

Delivering a Common Future

Commonwealth Day | 9 March 2020

Commonwealth Day Message by The Rt Hon Patricia Scotland QC, Commonwealth Secretary-General

As social creatures, human beings develop and make progress by living, learning, working and playing together in communities. We share experience and learn from what those around us do; by emulating what we admire we can in turn inspire others through our own example and achievement. The Commonwealth, through its interconnected networks, sustains a vibrant ecosystem of opportunity for us to do this on a scale that is vast and global, yet very human in expression. Our great strength as a family of nations, and of peoples growing together organically, is our ability to evolve and adjust to changing circumstances – whether in the field of human rights, democracy or trade.

We see such adaptation in the natural world, and it is just as necessary in the technological world, and for fruitful cooperation among nations and in local communities. So the current focus for thinking and action in and by the Commonwealth is on *Delivering a Common Future: Connecting, Innovating, Transforming*.

We are more aware than ever how what any single country does can affect for good or ill the well-being of our entire world and the welfare of everyone with whom we share it. This beautiful blue planet is held in common trust by us all for the generations who follow.

An impressive example of how our member countries come together to pool knowledge and resources which deliver transformational change through innovation is the Commonwealth Blue Charter. It provides a

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dynamic framework within which our member countries commit to working together on ocean health and to use marine resources in sustainable ways.

When Commonwealth Heads of Government meet in Rwanda later this year, we can expect them to agree on new collaborative programmes on a range of issues, including democratic governance, and the empowerment of women and youth. Most importantly, there will be fresh commitment to practical action on the environment and living lands. This will be an important staging post on the way towards delivering more ambitious national commitments when COP 26 is hosted by the United Kingdom in November. These will carry forward the impressive record of Commonwealth engagement on climate and regenerative development.

The pioneering Langkawi Declaration on the Environment, made as long ago as 1989 when Commonwealth leaders met in Malaysia, recognised that any delay in addressing the impending climate crisis increased the existential threats to our common home: planet Earth. We have moved a long way since then, and much has happened which is positive. Yet we know that time is running out, and the need to move from declaration to implementation becomes more urgent with every year that passes. We may be the first generation to have truly experienced the tragic consequences of this climate crisis, yet we are perhaps the last with the opportunity to take action to reverse it.

Friendship, kinship and affinity among the people of our member countries make it easier for us to coordinate and deliver such positive change swiftly in ways that help to ensure no one is left behind. Respect and understanding based on goodwill raise awareness in the Commonwealth of the particular needs of vulnerable, remote and marginalised communities, wherever they are and whatever their needs.

Our conviction is that with common purpose and by learning from one another, all can give and all can gain. This approach leads to innovation that transforms lives and livelihoods so that there is inclusive progress and greater prosperity in which all can share.

It inspires us to encourage ourselves and others to more profound depths of co-operation and greater heights of achievement. So taking our cue from the theme, we can each commit this Commonwealth Day to join with others and bring change by doing something new.