

SECRETARY-GENERAL'S OPENING REMARKS

- Thank you Chair, and may I begin by thanking you and the Government of Rwanda for your dedication and skill as the Commonwealth Chair in Office. This is our first meeting of Foreign Affairs Ministers since CHOGM, and I know everyone will agree with me when I say that the Government and People of Rwanda did yourselves, and the Commonwealth, proud last June.
- Honourable Ministers, I take great pleasure in welcoming you and your delegations to Marlborough House, our Headquarters, during this special week for our Family of Nations.
- I dearly hope you all enjoyed the Commonwealth Day Service and Reception, as we celebrated what we all share and renewed our commitment to what we all strive for.
- It brings me great joy to see you all in person, after a long period of separation during the pandemic, and I wholeheartedly welcome the newest members of our family, Gabon and Togo, to our table of Foreign Ministers for the first time.
- But in that joy, we are reminded of our sadness, at the loss of our dear brother from Gabon, Minister Michael Moussa Adamo, and of course Her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Head of our Commonwealth Family for 70 years.
- On this note I wish to laud our dear friend, the late Michael Moussa Adamo, former Foreign Minister of Gabon, who suddenly passed away a few weeks ago. I wish to propose that we hold a minute's silence as a sign of respect.
- We will not forget them, we will always be grateful to and inspired by them, and I thank you Chair for allowing us all to reflect on their lives in such a moving way.
- In recent months I have heard from so many of our colleagues and friends how much it meant to them that the Commonwealth was so prominent in Her Majesty's funeral.
- She decided every detail, and to deliver the first lesson was not only a poignant personal honour; it was a reflection of her love for the Commonwealth.

- And I often find myself reflecting on that lesson: ‘Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding, as ye know that your labour is not in vain.’

- These are powerful words in challenging times - and our labour continues. As it does, we welcome His Majesty King Charles III as the new Head of the Commonwealth. We have all experienced his devotion to our family of nations this week, and we greatly look forward to bringing our Commonwealth together again in May around his Coronation.

- We have shown again this week that our Commonwealth Family is unique in the world: bound by our special blend of shared interests, practical advantages and shared values. We are strengthened by our diversity, and united in our commitment to our Charter.

- As we celebrate the Charter’s tenth anniversary, we can renew our commitment to the vision it expresses: for a fairer, more equitable, more peaceful and sustainable world rooted in democracy, justice and human rights.

- And we can take confidence in the firm foundation it provides us with: to face the challenges of today, and seize the opportunities of the future.

- The Charter’s indisputable and immutable principles offer us a strong framework to face the world’s present economic, environmental and security pressures together.

- They strengthen and sustain us in the face of unforeseen and damaging shocks.

- And they are our compass, helping us to steer our collective course in the right direction, towards a better future.

- In this Commonwealth Year of Peace, they shine through our work on electoral observer missions, protecting and enhancing the process, culture and institutions of democracy.

- They strengthen our work to support socio-economic development through trade and connectivity.

- They underpin our leadership on climate change, flowing through our work on climate finance, clean energy, ocean protection and biodiversity towards a more sustainable future.

- And in this Year of Youth, they remind us of our responsibility to equip the 1.5 billion young people of the Commonwealth with the tools they need to shape their futures and realise their dreams. Just one example of this is the partnerships we have developed with Intel, Simplilearn and Kings College, which will equip tens of thousands of young people with the human and skills they need to thrive in a digital world.
- None of this diminishes the scale of the challenges we all face. They are serious, they are real, and I understand the pressure you are all under.
- But in a world which can sometimes feel like it is dividing and fracturing, our Charter gives us the enduring basis to stand together and face our shared challenges as one: bringing us closer to a global system built on engagement, mutual respect, and attempts to engender trust and understanding.
- This is a fundamental strength of the Commonwealth. It makes our Family of Nations a beacon within the international system. We have been reminded of it this week, and I am sure it will shine through our discussions today.
- As we delve into today's agenda, we should never forget what we mean to each other, what we can do for each other, and that we thrive by one another's cooperation.
- And we should take heart in the reason we are here: to enable each and every one of our member states to gain strength, stability, and security, by working on our areas of mutual interest.
- By building understanding, we enable development. By building cooperation, we enable peace. And by working together, we enhance the potential of multilateralism.
- I thank you all once again for your presence here, and look forward to today's proceedings.