Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting

Communiqué

Commonwealth Heads of Government convened in Malta from 27 to 29 November 2015 under the theme, ‘The Commonwealth: Adding Global Value’. They reaffirmed their shared and enduring commitment on behalf of the people of the Commonwealth to the values and principles of the Commonwealth Charter. In a year of exceptional global challenges and opportunities, Heads addressed issues such as climate change, sustainable development, trade and investment, migration, and countering violent extremism and radicalisation. They also deliberated on safeguarding the interests of Commonwealth small states and emphasised that the unique nature of the Commonwealth adds value in responding to contemporary global challenges.

Peace and Security

2 Heads affirmed that radicalisation, violent extremism and terrorism in all its forms and ramifications are serious threats to the whole world, including the Commonwealth and its peoples, undermining its values and aspirations; international peace and security; social harmony; and economic and social development. Heads condemned terrorism and abhorrent violence by extremist groups, including in many Commonwealth countries, which often target vulnerable groups as well as women and children. They noted with deep concern the growing trend of extremism and radicalisation globally and that foreign fighters, including from Commonwealth countries, continue to join terrorist and other extremist groups. They also agreed that it is imperative to counter the use of the internet by extremist groups to radicalise and recruit.

3 Heads underlined that such threats, which should not be associated with any particular religion, race, nationality or ethnicity, must be countered through strong national, regional and international action and cooperation. This could include partnerships between governments and civil society, the business community and others. They called upon all member governments to implement in full their obligations under United Nations Security Council Resolution 2178 (2014).

4 Heads reaffirmed the relevance of Commonwealth solutions, including recommendations in the Commonwealth report, Civil Paths to Peace, on ways of addressing, through education and the media, the conditions conducive to grievance and alienation, with a particular focus on women and young people. Heads renewed their commitment to implement national strategies to counter radicalisation, violent extremism and terrorism, and agreed to support each other, including by developing effective counter-narratives and by sharing practical prevention and
criminal justice best practice. They encouraged the implementation of the *Civil Paths to Peace* report’s recommendations, and undertook to explore new options including the creation of dedicated Commonwealth capacity, and to harness the assets and potential of the full family of Commonwealth governments and organisations in a coordinated way.

5 Heads recognised in this context that young people, who comprise sixty percent of the Commonwealth’s population, have an important role in building stable, secure and prosperous societies, and that Commonwealth programmes can help raise awareness of the risk of radicalisation and prevent young people from embracing violent extremism, radicalisation and terrorism in all its forms and ramifications. They undertook to promote youth participation in national development and peace building, and to encourage partnership activity with Commonwealth youth networks to help counter the appeal of violent extremism.

6 Heads acknowledged the entry into force of the Arms Trade Treaty, and the signing and ratification of the Treaty by many Commonwealth member states. They underscored that the illicit trade in conventional weapons, such as small arms and light weapons, contributes to human rights abuses, violations of international humanitarian law, and breaches of national security by its connection and support to the illicit drugs trade and border encroachment; and leads to conflict and instability, and hinders social and economic development. Heads invited those countries which wish to become State Parties to do so, and urged States Parties to the Treaty to implement it fully.

**Human Rights and Good Governance**

7 Heads of Government acknowledged that all human rights are equal, indivisible, interdependent, interrelated and universal; and urged members to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

8 Heads recognised that freedom of opinion and expression, freedom of peaceful assembly and association, and freedom of religion or belief are cornerstones of democratic societies, and important for the enjoyment of all human rights, including the right to development, and are fundamental to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Heads reaffirmed their commitment to the realisation of the economic, social and cultural rights of all and the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living. They emphasised the need to protect individuals from all forms of violence and discrimination. Heads recognised the need to adopt legal frameworks that promote privacy rights and to ensure an open and secure internet as well as data protection in accordance with the national laws of the states concerned. They resolved to encourage the development of practical networks that facilitate the sharing of information and building of capacity in these areas.

9 Heads observed that good governance and respect for the rule of law are vital for stable and prosperous societies, and for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and require efficient, effective and accountable public institutions that serve all citizens and provide access to justice for all. They encouraged continued efforts by member states to ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and
representative decision-making at all levels, and to enable and protect a free and vibrant civil society. In this regard, Heads noted recent Commonwealth publications of best practice on the appointment, tenure and removal from office of judges as well as on the establishment of national human rights institutions; they likewise noted the forthcoming publication of Commonwealth best practice on the establishment of national election management bodies. They also noted best practice and capacity-building in the Universal Periodic Review process; parliamentary oversight, including of public finance management and accountability; the independence and sustainability of judiciaries; the implementation of election observation missions; support to national election management bodies and national human rights institutions; and national anti-corruption efforts. In this context, Heads noted the establishment of the Commonwealth Association of Public Accounts Committees as a network for strengthening public financial management and accountability, these being vital in maintaining the trust of citizens and the integrity of governments and legislatures. Heads noted and recognised the work of the Commonwealth in advocating anti-corruption efforts.

Migration

10 Heads observed that migration, if properly harnessed and managed, can deliver economic and social benefits which improve the resilience and prosperity of Commonwealth member states. Heads underlined the importance of safe, orderly and regular migration and of ensuring full respect for human rights and the humane treatment of migrants, regardless of their migration status, and of refugees and displaced persons. Heads also observed that the world is facing exceptional levels of displacement of people, and this increases and exacerbates complex humanitarian challenges. They agreed to support efforts to achieve an ambitious World Humanitarian Summit in May 2016.

11 Heads agreed to enhance national and international efforts to address the causes of irregular migration including prevention and abatement of conflict and violent extremism and terrorism; eradicating poverty and promoting sustainable economic development; strengthening the rule of law; nurturing inclusive and pluralist political systems; combatting organised crime, human trafficking and people smuggling, and modern day slavery; and reinforcing respect for human rights. Heads stressed the importance of international cooperation and adherence to international law as applicable in regard to migration. Heads invited those states which wish to become States Parties to the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families to do so, and urged States Parties to the Treaty to implement it fully.

12 Heads noted the outcome documents of the Valletta Conference on Migration, and called on all stakeholders to work towards a lasting solution to this global issue.
Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group

13 Heads adopted the Report of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) and noted the Group’s efforts to implement its strengthened mandate that was agreed by Heads in 2011. Recognising the important role played by CMAG in safeguarding the Commonwealth’s fundamental political values, Heads encouraged CMAG to take further steps to implement this strengthened mandate.

14 Heads agreed that the following member governments should serve on CMAG for the next two years: Cyprus, Guyana, India, Kenya, Namibia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Solomon Islands, and Malta (ex officio as Chair-in-Office).

Sustainable Development

15 Heads welcomed the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, an historic outcome which has the ability to transform the world. They recognised that implementation of this Agenda would lead to the eradication of poverty in all its dimensions and ensure no one is left behind. Heads committed to support its implementation by 2030. They reaffirmed their commitment to work together to create an enabling environment to implement the 2030 Agenda in the spirit of global partnership and solidarity. In this context, they also welcomed the Addis Ababa Action Agenda adopted at the Third United Nations International Conference on Financing for Development which is integral to the realisation of the 2030 Agenda.

16 Mindful of the importance given to the environment by the Commonwealth, including in its Charter, Heads welcomed the Gaborone Declaration for Sustainable Development in Africa adopted by African countries, that seeks to promote sustainable production and consumption patterns, which will lead to climate-compatible sustainable development by incorporating the value of natural capital in the development agenda of countries.

17 Heads recognised that the full family of Commonwealth intergovernmental and accredited organisations is a valuable shared asset, and they encouraged special consideration be given to the particular role which the Commonwealth and its people, through its Charter, can play in advancing the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

18 Heads agreed that, in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals, the Commonwealth should provide continued assistance to member states in attaining long-term debt sustainability by means of technical advice on institutional strengthening, debt financing, debt strategy formulation and debt restructuring. Heads also agreed that the Commonwealth should facilitate member states’ efforts to obtain adequate and predictable resources from a variety of sources, technology, and capacity-building for developing countries to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

19 Heads underlined the importance of the G20 continuing in its discussions and decisions to take into account the development concerns of non-G20 states,
and expressed satisfaction with the role played by the Commonwealth to promote this including through the Annual Commonwealth Dialogue and regular G20 outreach with the Commonwealth. Heads also expressed appreciation for the continuing support of the G20 to ensure that the needs and priorities of developing states - small and large - are taken into account, reflecting the Commonwealth’s commitment to the principle of inclusiveness in global decision-making bodies. Heads stressed the importance of seeking to strengthen and broaden the Commonwealth-G20 relationship.

20 Heads of Government highlighted the importance of the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development. Heads noted that integrated approaches to ocean management, in accordance with international law, in particular the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, offer the prospect of better ocean governance, and the conservation and management of marine resources, habitats and biodiversity. Heads also recognised that the development of a sustainably-managed ‘blue economy’ offers significant opportunities for economic growth and general development for many Commonwealth member states. Heads also welcomed the prospect of capacity building partnership activities in support of these aims.

Small States

21 Heads recognised that while some small states enjoy medium to high GDP per capita, giving the impression of strength, they continue to suffer disproportionately from diseconomies of size, frequent external shocks such as the 2008 economic recession which gravely impacted their economies and societies, and adverse events including natural disasters and environmental change which can affect the entire population and substantially hamper sustainable development or even threaten their very existence. Heads recognised that the Commonwealth has always been a strong advocate for the cause of small states by raising international awareness of their vulnerability. Heads recognised in particular the need to address the debt and financing needs of small states and called for innovation and new partnerships, and for the international community to continue actively to explore innovative measures to alleviate their vulnerabilities and challenges. Accordingly, they welcomed the work of the Commonwealth Open-Ended Ministerial Working Group on Small States, the development of a Commonwealth Resilience Framework, and the establishment of the Small States Centre of Excellence in Malta.

22 Heads affirmed the work of the Commonwealth Open-Ended Ministerial Working Group on Small States to provide global advocacy and coordinate Commonwealth efforts on small states matters, in particular: i) strengthening resilience as an overarching framework; ii) development financing and trade including the use of vulnerability criteria for access to resources, debt, debt swaps, and trade preferences; iii) ocean governance frameworks; iv) climate change, including capacity-building efforts and energy concerns; v) tax cooperation and the operation of international financial centres; vi) outreach in the context of the G20 and with regional intergovernmental organisations, including strengthening regional organisations and mechanisms for resilience; and, vii) the attainment of the 2030 Agenda, including the Sustainable Development Goals. Heads recognised the added
value that the Small States Centre of Excellence would bring to small states through the promotion of their interests and the delivery of targeted capacity-building programmes and other support. They encouraged member states to support the mobilisation of resources for the Centre.

**Climate Change**

23 Heads met in a Special Executive Session to discuss climate action, recognising the leadership exercised historically by Commonwealth leaders on this pressing global challenge. They agreed on the seriousness and urgency of the threat posed by climate change, and the need for an ambitious agreement in Paris. They therefore adopted the Commonwealth Leaders’ Statement on Climate Action which they undertook to highlight and advance at the 21st session of the Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

24 Heads welcomed the establishment of the initial phase of a Commonwealth Climate Finance Access Hub to help build the capacity of Commonwealth small and other climate vulnerable states to access climate finance with regional support, and welcomed the hosting of the Hub in Mauritius. Heads encouraged financial support to the Hub and continuing innovation to develop other mechanisms for addressing climate finance requirements including consideration of a possible Commonwealth ‘blue bond’.

**Trade**

25 Heads reiterated their strong commitment to rules-based, transparent, free and fair multilateral trade and investment as a foundation for economic development and growth, as reinforced by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Heads noted the lack of progress in the conclusion of the Doha Development Agenda and encouraged all possible efforts to advance the Agenda and other global trade negotiations, including during the 10th World Trade Organisation Ministerial Conference in December 2015, in Kenya. Heads encouraged more member states to ratify the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement. Heads recognised the importance of creating a fair and equitable trading system. They also recognised the need for capacity-building that promotes inclusive and effective participation in the international trading system, recognising the special requirements of least developed countries and small and vulnerable economies.

26 Heads welcomed the launch of the voluntary Commonwealth Trade Finance Facility, initiated in Malta to help augment trade and investment finance, particularly for small and other developing economies with limited access to trade finance. Heads also welcomed offers of investment in the Facility and looked forward to its early implementation.

**Youth**

27 Heads recalled the Commonwealth theme for 2015, ‘A Young Commonwealth’, and the vital role that young people will play in shaping their societies and in the fulfilment of the Sustainable Development Goals. Heads reiterated
their commitment to empowering young people as partners and agents of change, including investment in meaningful participation in national decision-making, support for youth-led initiatives, and expansion of employment and entrepreneurship opportunities. Heads undertook to protect and strengthen the rights of young people, as set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

28 Heads recognised the important leadership role of young people. They agreed to continue supporting youth-led approaches that add value across the Commonwealth and globally, and to promote, support and work in partnership with the Commonwealth Youth Council as well as regional and national youth bodies. Heads applauded the Youth Development Index and the growing regional networks of alliances of young entrepreneurs.

Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment

29 Heads underlined that national development and prosperity cannot be fully achieved or be complete unless the needs of girls and women are taken fully into account, and their voices are heard at all levels of community and national planning and decision-making, and their effective participation is ensured in the political, economic and social life of society. Heads reaffirmed their conviction that gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls should be mainstreamed into development, and reaffirmed their commitment to prioritising this issue in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and within the work of the Commonwealth Secretariat.

30 In that context, Heads gave special emphasis to the overarching importance of female education in their social uplift, and in their political and economic empowerment. They also stressed the need to sensitise the international community to women’s health needs, in particular maternal, newborn and child health and malnutrition, which pose impediments to their socio-economic development. Heads agreed to continue efforts to eliminate all forms of gender-based violence, including in conflict and other emergency situations.

31 Heads welcomed the continuing efforts by member states and Commonwealth bodies to prevent and eliminate child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation as barriers to development and the full realisation of girls’ and women’s human rights. Heads also encouraged support for already married girls, adolescents and women who have been affected by such practices. Heads encouraged cooperation with regional and global efforts, and concerted action at the national level to develop and implement holistic, comprehensive and coordinated responses and strategies to address this issue, including those aimed at the eradication of poverty, and protecting girls’ and women’s right to education.

Public Health

32 Heads recognised the importance of tackling communicable and non-communicable diseases, including malaria. They underlined the importance of routine immunisation programmes. Heads reaffirmed their commitment towards mak-
ing the complete eradication of polio a global priority. Heads called on the Commonwealth at large to support the strengthening of policies for universal health coverage in order to build strong and resilient health systems that will, in turn, enable better responses to public health threats and emergencies, as well as to address the increasing burden of communicable and non-communicable diseases. Heads also called for continued promotion of collaborative research into communicable and non-communicable diseases, as well as collective Commonwealth action to advocate for global health security and the reduction of all public health threats, including the global imperative of addressing antimicrobial resistance.

**Country Situations**

33 Heads of Government welcomed the progress in the bilateral relations with the signing of thirteen cooperation agreements between Belize and Guatemala. They also welcomed the signing of a Protocol to their Special Agreement which adds flexibility to holding the required referendum in both countries to submit Guatemala’s claims to the International Court of Justice for a final determination. Heads recognised the important role of the Organization of American States in the efforts of both countries to maintain peace and stability between them. They reiterated the Commonwealth’s full support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Belize.


35 Heads noted that the Geneva Agreement of 1966 between the Parties provides a range of mechanisms for an expeditious solution to the controversy arising from Venezuela’s contention of invalidity of the 1899 Arbitral Award, which definitively settled the land boundary between Co-operative Republic of Guyana and Venezuela. Heads expressed their full support for the United Nations Secretary General to choose a means of settlement in keeping with the provisions of the Geneva Agreement of 1966, to bring the controversy to a definitive end. Heads endorsed the outcome statement of the Commonwealth Ministerial Group on Guyana following its meeting in September 2015, and reaffirmed their unequivocal support for the maintenance and safeguarding of Guyana’s sovereignty and territorial integrity.
Movement of Commonwealth Citizens

36 Heads recalled the importance to the people of the Commonwealth of easier movement between member states of the Commonwealth for legitimate and temporary reasons in order to benefit from stronger economic, official and cultural cooperation. Heads noted the proposal for a ‘Commonwealth Advantage’ under which all member governments would consider further possible measures to enhance the scope for Commonwealth citizens to access each others’ countries more easily and for longer than is currently possible, and the benefits therein where they do not conflict with national legislation and international obligations regulating visa policies. They noted the efforts made to date by the working group in this regard and requested a further progress report at their next meeting.

Commonwealth Collaboration

37 Heads affirmed the strong convening power of the Commonwealth and expressed their gratitude to all representatives of member governments who had met in Commonwealth Ministerial meetings since the last CHOGM, including Ministers of Education, Finance, Foreign Affairs, Health, Law, Sport, and Youth. Heads underlined the importance of these gatherings of Ministers for advancing shared Commonwealth values and objectives and building consensus at both the national and international levels. Heads received with appreciation the outcome statements from these Ministerial meetings, as annexed.

38 Heads expressed their appreciation to parliamentarians, local government representatives, senior officials, civil society and others, for convening as a Commonwealth to share good practices and mobilise support for common goals, including at the Commonwealth Science Conference held in India in 2014 and the Commonwealth Local Government Conference in 2015 in Botswana. Heads further welcomed Singapore’s offer to host the next Commonwealth Science Conference in 2017, and encouraged member states to participate in the conference.

39 Heads welcomed the impact and results achieved in the work of the Commonwealth Secretariat as reflected in the Secretary-General’s biennial report and in the Strategic Plan. Heads agreed that the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation (CFTC) should continue its efforts in accordance with the Strategic Plan. Heads noted that the size of the CFTC had been reduced and encouraged member governments to make voluntary pledges to this flagship of Commonwealth cooperation, whilst also encouraging continued efforts to secure innovative and new sources of funding for Commonwealth mutual technical exchange and support.

40 Heads noted that, in this the 50th anniversary year of the Commonwealth Secretariat, the governance arrangements of the organisation had not been reviewed in over a decade. They mandated the Secretary-General to convene a high-level group to review the full governance arrangements of the Commonwealth Secretariat to ensure that its governance is streamlined and integrated in order to improve oversight, efficiency and transparency.
41 Heads received with appreciation the report of the Commonwealth Foundation. Heads noted the consonance between the Commonwealth Foundation’s mission and Sustainable Development Goal 16 with its emphasis on peaceful and inclusive societies and building effective, accountable institutions at all levels. Heads recognised the importance of developing the capacity of civil society to engage with institutions constructively at the regional level and the developmental value of creative expression as advanced through the Commonwealth Writers initiative. Heads welcomed the Foundation’s contribution to enabling the exchange of ideas between civil society and institutions through its grants programme on participatory governance for development.

42 Heads welcomed the work of the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) and its ‘Learning for Development’ approach in enhancing access to quality education and training, leading to employment and entrepreneurship. Heads commended the COL’s Strategic Plan 2015-2021, which they envisaged would add value to national efforts to accelerate progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals through the uses of appropriate information and communication technologies. Heads expressed particular appreciation for the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth and its use of innovative technologies for human resource development in small states, as well as the special initiative to prevent child marriage. In view of the importance of education, Heads requested COL and the other related intergovernmental organisations, as well as Commonwealth Associated Organisations, to study the possibility of organising education fora at future CHOGMs.

43 Heads commended the rejuvenation of the Commonwealth Games movement, recognising the success of the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games, and encouraged the Commonwealth Games Federation, the Commonwealth Advisory Body on Sport, and the Commonwealth Secretariat to continue to collaborate to position the Commonwealth Games as an instrument to promote sustainable development, peace and community cohesion, respect and understanding, and the shared values of the Commonwealth particularly amongst young people. They noted that all Commonwealth members look forward to meeting at the XXI Commonwealth Games on the Gold Coast, Australia, in 2018.

44 Heads welcomed the continued active participation and support of the eighty accredited Commonwealth organisations. Heads recognised that each had a valuable role in promoting Commonwealth values and principles; providing innovative thinking, advocacy and practical support for Commonwealth citizens; and, raising the profile and impact of the Commonwealth as a whole. Heads noted the thoughtful submissions prepared collectively by accredited organisations, as annexed.

45 Heads underscored the need for a greater level of collaboration among accredited Commonwealth organisations, particularly between Commonwealth intergovernmental and Associated Organisations. They also encouraged cooperation with the United Nations, particularly its Specialised Agencies, as well as with relevant regional intergovernmental organisations given that they have complementary capacities, so as to promote synergies and significantly contribute to enhanced outcomes within and across the Commonwealth.
Heads recognised the important work being advanced by the Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Trust to promote youth development and to address preventable blindness in all Commonwealth member states.

Commonwealth Secretary-General

Heads were pleased to announce their selection by consensus of the Rt Hon Patricia Scotland as the sixth Commonwealth Secretary-General for a four year term, and committed their governments to supporting her in further efforts to advance the Commonwealth’s values and principles as well as its institutions as dynamic and contemporary agents of positive change for all Commonwealth citizens. Heads expressed their warm appreciation to the outgoing Secretary-General, Kamalesh Sharma. They commended his contributions to fostering a Commonwealth that is a strong and respected voice in the world; enlarging its networks, including through the ‘Commonwealth Connects’ collaboration platform; and sustaining its global relevance and profile. They paid tribute to his commitment to improving the lives of all peoples of the Commonwealth.

Parallel Meetings in Malta

Heads thanked the organisers and all participants in the four fora held on the eve of their meeting: the Youth Forum, Women’s Forum, People’s Forum, and Business Forum. Heads recognised especially the contribution made by the recently-established Commonwealth Enterprise and Investment Council in the success of the Business Forum. Heads underlined the importance and additional value for the Commonwealth that had been achieved through the success of the inaugural Women’s Forum, and agreed it should become an integral part of future CHOGMs. Heads took note of the submissions prepared as outcomes from the fora, as annexed.

Heads recognised that many Commonwealth organisations and individual citizens had gathered in Malta at the time of their Meeting to contribute in a richly diverse way to advancing the Commonwealth’s values, principles, goals and priorities.

Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Malta and beyond

Heads expressed their deep gratitude and appreciation for the warm and generous hospitality extended by the President, Prime Minister and Government, and people of Malta.

Heads expressed their warm appreciation for the attendance at their meeting of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Head of the Commonwealth.

Heads welcomed the presence at their meeting of special guests including the United Nations Secretary-General, the President of France, and the heads and representatives of international and regional intergovernmental organisations with which the Commonwealth works in fruitful collaborative partnerships. Heads expressed appreciation for the continuing presence of HRH the Duke of Edinburgh at
CHOGM in support of the Head of the Commonwealth and for his encouragement of the Commonwealth at large, particularly its young people. Heads also welcomed the presence of TRH the Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall.

53 Heads welcomed and accepted the offer of the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to host their next meeting in 2018. They also recalled with renewed appreciation the offer of Malaysia to host the 2020 CHOGM.

Malta
29 November 2015
List of Annexes [to be provided separately]

ANNEX 1: Commonwealth Ministerial Meeting Statements

ANNEX 2: Submissions from Commonwealth accredited organisations

ANNEX 3: Outcome statements from CHOGM parallel fora