

**27 November 2015**

**CHOGM Opening Ceremony – Mediterranean Conference Centre, Malta  
Speech by Commonwealth Secretary-General Kamalesh Sharma**

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Your Majesty, President Preca, Prime Minister Muscat, President Sirisena, distinguished Heads of Government, representatives and guests from the Commonwealth family and beyond: Merħba - welcome!

It is also a great pleasure to have Your Royal Highnesses in our midst. Your enduring support for our Head of the Commonwealth is greatly valued.

It is good to see CHOGM back in Malta. Through the great generosity of the Government and people of Malta we have been invited to assemble here for a second time in ten years. This fact, and the warmth of welcome extended to all who are participating in this Summit and the associated Forums, shows the depth of this country's commitment to the Commonwealth.

The Women's Forum initiated by our hosts has made a rich and valuable contribution. At its opening ceremony, we heard that powerful song, 'Sisters Are Doin' It For Themselves', which includes the line: 'Behind ev'ry great man there had to be a great woman'.

We can ignore the 'great man', but behind me certainly stands a great woman: my wife Babli.

Our greatest Commonwealth asset is the affinity, sense of kinship and goodwill that flourishes at all levels.

This feeling of mutual belonging is nurtured whenever we work together. Our shared purpose lends vitality and inspires a vision for our own citizens and for the wider world. Through mutual support and by offering practical solutions, the Commonwealth helps turn that vision into reality.

Our Commonwealth diversity is the foundation of our success in international cooperation. By serving one another and creating shared ground, we serve the greater global good.

This is expressed in our CHOGM 2015 theme: 'The Commonwealth: Adding Global Value'. A publication with that title is released this week. It selects from a vast range of pioneering social, economic and political initiatives to show how Commonwealth impact and influence make a difference.

There is now greater acknowledgment of the innovative ideas and wisdom we bring to the world at large. Our advocacy of the concept of Resilience and Vulnerability is accepted by leading global institutions, as is our insistence on equitable outcomes for all human communities irrespective of size and endowment, and our thinking and practical action on debt, trade, ocean management, climate change and capacity creation.

More ideas and action are on our agenda at this CHOGM. Malta 2015 will be recalled for championing and acting on the principle of equity and justice in global affairs, and especially the continuing determination of the Commonwealth to create space for the smaller and more vulnerable.

It will also be remembered for addressing three of the greatest collective challenges of our times: how to shape a future of dignity and opportunity for all within the new sustainable development framework; how human communities can prosper and survive in harmony with the natural world and climate; and, how to nurture connected and mutually supportive human communities that are free of radicalisation and fragmentation.

We are conscious of the acute recent challenges and tragedies arising from violent extremism and migration in particular. There is scarcely a Commonwealth member state which does not have its own tale to tell. Sharing solutions is part of our true common wealth.

We are respected as a champion of an inclusive human community – and with good reason. We make vital contributions towards rights-based and democratic development, peace building, nurturing diversity, and strengthening public institutions. Inspired by our Charter, we are clear about the core values and principles we work to safeguard and advance.

Our enduring value and indeed our greatest testimonial is the enthusiasm with which young people are embracing the Commonwealth. With a powerful mix of aspiration and inspiration, they seize the opportunities we offer to connect and converse through some of the world's most promising and inclusive networks.

A sign of our progress and vigour as a community of democracies is that 21 – close to half of our 53 member states - have held elections resulting in new leaders of government in the two years since our last CHOGM. The Commonwealth is on a rising trajectory, is in robust good health, and grows in stature, influence, relevance and respect.

CHOGM is always an opportunity to take the pulse – of global trends and the health of our association – and to continue to adapt creatively to the times. The Secretariat has led the drive for reform and renewal with enthusiasm, commitment and unwavering practical intent. Among principal multilateral organisations the world over it is recognised as the leader in systems of internal justice and in representation of women at all levels of its staff. It has supported a Commonwealth that is better connected digitally and interwoven than ever before. I like to think that we have given the celebrated convening power of the Commonwealth new and contemporary meaning.

Your Majesty, through more than sixty years you have not wavered in your vision of what this great global good can be. Your example of service has inspired me personally over the past eight years, and inspires us all with the ideal of what can be achieved through belief, thoughtful resolve and dedication.

Let us all embrace the opportunity of this Meeting to revitalise understanding by all our citizens of the richness, progress and solace that their Commonwealth identity brings. Building together on solidarity and shared ambition, and the manifold opportunities offered through our kinship and connection, we can bring closer a kinder and more secure world.

Grazzi ħafna, thank you very much.