Trinidad & Tobago in November 2009 and in various other fora.

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What is the Commonwealth?



The modern Commonwealth was born 60 years ago in 1949. Today, it is a unique global family of 53 member countries stretching across all the world's continents and oceans and including 2 billion people, or 30% of the world's population.

A vibrant and growing association of states, the Commonwealth works to promote democracy and good governance, respect for human rights and the rule of law, as well as sustainable environmental, economic and social development.

All Commonwealth countries are united by agreed common values and principles; and share a common heritage and language. They join voluntarily to work together in a spirit of cooperation, partnership and understanding.

It is very important that there is a continuing dialogue about the Commonwealth among its peoples. I therefore welcome the Commonwealth Conversation, and look forward to the new ideas that it will bring.

**COMMONWEALTH SECRETARY-GENERAL,
KAMALESH SHARMA**

What is the RCS?

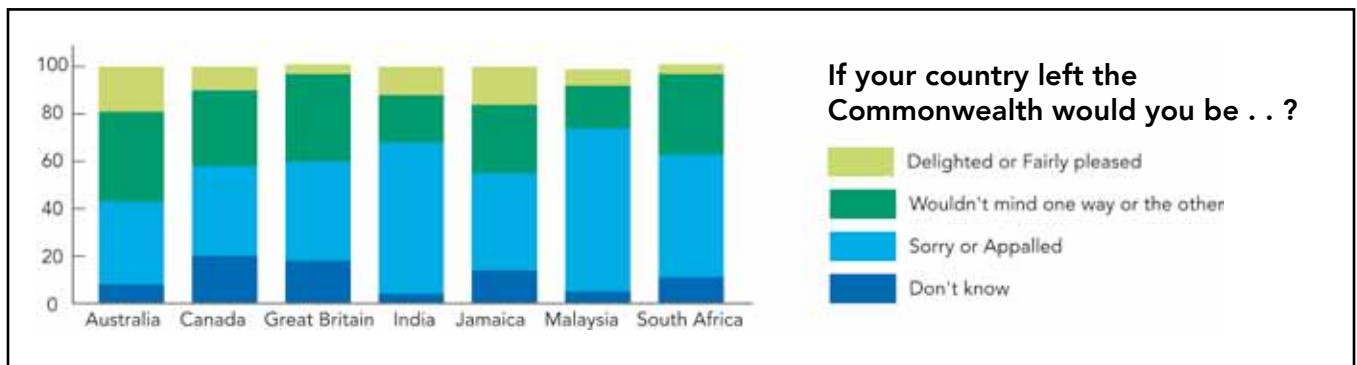
The RCS is an international educational charity. We work to engage people in the modern Commonwealth through our range of debates, youth projects and educational activities. Founded in 1868, our home is now the Commonwealth Club, a contemporary members' club and events venue in the heart of London. Our registered charity number in England and Wales is 226748.

Find out more by visiting www.thercs.org

Why do we need a Conversation about the Commonwealth?

When the modern Commonwealth was born, its founding fathers took some brave decisions. From the ashes of Empire rose an association of free and equal members committed to democracy, development and diversity. Since its remarkable beginnings, the Commonwealth has achieved much of which it can be rightfully proud.

Yet, in a crowded marketplace of international organisations, the Commonwealth sometimes struggles to stand out. In many member countries, awareness of the association and its work is at an all time low. Opinion polls commissioned by the RCS in several countries found that only about a third of people could identify anything that the Commonwealth did, and most of those people listed the Commonwealth Games. The polls also found varying levels of support for the association (an example of which is shown below). Full results of our polls can be found on the Conversation website.



The Commonwealth's 60th anniversary and the 2009 CHOGM offer an important opportunity to ask how the Commonwealth can add value to the international community in the 21st century. Governments and officials around the Commonwealth are starting to think about these issues. **Now we want everyone else to join in!**

What are the aims of the Commonwealth Conversation?

- To gather the opinions of individuals and organisations across the world about the Commonwealth
- To identify key issues of international concern on which the Commonwealth should focus
- To help re-vitalise the Commonwealth and re-connect it to a new generation
- To present key recommendations to Commonwealth leaders and policymakers
- To raise awareness about what the Commonwealth is and does

How can I get involved?

Visit thecommonwealthconversation.org to follow the debate, post your ideas and comments and take our survey

Convene or take part in a discussion group on the Commonwealth in your local community/group

Volunteer to get involved in our online discussion groups

Talk to your local politicians or community leaders about what you think the Commonwealth should be focusing on and let us know about it

Participate in a creative Conversation exercise designed for young people

Find us on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube

Email your ideas or thoughts to us at conversation@thercs.org

For more information about all the different ways you can get involved, please visit www.thecommonwealthconversation.org/get-involved

Who will my views influence?

The results of the Conversation will influence Heads of Commonwealth governments, the Commonwealth Secretariat, political leaders in each member state, civil society organisations, business leaders, the media and commentators. The findings will also shape the activities of the RCS in the coming years.

Headline results will be featured across global media; key recommendations will be presented to leaders at CHOGM; a full Conversation report will be published and widely distributed; and a series of high-profile debates at the RCS will explore central themes which emerge.

When several thousand people speak, they cannot be ignored. The results of the Conversation are awaited by governments, policy makers and civil society leaders around the world. This is your chance to make sure your voice is heard.

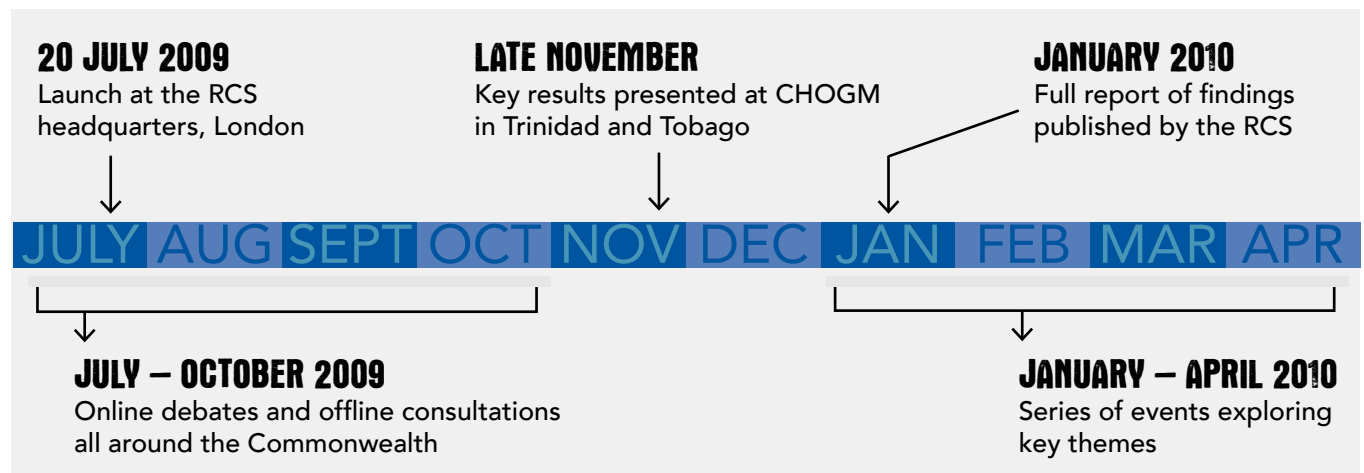
Rarely do people get the chance to shape the future of an international organisation. Let's make the most of it.

**RCS DIRECTOR,
DR DANNY SRISKANDARAJAH**

When will we see results?

The best way to follow the Conversation as it unfolds is to keep visiting and contributing to our website (www.thecommonwealthconversation.org). Better still, bookmark us on one of the many social networking websites or set up a news feed so you are always kept up to date.

Meanwhile, look out for some key milestones in the life of the Conversation:



Where can I find out more?

You can find out more about the Commonwealth Conversation by exploring our website:

www.thecommonwealthconversation.org

Or, please contact Zoë Ware, RCS Commonwealth Affairs Manager, on +44 (0) 20 7766 9240, conversation@thercs.org. Alternatively, you can write to us at: 25 Northumberland Avenue, London, WC2N 5AP United Kingdom

We would love to hear from you.