

“MORE COMMON, MORE WEALTH: NEXT STEPS FOR THE  
COMMONWEALTH”

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AT THE LAUNCH OF THE COMMONWEALTH CONVERSATION ‘2  
BILLION VOICES’  
ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY  
LONDON 20 JULY 2009

My first task is to thank Chief Emeka Anyaoko. It is right that he is here as we launch this discussion. Under his leadership the Commonwealth demonstrated its value. With Chief Anyaoko in the driving seat the Commonwealth issued the Harare Declaration, giving contemporary relevance to the Commonwealth’s beliefs and purposes, and defining a new mandate. It helped South Africa to end apartheid, and deployed a Commonwealth Observer Missions to assist with and monitor the historic 1994 elections.

I am here to launch a unique Commonwealth Conversation, not deliver a Commonwealth sermon. That is important because the modern Commonwealth has to unite disparate voices, and unity needs active engagement not just strong leadership. The Conversation will be open, global and focussed. I want to thank the Royal Commonwealth Society for leading the work of the Commonwealth Conversation. The RCS is one of the oldest and largest civil society organisations devoted to the Commonwealth. Yet in keeping with the spirit of juxtaposition in the modern Commonwealth, its leadership is new, energetic and full of ideas.

#### The Case for Reform

I am proud to be Secretary of State for Commonwealth as well as Foreign Affairs. If you say the word commonwealth to me the image that comes to mind is of the tens of thousands of young Ugandans who gathered to meet Her Majesty the Queen in Kampala for the Heads of Government Summit in 2007. They were full of anticipation, expectation and excitement, proud of their own country but also proud to be part of a bigger family.

I am pleased that the UK is the single largest contributor to the Secretariat. Last year we provided over £33 million pounds through a range of Commonwealth institutions and have offered to raise our contribution to Commonwealth funding. In 2007/2008 we gave over £1 billion in bilateral development assistance to Commonwealth Countries.

But the starting point for our Conversation has to be the world around us not the organisation we care about. Because it is only by being relevant to the challenges and opportunities of the modern world that a relevant modern Commonwealth will be built.

When the Commonwealth was born a defining question in foreign relations was the end of empire and the emergence of a post-colonial age. Today, the defining feature of foreign relation is a particular form of globalization. The deepening of links between nations is not new. Empire itself unleashed flows of money, goods, people and culture across national borders. But several things about the current form of globalization are unprecedented.

First, the relationships between nations are overwhelmingly based on free will not conquest. Global cooperation is voluntary not imposed.

Second, the degree of interdependence means that national interests between countries overlap to such an extent that we can genuinely talk about shared interests. Welfare and security go hand in hand rather than at the expense of each other: whether in respect of trade and climate change or nuclear proliferation, health pandemics and global financial regulation, it is not unreal to talk about the only solutions being win-win solutions.

Third, globalization has dispersed power that was once concentrated. It is not just people and goods that have taken flight, it is authority. With the economic growth in India and China power is shifting eastwards. With greater real-time access to information and ideas, power is shifting downwards from governments towards people. And as citizens and governments alike recognise the reality of their interdependence power is also shifting upwards. Regional institutions such as the EU, AU and ASEAN are playing a greater role. Greater demands are being made on global institutions. In 2000 the UN had 30,000 peacekeepers deployed around the world. Today that figure has risen to 94,000. And the London Summit in April showed that the world's leading economies now accept that economic governance increasingly has to be conducted at global level.

Yet despite the growing dependence on international rules and institutions, the truth is that the current international system was designed for another age. It was fashioned for a world exhausted by total war and designed to cater to the needs of small and relatively closed economies. The security threat was that of one state against another, not of non-state actors. In recent years it has become increasingly apparent that our rules and institutions have failed to keep pace with global change. This has undermined both their legitimacy and their effectiveness.

And I think that while that narrative of interdependence, of international institutions that are too weak is my stock introduction to foreign policy speeches, it is vital that the debate about the future of the commonwealth situates itself in the modern world as it.

That is why the British government has long argued for systemic reform of the international system. We need to renew our multilateral system to make it more relevant and more representative. That means reforming the UN Security Council to include India, Brazil, Germany, Japan and African representation. It means making the EU fit for 27 countries, with a wider range of tasks including in foreign and defence policy. It means NATO adapting to a world where the greatest threats to Western Europe come from non-state actors not other states. It means International Financial Institutions that are more representative of the modern economic world. And across the piece it demands enhanced partnership and greater practical cooperation.

This is where the Commonwealth comes in. In 2008, after a review of FCO strategy, we made the reform of international institutions one of the top four foreign policy priorities for Britain. Alongside our efforts to reform institutions that wield and use hard power we also need to renew those dedicated to soft power. Because the truth is that without the understanding and relationships at the heart of soft power, hard power will be far less effective.

I have previously talked of the Commonwealth's important mission. Its power lies, first, in the strength and clarity of its shared values. Despite their differences, each and every one of its members has made a commitment to freedom and democracy; to the eradication of poverty and inequality; and to peace, the rule of law and opportunity for all. This transcendence of political, economic and social barriers in the name of basic human values provides the Commonwealth with an ideological grounding that goes far beyond its colonial roots.

Second, the mission stems from its ability to speak to close to a third of the world's population. And speaking to as well as for its members is something that the Commonwealth needs to do much better. Of its two billion citizens, half are under 25. So it is or should be the voice of the future.

Third, its diversity. Fifty-three countries, spanning all five continents, come together as equals in the Commonwealth. But this diversity is more than geographical: the organisation represents 800 million Hindus, 500m Muslims, 400m Christians. And it encompasses some of the wealthiest countries in the world, alongside some of the poorest; some of the most powerful alongside some of the most vulnerable.

So there are real assets on which to build.

### The Future of the Commonwealth

To decide on where the Commonwealth should go, it is necessary to understand where it has come from.

At its birth the Commonwealth's purpose was clear: it provided a link between Britain and its former colonies; a relationship close enough to reflect historic ties,

but distant enough to respect the independence of its members. In the 1960s, as it expanded from ten members to thirty, the depth of its common values and interests grew. Charismatic independence leaders, from Nehru to Nkrumah, came together to shape the position of the Commonwealth on critical issues such as de-colonisation, Rhodesian independence or apartheid in South Africa.

In recent years, as the list of global challenges has grown, the Commonwealth has sought to engage in new areas and has taken on a broader role, for instance trying to tackle hard security issues such as terrorism. At the same time, with more countries recognising the reality of interdependence, new international organisations and multilateral forums have sprung up. International cooperation has become a crowded field.

So clear direction, identity and purpose is at a premium. And the search for greater focus in all three domains is at the heart of this Conversation - to engage not just governments but other opinion formers, media and civil society - and of course a wide range of citizens - across all 53 members, on the role of the Commonwealth for the future. As the polling that has been presented today makes clear, this clarity of direction, identity and purpose is much needed.

The British Government's view is that the Commonwealth needs to be clear about its distinctive role and focus on its strengths and advantages. Our starting point is to break this down into three areas.

First extending what is common between us, by focussing foremost on the values and principles that we all signed up to. In essence this means prioritising democracy and human rights. Because with the wave of democracy of the 1990s seemingly having plateaued, these rights and values are increasingly contested. And because the Commonwealth has important tools at its disposal: the ability to censure members who seriously or persistently violate basic norms, the Commonwealth Observer Missions which provide technical support for elections, and the 80 or so Commonwealth Associations which work across the Commonwealth and in some cases beyond promoting freedom of the media, supporting civil society and developing education initiatives. The point about democracy and human rights is that the battle is never entirely won and so it needs the Commonwealth. Just look at Zimbabwe. We will know there is real progress there when we are able to welcome Zimbabwe back into the Commonwealth.

Second, extending our shared wealth, not only economically but also socially and intellectually, by building on the Commonwealth's current strengths. Our heritage means that most of our members share not just the English language, but legal and financial systems. This gives us a competitive edge when it comes to trade and business the Commonwealth today accounts for 20% of global trade - and it is a platform we should seek to build on. This heritage also creates obvious educational links. The Commonwealth Scholarships and English language

training are excellent development tools. I believe the changes last year will make the Scholarship scheme more effective, more useful and more sustainable.

Third and finally, capitalising on our diverse membership. As the Commonwealth contains two members of the G8, five of the G20, twelve of the Islamic Conference, over half of the G77, as well as members of the EU, AU and ASEAN, it is uniquely placed to drive the renewal of our international architecture that I talked about earlier. Given its youth, and the fact that a number of its members, from Bangladesh to the Maldives, are on the front-line, climate change should be an urgent focus.

If two billion voices can speak together at the Copenhagen Conference just two weeks after the Commonwealth Heads of Government meet in Trinidad then we could play a very powerful role in securing the ambitious global deal we need. But the battle for low carbon development is not just a one off challenge. Rich countries seeking a transition to low carbon, poor countries seeking to avoid the mistakes of industrialised countries, need to come together in a decades long drive to live within the resources of a single shared planet. They need economic, social and cultural norms to change in fundamental ways. I believe the battle against climate change should be a unifying focus for the Commonwealth, involving not just practical exchange of ideas but political voice across barriers of region, race and religion.

### Institutional Change

If we are to renew and refresh our Commonwealth, we need to ask hard questions not just about our priorities but our structure, institutional arrangements and membership. We need to re-examine not just what we do, but how we do it.

That means modernising the Commonwealth Secretariat; ensuring our programmes are effective, that they are targeted at those who need them most and deliver real value for money. We also badly need to find new ways to engage the two billion people we represent. The polling data released today shows that too few people understand what the Commonwealth is for, let alone appreciate the work it does. We must ensure that it reflects the interests and aspirations of our citizens, that it creates opportunities and opens networks for them whether in business, education, sport or politics.

And finally we must extend our membership to those who share our values, who meet the criteria and who want to join. As we saw in the 1960s when the Organisation expanded from ten to thirty, new arrivals inject new dynamism. Broadening the membership does not dilute the shared values or weaken the shared purpose, it enhances it. We have said before that we support Rwanda's application because its inclusion would help bind Rwanda into our shared values and principles. Let it not be the last.

## Conclusion

In 1946 Nehru said that "The world, in spite of its rivalries and hatreds and inner conflicts, moves inevitably towards closer cooperation and the building up of a world commonwealth". This world, he expanded, was one in which there is the "free cooperation of free peoples, and no class or group exploits another".

Sixty years on Nehru would be astonished at some of the progress, but surely he would also be desperately disappointed by some of the basic failings of international cooperation. Distances have shrunk and interests have become more closely aligned. Yet our work of building up this common wealth is far from complete. Too many lives are blighted by the diseases of prejudice, ignorance and corrupted government as well as the injuries of poverty and conflict.

So my theme for this Conversation is simple: more common, more wealth. With more common action and common effort, greater unity of focus and collective effort, we can and will create more wealth, not just in the narrow, material sense but in terms of our cultural and social diversity, in terms of the rich tapestry of our lives. Even at sixty, demographics makes the Commonwealth one of the youngest international organisations. So let this Conversation show that sixty is the new forty, and set this organisation on the road to an active and effective middle age.