

**10 November 2016**

**Commonwealth Youth Worker of the Year Awards Ceremony**

**Youth Work Week 2016**

**Theme: *Empowering Young People through Sport and Arts***

**Remarks by the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, the Rt Hon Patricia Scotland QC**

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Commonwealth friend and - most of all - Youth Workers and Award Nominees... greetings!

It is with pleasure and with pride that I welcome you to this gathering - pride that we are able to share with you new stories and uplifting examples of the wonderful work we celebrate annually at this Commonwealth Youth Worker of the Year Awards Ceremony.

Before announcing Commonwealth Youth Worker of the Year for 2016, which is what I know you are all eagerly waiting to hear, let me - on behalf of the entire Commonwealth family - formally congratulate all youth workers, you who are with us here, and the thousands of your counterparts in all Commonwealth member states, for the outstanding service you render.

Working alongside you, our Commonwealth vision is for the youth work profession in all our member states to become better recognised, respected and supported, as you continue to engage, empower and inspire young people to achieve more fully their potential and sense of purpose as participating and productive citizens in community life and society.

It has often been observed that the best advocates for young people are young people themselves.

Less recognised - for their role as advocates, mentors and champions of young people - are youth workers.

Too often unsung and unacknowledged, the role and contribution of youth workers to the youth development sector is as important as that of the teachers in the education sector, or of nurses in the health sector.

So today, youth workers of the Commonwealth, we celebrate your service, your commitment, and your dedication to the cause of youth development and empowerment.

Youth workers play a key role in creating the enabling and empowering conditions for young citizens, who can then contribute in multiple ways to national and local social, economic, political and sustainable development outcomes.

I am talking here about that scout or girl guide leader, the youth officer, the sports coach, the youth club coordinator, the youth outreach officer on the block, on the street corner, in a faith-based institution, in a civil society organisation, in a government office, who designs and implements programmes that change young people's lives.

I am talking about the hundreds of youth workers who serve in a voluntary capacity at weekends investing time and effort and mentoring in young people as groups and as individuals.

The Commonwealth is a global leader in the development of the youth work profession, and remains the only intergovernmental organisation for our member states focusing on this important work.

Our Commonwealth Youth Programme has determinedly raised the profile of youth work and highlighted the difference youth workers are making in the lives of young Commonwealth citizens around the world.

As a result of our efforts governments now acknowledge the vital importance of a professional youth worker sector in national youth policies and legislation.

We are committed to building the youth work sector in new ways, and through innovative partnerships and strategies over coming years.

Let me give as an example just one of the innovative partnerships and strategies that we have created, and that can help transform the future prospects for the youth work profession and young people in our member states.

We have an agreed tripartite MOU between the Secretariat, the Commonwealth of Learning and the University of the West Indies to offer, free of charge, a Youth Work Bachelor's Degree to any University or academic institution in the Commonwealth interested in offering training in youth work.

Through this partnership the Commonwealth will extend access for thousands of individuals to gain professional qualifications in youth work needed, particularly in small and vulnerable countries, and countries experiencing the youth bulge.

Work is now underway, and progressing well, towards establishing a Commonwealth Consortium of Academic Institutions to offer this Youth Work Degree and Diploma as an Open Educational Resource through the Commonwealth of Learning. It is set to become operational in 2017 for the first set of universities.

With 1.8 billion people between the ages of 15 and 29, there are more young people on our planet today than ever before. Close to 90% of them live in developing countries. Young people make up around one quarter of humanity, and in many countries, especially in South Asia and Africa, the ratio rises to one in three.

The next few decades, therefore, are an unprecedented window of opportunity for the world, and for developing countries in particular, to reap the promise of this 'demographic dividend'.

Last November world leaders agreed the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 17 goals to achieve three extraordinary things in the next 15 years:

- end extreme poverty,
- fight inequality and injustice,
- fix climate change.

These goals 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.

Every goal is in some way 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 aim of youth work is to enrich the life experience of young people and enhance their contribution to society as active, involved, useful and valued citizens. The involvement of youth work professionals is therefore vital to achieving the goals of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

Commonwealth member states, collectively and individually, have a fine track record of leading international action on youth inclusion.

Last month we 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.

There is ample evidence to show that by investing in a professional cadre of youth workers, communities are better placed to reap the vast innate potential of young people, and to reduce the negative outcomes arising from a lack of motivation or misdirected energy.

So in this year when we are celebrating 'An Inclusive Commonwealth' let us all recommit to working together and through our Commonwealth Youth Programme, and to investing resources and effort that will deepen the immeasurably beneficial impact of youth work in all our communities and national settings.

Let me again congratulate the outstanding youth workers from each of the regions represented here today, and commend our wonderful Commonwealth youth workers for continuing to raise standards ever higher in your profession.

I know that it is not we who need to urge you to continue to create those innovative interventions that transform lives, it is you who continue to inspire us to find new ways of supporting our young people by applying the creative methods and innovative approaches you pioneer and develop.

**We now come to the exciting moment when I have the honour of announcing the Commonwealth Youth Worker of the Year 2016.**

**Excellencies, guests, Commonwealth friends, it is my very great pleasure to announce that the Commonwealth Youth Worker of the Year for 2016 is....**