



The Commonwealth

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'The Commonwealth of Nations' - delivered by the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, The Rt Hon Patricia Scotland QC

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## Introduction

Vice Chancellor, Excellencies, Distinguished Guests and Commonwealth friends...

I am deeply conscious of what a great honour it is to address you this evening, and to follow in so distinguished a line of Romanes Lecturers.

It is also a privilege to be addressing you as Secretary-General of the Commonwealth.

Just over a year ago, at their summit meeting in Malta, Commonwealth Heads of Government, entrusted to me the responsibilities of serving collectively the governments and people of our 52 independent sovereign member countries.

The Commonwealth is home to 2.4 billion people. This means that a third of the world's population are Commonwealth citizens - of whom 60% are under the age of 30.

These young people are growing up and setting out on their careers at a time when we face some very daunting global challenges. These are not merely a future possibility - they are a very present reality.

At the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Malta last year our leaders identified the major threats we face and the challenges on which we need to work together.

Many of these issues are inter-related. They also affect disproportionately people living on the margins or in disadvantaged communities.

I want to examine why it is that the Commonwealth is so well-placed to tackle those challenges, and to bring hope for the future.

I will begin by examining some of the distinctive characteristics of the Commonwealth that set it apart as an enduring, yet continually evolving and developing family.

## Overview

Bound together as much by interconnecting networks linking its people, civil society organisations and educational institutions as by governments, the Commonwealth brings 'soul' to international affairs.

I like to think of it as a 'goodwill' of nations. The special place it holds in the hearts of its citizens brings it strength.

A sense of continuity and building on the best of what we hold in common, enables it to flourish as a powerful influence for good in this changing and turbulent world.

As we move towards the end of this year during which we have been celebrating the 90<sup>th</sup> birthday of Her Majesty The Queen, it is fitting to pay fulsome and truly heartfelt tribute to the her immense personal contribution to Commonwealth continuity and building it up as a global power for good.

She embodies both the Commonwealth's historical roots and its flowering. As Her Majesty observed during her Silver Jubilee in 1977, her role as Head of the Commonwealth represents - and I quote:

"the transformation of the Crown from an emblem of dominion into a symbol of free and voluntary association. In all history this has no precedent".

It is a truly remarkable record that so diverse a family of nations, steadily growing in scope and stature, should for 65 years have had one person as the emblem of its unity.

By bringing a sense of human recognition and family to our richly diverse Commonwealth, The Queen has encouraged us to embrace positive change and fresh thinking, and to build together for the future.

She has offered wise counsel and a sympathetic ear to generations of Commonwealth leaders. Her Majesty has given unwavering dedication to the values and goals of the Commonwealth, and to all that it represents.

Early in her reign, and having in 1952 at the age of only 25 succeeded her much-loved father King George VI as Head of the Commonwealth, Her Majesty said of the Commonwealth:

"It is an entirely new conception, built on the highest qualities of the spirit of man: friendship, loyalty and the desire for freedom and peace".

It is on that new conception, and on those highest qualities of friendship, loyalty, freedom and peace that I want to dwell this evening.

In considering these qualities, and the nature of the Commonwealth, it is striking to see the

extent to which its development as a concept, and in terms of scope and membership, has tended to be gradual, responding to alterations in circumstance and changing needs, mimicking the evolution and adaptation of the natural world.

This means that our relationships do not have the feel of an artificial construct, but rather of natural growth and symbiotic development.

The first Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, Arnold Smith - a Canadian - said:

“The Commonwealth is a living organism, not a political blueprint. It has developed over the years, not according to any written constitution or central plan, but as a product of a long series of courageous and sometimes very difficult decisions, on immediate and practical issues, by statesmen from many parts of the world.”

Distinctly human in manifestation and expression, built largely on personal encounters and links, Commonwealth connection can be seen as a family tree writ large, with roots going deep and branches spreading wide.

It is a setting within which I feel particularly comfortable, as tenth in a family of twelve children, with a vast extended network of uncles and aunts, nephews and nieces, and countless cousins at various removes.

I am a classic child of the Commonwealth, born in the Caribbean, my mother from Dominica, my father from Antigua.

I have African, Scottish British, First Nation Caribbean and French inheritances. I moved to the UK as a child, and have friends and family in many of the 52 countries of the Commonwealth.

Bringing together people from nations and territories in every continent and ocean who cherish within the rich diversity of our membership a sense of belonging and of kinship and affinity, the people of our Commonwealth family find mutual support and benefit as they live, learn, work and play together.

I often drive through the magnificent Commonwealth Memorial Gates at the top of Constitution Hill near Hyde Park Corner in London.

Indeed, as a Millennium Commissioner I was involved in the decisions to fund this overdue tribute to the men and women of the Commonwealth who gave their lives in the global conflicts of the last century.

The gates were the brainchild of a great daughter of India, Baroness Shreela Flather.

Shreela's monumental gates now stand as testimony to the sacrifice and comradeship of our Commonwealth family, and the trials and tribulations that forged new awareness both of our togetherness, and of nationhood and national identity.

Carved into the stone pillar of the Commonwealth Gates, our individual and collective memories, and our shared commitment, are drawn together in the marvellously simple yet deeply inspiring words of Ben Okri, the Nigerian poet:

“Our Future is Greater than Our Past”.

In the Commonwealth we seek to build in positive ways on what is good in our shared traditions and heritage, and on our common aspirations for a safer and fairer future for all.

The Common Law, shared language, and similar systems of governance and administration give us a truly remarkable advantage when we work together towards the collective goals of the Commonwealth Charter.

This evening I want to consider with you the value of Commonwealth networks - drawing together as they do such marvellously diverse arrays of talent and potential at multiple levels.

Indeed, the Commonwealth is often characterised as ‘a network of networks’. Its distinctive feature as a family of nations is the range of organisations that link and serve our people.

These bring depth and strength to the worldwide connections of citizens in our member states - and that is what we mean by ‘An Inclusive Commonwealth’, our 2016 Commonwealth theme.

The immense good that is achieved through cooperation between governments, ministerial meetings, and official dialogue, is immeasurably enhanced by the vigour and dedication of Commonwealth civil society organisations, professional bodies, and other groups.

These networks bring together and allow for cooperation between an amazingly diverse yet closely interrelated constellation of people, institutions, communities and nations.

First perhaps we need to look at the origins and development of the Commonwealth over the past 130 years or so, from 1884 to the present day.

The halfway point in that timeline, 1949, is a point of inflexion, marking a decisive change in understanding of what the relationship between Commonwealth member states should be.

### **History and development**

It was Lord Rosebery, speaking in Adelaide in 1884, ten years before he became Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, who first used the term ‘Commonwealth of Nations’ to refer to what until then had been known only as the British Empire.

By the time of the Balfour Declaration of 1926, the 'British Commonwealth of Nations' clearly referred to the unique relationship between the United Kingdom and the Dominions. Coming together freely as equal members, they were united by common allegiance to the Crown.

In the late 1940s, India, Pakistan and Ceylon achieved independence. The decision of India to become a republic and its desire to remain within the Commonwealth offered the opportunity for innovative development and progress.

By creating the role of Head of the Commonwealth, the London Declaration of 1949 revealed the continuing strength and adaptability of the ever-evolving family of nations.

It also opened up a new chapter of opportunities for equal and voluntary association and cooperation among sovereign countries with diverse yet related models of governance and administration as a true 'Commonwealth of Nations'.

I feel sure that this achievement of her late father King George VI, and of Commonwealth statesman such as the Prime Ministers of Canada and India, Louis Saint Laurent and Jawaharlal Nehru, is what was in the mind of Her Majesty when, only three years later, she spoke of the Commonwealth as 'an entirely new conception'.

It is striking, and yet typical of the way the Commonwealth works, that the principal architects of this model and of the London Declaration should have been a French Canadian and the paramount leader of the Indian independence movement.

Indeed, as a farsighted statesman who saw beyond his times, Nehru declared that the Commonwealth brings 'a touch of healing'.

From 1944 a pattern of biennial conferences of Commonwealth Prime Ministers had been established.

It was at the 1964 meeting in London that the decision was made to create the role of Commonwealth Secretary-General and a Secretariat to serve as 'a visible symbol of the spirit of co-operation which animates the Commonwealth.'

In a visionary and pioneering move - first suggested by President Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana - the Commonwealth Foundation was established alongside the Secretariat to encourage the growth of Commonwealth wide professional associations, and to nurture and encourage links between the people of member countries and deepen the distinctive character of the Commonwealth as an association of peoples as much as of governments.

The Commonwealth family expanded steadily during the 1960s and 1970s as new members joined on becoming independent and sovereign nations. This led to the biennial meeting of Commonwealth Prime Ministers assuming a new form and becoming the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting.

The inaugural CHOGM, as it came to be known, took place in 1971 and was hosted by Singapore with its then Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew, as the very distinguished Chair.

That first CHOGM led to the Singapore Declaration, which set out the Commonwealth's core beliefs: rejection of racism and discrimination, liberty, egalitarianism, the eradication of poverty, free trade, institutional co-operation, multilateralism, world peace and support for the United Nations.

South Africa had withdrawn from the Commonwealth in 1961, and during the dark years of the fight against the evil of apartheid and for majority rule, the Commonwealth became the conscience of the international community.

The 1979 CHOGM, held in Zambia and chaired by President Kenneth Kaunda, issued a renewed condemnation of apartheid, the Lusaka Declaration of the Commonwealth on Racism and Racial Prejudice.

Commonwealth countries provided money and support for the liberation struggle, and collectively spearheaded international action against the apartheid regime.

At the Bahamas CHOGM in 1985 the Nassau Accord was agreed, and called on the government of South Africa to dismantle its apartheid policy, to enter into negotiations with the country's black majority, and to end its occupation of Namibia.

A Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group was appointed to investigate the issues involved and to report back with recommendations to a special CHOGM in London the following year.

Co-chaired by Olusegun Obasanjo, former President of Nigeria, and Malcolm Fraser, former Prime Minister of Australia, the group famously visited President Botha, and then Nelson Mandela who was still in detention on Robben Island.

The Commonwealth increased the pressure for Mandela's release, and for the internal negotiations which led to the first ever multi-racial elections in April 1994. Those elections witnessed the largest ever Commonwealth Observer Group, under the leadership of Michael Manley of Jamaica.

The new engagement with the Commonwealth was immediate: President Mandela's first visit outside the country was to London, where he led the return of South Africa to the Commonwealth.

During that visit he famously announced:

'The Commonwealth makes the world safe for diversity'.

Having helped it win its political freedom, the Commonwealth chaired the international community's donor committee on reconstructing South Africa, laying the foundations for economic liberation.

In 1991 CHOGM was hosted by Zimbabwe, and it is a sad irony - given subsequent developments - that in mapping out a course towards the new millennium it was the Harare Declaration that strengthened Commonwealth emphasis on democracy, human rights and equality.

In 2009, sixty years on from the London Declaration, the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting was hosted and chaired by Trinidad & Tobago.

A principal outcome of that meeting in Port of Spain was the Affirmation of Commonwealth Values and Principles, with commitment to collective respect for international peace and security, democracy, human rights, tolerance, respect and understanding, separation of powers, rule of law, freedom of expression, development, gender equality, access to health and education, good governance and civil society.

That 2009 CHOGM also led to the commissioning, by my predecessor as Secretary-General, of an Eminent Persons Group to: 'undertake an examination of options for reform in order to bring the Commonwealth's many institutions into a stronger and more effective framework of co-operation and partnership'.

One of the most significant recommendations made by the Group was for there to be a Charter of the Commonwealth.

### **Commonwealth Charter & 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

Following extensive national consultations in member states, and with civil society, the Charter of the Commonwealth was adopted by Heads of Government in December 2012, and signed by Her Majesty The Queen, Head of the Commonwealth, at Marlborough House in March 2013.

The Charter is now the defining document of the Commonwealth and sets out the core values and principles to which all our member states voluntarily commit themselves.

Significantly, although it was ratified by Heads of Government, the opening words of the Charter are: 'We the people of the Commonwealth'.

This makes clear once again the distinctively personal rather than institutional way in which Commonwealth connection and impact are experienced and made manifest.

The sixteen Articles of the Charter - ranging from Democracy, through Tolerance, Respect and Understanding to Gender Equality and Young People - prefigure the seventeen goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, whereby we seek to achieve three extraordinary things in the next fifteen years:

- end extreme poverty,
- fight inequality and injustice,

- fix climate change.

These goals, adopted a year ago, match the ambitions of our Commonwealth Charter, and our 52 member countries collectively are committed to working on them together in a spirit of goodwill and mutual support.

The difference between our sixteen Commonwealth Charter headings, and the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals, is because the latter treat 'Partnership' separately, whereas we regard it as overarching and integral to each of our ambitions.

As the basis of Commonwealth connection at multiple levels, and the animating principle of all that we do and aspire to, 'Partnership' is fully covered in the preamble to the Commonwealth Charter - and inspires our approach to every one of its sixteen articles.

Partnership is one of the five 'P's that encompass all that we seek to achieve in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and all that we work for as the Commonwealth family.

### **Five 'P's and my vision for the Commonwealth**

The five 'P's are People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnerships.

These also encompass my personal vision for the Commonwealth - and so let me say something about each of them.

#### **People**

Under the heading 'People', I see respect for human dignity as paramount. That is why I have set 'Eliminating Violence Against Women and Girls' as both a personal and a Commonwealth priority

Violence against women and girls is disturbingly persistent and pervasive worldwide. Domestic violence affects one in three women worldwide, and is the greatest cause of morbidity in women and girls.

It kills and injures more women and girls than anything else.

Even though most of our Commonwealth member states have laws designed specifically to protect the rights of women who are assaulted or abused, implementation of such legislation can prove really difficult.

That is why practical Commonwealth tools such as judicial bench books to guide those responsible for upholding laws that protect women against violence are so important - and are valued so highly by legal practitioners and human rights defenders in our member states.

We are living through times in which an unprecedented number of women are moving into the highest offices in politics, business and civil society. I want to make sure that we take decisive action to draw on that huge pool of female talent now available within the Commonwealth and beyond.

As our Commonwealth Charter makes clear, justice demands that women have the right to equality in all areas. This must be embedded within legal systems, upheld in both law and practice, and realised at every level of economic and political activity.

Advancing women's political participation and leadership and economic empowerment are critical building blocks for achieving the SDGs.

Another priority under the heading of 'People' is Youth.

It is in youth that we step through the gateway of promise, and set out along the road to fulfilment. The young people of the Commonwealth are leading us to a future of ever greater aspiration, and even greater achievement.

We recently launched the 2016 Report of our Commonwealth Global Youth Development Index. This project continues our long established Commonwealth record of pioneering practical action on youth development.

The YDI brings together vital data on young people for analysis and to guide policies and projects for youth development. It aims to inform policy-makers and raise awareness about the key opportunities and barriers to improving youth development around the world.

The YDI also lays down a challenge. Without action to promote young people's empowerment, boosting opportunities for employment, and opening up spaces for political dialogue and civic participation, countries will be squandering their most precious resource.

Our goal through the Commonwealth Youth Programme is to include young people, and to enhance their opportunities for fulfilment through employment, through enterprise, and through deeper and more meaningful involvement in all aspects of national and community life.

It is engagement with and by youth that brings vibrancy and vitality to Commonwealth connection.

With over 60% of the population of the Commonwealth aged under 30, and in some countries over 70%, almost every Sustainable Development Goal is relevant to young people - both as beneficiaries, and as agents of change.

Involving young people in shaping the world and its systems, and investing in their development, is critical to achieving the global goals, as well as in measuring up to our shared Commonwealth values and principles.

The global youth population is at an all-time high of 1.8 billion. 640 million of them live, learn, work and play in Commonwealth countries.

However, when I say work, we need to be mindful that Commonwealth countries have higher youth unemployment rates than the global average.

Economic empowerment and positive engagement of young people, especially those facing complex and multiple disadvantages, benefits individuals and the societies and countries in which they live.

Such empowerment and engagement are critical to the well-being of young people and their ability to contribute to democracy and development.

The more skilled young people are, and the more they are involved in planning and working for the future of our societies at every level, the more opportunities and freedom they will have to fulfil their aspirations and talents.

Without the active support of youth leaders, attainment of our development objectives is impossible. Encouragingly, youth development is not heavily dependent on income per capita.

This means that low income countries can make significant advances by providing young people with opportunities to seek quality education and training, and to participate in the social, political and economic life of their localities and their nations.

Commonwealth member states, collectively and individually, have a fine track record of leading international action, and of pressing for global responses to the calamity of youth unemployment.

## **Planet**

Under the heading 'Planet', there can be no doubt that it is tackling climate change that has to be our focus.

The impact of climate change has been high on our agenda for thirty years. As long ago as the 1989, when CHOGM was hosted by Malaysia, the Langkawi Declaration on the Environment committed the Commonwealth to an active role in protecting natural balances and preventing environmental deterioration.

It stated:

"We, the Heads of Government of the Commonwealth, representing a quarter of the world's population and a broad cross-section of global interests, are deeply concerned at the serious deterioration in the environment and the threat this poses to the well-being of present and future generations. Any delay in taking action to halt this progressive deterioration will result in permanent and irreversible

damage..."

This longstanding focus bore fruit a year ago when our biennial Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting assembled in Malta. Days before COP21, our member states - in their rich diversity - agreed to set ambition high, and paved the way for the Paris Agreement.

A practical and distinctively Commonwealth contribution is the technical support being offered by our Commonwealth Climate Finance Access Hub.

Despite global commitments to \$100 billion a year being made available for climate mitigation and adaptation by 2020, only \$726 million of available finance has so far been received by our Commonwealth small states.

The Commonwealth Hub, hosted by the Government of Mauritius, now provides guidance and support to help ensure that our member countries are able to access the resources they need.

Our Commonwealth priority in tackling climate change is to move from agreement to action. Among our members there are small islands, threatened by rising sea levels, and larger states vulnerable to flooding or desertification.

Two months ago we convened a ground-breaking and dynamic two-day workshop at Marlborough House, our Commonwealth headquarters in London, looking at the possibilities and potential for 'Regenerative Development to Reverse Climate Change'.

The Commonwealth has long been a pioneer of innovative thinking and conjoined action on the existential threat posed to many of our communities - and in some cases entire member states - by destructive human impact on the delicate balance of life on this planet.

New approaches such as biomimicry, copying the R & D of nature, creating carbon eating concrete, and cooling systems like termite mounds, permaculture, circular and symbiotic economics - made possible by science, technology and changed attitudes - now offer the possibility for reversal of that damage - and I find it very exciting that we, as the Commonwealth, can offer leadership in adopting and implementing those new technologies.

I was able to convey this innovative thinking as another pioneering Commonwealth contribution when I addressed the High Level Segment of COP22 in Marrakesh three weeks ago.

It is through such approaches, I believe, that - as on so many occasions in the past - the potential of our Commonwealth networks and meetings will be mobilised to lay the foundations on which progressive global consensus can be built to create a safer and more sustainable future for all.

**Prosperity**

We now come to 'Prosperity'.

When I was appointed by Heads of Government at their meeting in Malta last November, I said that I wanted to put the 'wealth' back into the 'Commonwealth', and the 'common' back into 'wealth'.

In saying that, I was simply articulating the essence of what motivates us as a family - and what has for more than sixty years guided us along shared pathways towards good governance, sustainable growth, and inclusive social and economic development.

The wealth is more than just money, it demands real investment in the social capital of each of our member states.

We have one very important asset which is ours and ours alone, we call it Commonwealth Advantage.

The recent Commonwealth Trade Review - an excellent study, full of fascinating data - shows that there is a measurable advantage in intra-Commonwealth trade, which has never been more in need than in this new post-Brexit world.

Fraud and corruption potentially destroy that Commonwealth Advantage - and the benefits of having similar institutions. We must use our innate sense of kinship and affinity, and the Common Law to leverage real change in the Commonwealth.

We are well placed - and have connections and mechanisms that can help us - to devise shared approaches to the challenges we jointly face.

Exchange of ideas as well as trade are the lifeblood of Commonwealth connection. They bring employment, and help to share the social and economic benefits of growth and prosperity more equitably among citizens and communities in all our member states.

As Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, and as a proud daughter of the Caribbean, I take as one of my guiding texts the words of the great St Lucian economist and Nobel laureate, Sir Arthur Lewis.

He said:

'the fundamental cure for poverty is not money but knowledge'.

I am committed to championing all those who work to liberalise and increase trade in order to drive sustainable and inclusive economic and social development.

The Commonwealth offers unrivalled networks, through which to expand trade and investment among our member states.

Commonwealth Secretariat research and analysis shows that when both bilateral partners are Commonwealth members they tend to trade 20% more, and generate 10% more foreign

direct investment inflows than would otherwise be the case.

This potent Commonwealth effect implies bilateral trade costs between Commonwealth partners are on average 19% lower compared with those for other country pairs.

It is good business sense to make the most of this unique asset for the greater good of all our citizens.

Trade among Commonwealth countries has risen from about \$200 billion in the year 2000 to more than \$600 billion today. By 2020, we estimate it will be worth \$1 trillion. So the economic links between our nations are growing, some would say exponentially.

This offers huge opportunity over coming years to make even more of Commonwealth trade advantage, and to extend it from 19% to perhaps 30% or beyond.

To do so we will need to enhance and share best commercial and regulatory practice within similar statutory frameworks across the Commonwealth so that we make it even easier and better for Commonwealth members to trade one with the other.

Next year the United Kingdom will host a Commonwealth Trade Ministers Meeting, followed by the next Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in 2018. These will be pivotal meetings in terms of opening up new commercial, economic and other opportunities for all Commonwealth member countries.

## **Peace**

With that I come to 'Peace' - and our theme next year will be 'A Peace-building Commonwealth'.

The changing nature of violence in today's world is alarming, and it affects us all.

Building peace requires patience, perseverance, and determination to work for the common good in a spirit of respect and understanding.

These are all Commonwealth strengths, and our collective approach is undergirded by the splendid work of the Commonwealth Commission on Respect and Understanding.

The Commission was chaired by Amartya Sen, and its report, 'Civil Paths to Peace', issued in 2006, brings distinctive Commonwealth insights and perspectives to this pressing area of concern.

Among these is our understanding that it is by building on our multiple identities, and by finding what we hold in common rather than how we are different, that inclusive progress is made towards sustainable peace.

In this context acting early to prevent violent extremism has to be one of our top priorities.

There can be no greater responsibility than ensuring the safety and security of our citizens.

I believe this starts with women and children - which means we need to start in the home and in schools.

If there is not peace in the home, there cannot be peace in our world.

Education about the other, teaching that difference is something to celebrate and not to fear, needs to start in primary schools.

The Commonwealth has for decades supported youth-led organisations and networks to give young people a voice. This has included pioneering the development of youth workers and youth work as a profession.

We need to guide young people towards positive involvement with their peers, and with wider society as nation builders.

Such interventions enable young people to address social exclusion, ethnic or religious prejudice, and politically-motivated violence at grassroots where they can be potent catalysts for inclusion and help avert alienation.

We are currently establishing a new dedicated unit within the Commonwealth Secretariat to strengthen national, regional and global action on countering violent extremism.

If extremists can recruit a young person with just three emails, we need to know how and why, so that we can recruit them with our message and inspire them to work instead towards our goals and values.

The new Commonwealth Countering Violent Extremism Unit will support our member states with devising and implementing their own national strategies for preventing radicalisation, and for strengthening their national human rights institutions and the rule of law.

The Commonwealth way is always to encourage positive engagement, by promoting alternative narratives, strengthening justice institutions, and building platforms for dialogue.

Violence can be defeated, but we need the widest and most inclusive alliances of government, international agencies, civil society organisations, private sector actors, legal bodies, educators, youth workers and healthcare professionals.

We also need to mobilise faith leaders alongside those of no religious belief, and unite in upholding and expressing the values of our common humanity.

## **Partnership**

This brings us to 'Partnership' - and our Commonwealth flair for making connection at

multiple levels

Involving people from all walks of life, and from all member states, and providing opportunities for them to work together in shaping a safer, more equitable world, with inclusive economic growth and development in which all can share, is critical to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as in measuring up to our shared Commonwealth values and principles.

A good example of this is the way the Commonwealth developed its doctrine of the separation of powers - generally better known as the Latimer House Principles.

These were originally proposed by a small informal ginger group of experts within Commonwealth professional organisations.

Their ideas were taken up and developed more widely, including within the Commonwealth Secretariat. Ministerial buy-in then led to adoption by the Commonwealth Heads of Government.

This shows how - when the most is made of Commonwealth connection at multiple levels and of our convening power, and of the goodwill and ease with which we can interact - it leads on to global impact.

### **My vision for the Commonwealth**

Globally, regionally and nationally, we see political, social and economic change occurring at a very rapid pace.

By offering support to strengthen and stabilise national institutions, and by providing targeted and practical assistance to help all member states to reach the objectives they set themselves, the Commonwealth can be a steadying anchor in these turbulent times.

Our sustained work together as a Commonwealth provides the basis for major global agreements - as we saw in September and December 2015 when the consensus achieved by our Heads of Government was taken up by the wider international community.

In plotting the direction of travel for the Commonwealth our leaders provided a template for the Sustainable Development Goals, and our Commonwealth Leaders' Statement on Climate Action was the precursor to the COP21 Paris Agreement.

So that we can capitalise on our shared inheritances of the Common Law - which forms the basis for international law - and on other aspects that combine to give us our Commonwealth Advantage, I have announced that we will be setting up a Commonwealth Office of Criminal and Civil Justice Reform.

It will share templates for legislative reform and implementation of best practice to strengthen public safety, and help show what has or has not worked in our Commonwealth

jurisdictions.

Each of our jurisdictions is different, and has specific local needs and context, yet all share many similarities, and deep connection between our people and the institutions which serve them.

Partnerships with the judiciary, prosecutors, police, national human rights institutions, international agencies and civil society organisations are vital in all this work.

So in terms of value for money, benefit for our citizens, and improvement of business environment and efficiency, this is a distinctive contribution that only the Commonwealth can make. Yet what we achieve in the Commonwealth can be applied more widely.

That is why the 'Tackling Corruption Together' conference we organised at Commonwealth headquarters in May attracted such an unprecedented level of participation and interest from around the world.

It brought together government and business leaders, civil society organisations and the private sector, to agree on practical steps that will expose and make a dent in corruption.

Leaders spoke unequivocally of their determination to end impunity, root out corruption, empower victims and support activists and whistle-blowers. Such commitment is vital to the forming of a global coalition of goodwill and good practice to bolster transparency and good governance.

As I have already remarked, our 2016 theme is 'An Inclusive Commonwealth' - and inclusiveness comes from being interlinked, interdependent, interwoven. Yet it is an unfinished fabric - there are loose ends.

It is those loose ends, our acceptance of incompleteness and on occasion of inconsistency that allow for creativity, adaptation and innovation.

By being able to tie on something new we are able to grow and to develop. We are not a closed system.

We do not claim to be perfect or complete - but those untidy loose ends mean we always have an opportunity to knit in new threads, to add to the pattern - or to weave a new one.

I hope the examples I have given of how and why Commonwealth member states choose to come together voluntarily in a spirit of trust and goodwill, and to act together for the common good, have served as something of an introduction to the work and mission of this precious shared inheritance, 'The Commonwealth of Nations'.

We must value it and cherish it - not as an heirloom, but as a matchless asset and great resource for strength and cooperation in this fragile world.

It is up to all of us, Commonwealth citizens, governments and institutions of member states - in partnership with friends and neighbours in the wider international community - to understand its potential, to use it, and to make the most of its promise for a safer, more inclusive, and more sustainable future for all.

‘Our Future is Greater than Our Past’.