

Remarks for SG: ACU Event on Food Security

Good afternoon

It is a pleasure to be with you here at UK House in the margins of the Commonwealth Games which, although only a few hours old, already look like a triumph for our family of nations.

Our Commonwealth is at its best when we work together: talking, listening, sharing, preparing and acting in the common interest.

That is the spirit in which I join you today, and I pay tribute to the ACU, and to the collaborative efforts of academic institutions across the Commonwealth.

The focus of today's gathering - food security - could not be more important, timely, and demanding of that collaboration.

Food security is both a serious long-term challenge, and an acute crisis.

Before we consider the solutions we are forging, we must start with where we are.

There is enough food in the world for everyone. Yet we all know that, right now, food insecurity is increasing.

The drivers are many.

We are emerging from a terrible pandemic which, beyond the colossal and tragic cost in human life, has created unprecedented disruption to trade and economic activity. Recoveries are stalling and debt is rising.

We are faced with both the existential threat - climate change, and with the amplification of existing social, political and economic inequalities which climate change brings.

Harvests are poor and unpredictable. Droughts are increasing. Land is more acidic and harder to cultivate. In too many parts of our world, those who produce food are struggling to feed themselves.

Food insecurity is both a cause of the environmental problems we face - in our distorted relationship with this hitherto abundant planet - and an effect.

And now, the impact of conflict in our world is throttling the supply of grain - compounding economic and environmental pressures to bring us to the brink of emergency.

The World Food Programme have described 2022 as 'the year of unprecedented hunger'

Close to one billion in our world go to bed hungry every night, with 50 million people teetering on the edge of famine.

From the Central American Dry Corridor, through the Sahel to the Horn of Africa, and Eastwards to Asia, the WFP describe a **ring of fire** stretching around the world where conflict and climate shocks are driving millions of people to the brink of starvation.

Many Commonwealth countries form part of this ring of fire.

At CHOGM in Kigali last month, Heads of Government gave us a clear mandate in the Leaders Statement, and the Communique, to lead.

I am absolutely committed to that - and food security will be a primary focus for me in the run-up to, at, and beyond the UN General Assembly.

In the short term, we need the international community to step forward with practical and financial support for countries facing famine and people facing starvation.

I will be working closely and urgently with our member countries, and our multilateral partners, to ensure the Commonwealth plays its full part in the weeks and months ahead.

But long term, it is clear we need a different - more holistic - approach to food security.

For the Commonwealth, this holistic approach comes together in our Living Lands Charter: ratified by Heads of Government at CHOGM.

The Living Lands Charter is unique.

It recognises that the vulnerabilities of our ecosystems to land degradation, biodiversity loss and climate

change are closely interrelated and need to be considered collectively.

It will strengthen synergies and coordinated action at national, regional and global levels, of relevant actions under the three Rio Conventions – the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD); the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

The Secretariats for the three Rio Conventions have expressed their full support for the Charter.

Supported by Heads of Government, we are clear on the need to take a principled approach to the Living Lands Charter - and to actively cooperate with a range of partners to share knowledge, expertise, success stories, and good practices in sustainable land management, while incentivising investment flows and technological innovation.

And, through the Charter, we underline the critical guardianship provided by Indigenous peoples and local communities in protecting land and vital ecosystem services - recognising the land and resource rights of these communities, in accordance with national law and international instruments.

All Commonwealth member countries have agreed to voluntarily dedicate a 'Living Land' in their territory to future generations, in line with the Strategy set for the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration.

I believe the Living Lands Charter can be a game changer.

But it is not an end in itself - it will grow and develop as it takes hold.

And it will not implement itself - it requires our combined effort.

Combined effort is the key.

Whether in policy, research, or programmes, the world has been too narrow - too siloed - in its approach.

The idea that, in policy or programmes, climate change is distinct from - say - peace-building, is outdated.

The idea that, in academia, the climatologists should be hermetically sealed from the oceanologists and the

experts on agriculture, energy, water or humanitarian response, is old news.

In fact, it can be dangerous.

The scale and complexity of the challenges we face demands that we reach beyond our traditional disciplines and work together, in a multi-disciplinary approach.

For the Living Lands agenda to truly thrive, we need you: to crunch the data; to generate new ideas; to work with us; to support us; to challenge us; to enrich us with your knowledge. And, in doing so, to make the world safer.

I applaud the action you are already taking.

Through the LEAP 4 Food and Nutrition Security, and Sustainable Agriculture (FNSSA), which the ACU partners, there is a new drive to collaborate.

The High-Level Policy Dialogue is a real opportunity to increase synergy and coherence.

And the ACU's proposal for a Living Lands Charter Fellowship scheme, which builds on the Commonwealth Blue Charter Fellowships, is a welcome step which can strengthen the conduits between policy makers and expertise.

I am temperamentally optimistic - and I have a fierce belief in the Commonwealth's capacity to make a difference.

But occasionally, there are those who do not share this conviction. They do not have the same hope, or the same confidence.

To them, I say this: if you are in doubt about the Commonwealth's capacity for global leadership, then you need only look at our history.

In 1989 Commonwealth Leaders agreed the Langkawi Declaration. At the time, this was the most significant political statement on climate change ever issued, paving the way for the earth summit, the birth of the COP Process, and the pathway for global agreement.

In 2013, Commonwealth Leaders agreed our Charter, with its 16 tenets entirely reflecting the Sustainable Development Goals which the world would ratify two years later.

We are 56 countries, one third of the world's population, but reflective of the whole.

Stretching across 6 continents, and five basins of our one shared ocean.

We have developed and developing economies. Island states and land-locked states.

Some of the largest populations of any country in the world, and some of the smallest.

Some of the most vibrant cities, and some of the most remote indigenous communities on our planet.

What we pioneer, the world adopts.

So we must continue to break new ground.

On Food Security, Heads of Government have given me a clear mandate as Secretary-General of the Commonwealth of Nations.

And as your Secretary-General, I am sharing that mandate with you.

We need your acuity, your imagination, your commitment, and your willingness to work together more than ever.

There is no time to waste.

Thank you.