

Forging a Sustainable and Peaceful Common Future

Commonwealth Day | 13 March 2023

Commonwealth Day Message from The Rt Hon Patricia Scotland KC, Commonwealth Secretary-General

We gather as a Family of Nations to celebrate Commonwealth Day for the first time since the passing of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

Her Majesty was a remarkable person, who lived a remarkable life. Through her seven decades of service as Head of the Commonwealth, in a rapidly changing world, she was the epitome of duty, stability, wisdom and grace.

Her late Majesty loved the Commonwealth, and the Commonwealth loved her.

In our sadness at her passing, our admiration for all that she was, and our enduring gratitude for all that she gave us, we can all take heart from the fact that her vision for the Commonwealth, as an equal partnership of nations and races, has come to fruition.

As we look to the challenges and opportunities of the world today, and seek to shape our common future, we warmly welcome His Majesty King Charles III for his first Commonwealth Day as the new Head of the Commonwealth.

His Majesty has said many times that our Family of Nations has been a cornerstone of his life, and as we celebrate the tenth anniversary of the signing of the Commonwealth Charter, we share his conviction – and that of all Commonwealth leaders – that the values and aspirations it enshrines must not simply represent words on a page, but the lived experience of all.

Today, the Commonwealth stands as a voluntary association of 56 independent sovereign states, spread across five continents and six oceans. At 2.5 billion people, 60 per cent of whom are under the age of 30, we encompass around a third of the world's population.

Each Commonwealth country is different, with different histories, different circumstances, and different experiences.

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But each is united in active, engaged membership of the modern Commonwealth, bound by the blend of practical advantages, common interests and shared values which makes our Family of Nations so special.

I believe profoundly that our unique qualities and advantages mean that the Commonwealth in 2023 is not simply a part of the international system, it is a beacon within it. These qualities shine in the fact that, with a multilateral system under strain, the Commonwealth is growing, precisely because of what we stand for and what we can deliver.

The values and aspirations of our Charter, and their application in the Commonwealth and the wider world, are enduring – but they are at their most important during difficult times.

In a world experiencing serious economic, environmental and security challenges, and profound social and technological change, they offer us a clear path forward for principled and purposeful collective action to break down the barriers which confront us, and build a better future for everyone.

Just as the Commonwealth stood together in the face of apartheid, and warned of the threats of environmental breakdown as long as 34 years ago, we stand together now to face the challenges of the moment, and seize the opportunities of tomorrow.

Where there is violence and conflict, we work for peace.

Where there is insecurity, we protect the culture, process and institutions of democracy.

Where there is poverty, we tackle it.

Where there is injustice, we challenge it.

Where our brothers and sisters have their lives threatened and disrupted by the impacts of climate change, we stand with them, working tirelessly for climate action and a more sustainable world.

And at every turn, we work together to deliver a better future for the 1.5 billion young people of the Commonwealth.

The friendships and partnerships which have developed over decades mean that no Commonwealth country, or citizen, stands alone.

As we have shown so many times, when we stand together there is no storm we cannot weather, no challenge we cannot overcome, and no opportunity we cannot seize. I believe profoundly that our family of 56 nations and 2.5 billion people is stronger, more vibrant, more connected and more purposeful than ever.

So on this tenth anniversary of our Charter, as we renew our commitment to its values and to each other, let us resolve together to ensure that in the years to come, we make the peaceful and sustainable common future we all strive for a reality for the whole Commonwealth.

I wish everyone, in every part of our Family of Nations, a peaceful, joyous and purposeful Commonwealth Day.