

**Address to the UNESCO Executive Board, Paris**

**By Rt Hon Patricia Scotland QC**

**Secretary-General of the Commonwealth of Nations**

**15 April 2016**

Chair of the Executive Board, Your Excellency Mr Michael Worbs; Director-General, Madam Irina Bokova; Chairperson of the Commonwealth Group, Ambassador Doyle; Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am glad to be speaking to you so early in my term as Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, and as I take up the responsibilities entrusted to me by our Heads of Government.

The Commonwealth and UNESCO are firm allies in what we seek to achieve and share a similar vision. We are both committed to bringing together the human community in all its diversity, and to investing in and harnessing the talents of each individual for peace and prosperity in our world.

We already enjoy constructive partnership, and this can be deepened as we offer engage in more formalised agreement as to how we can provide mutual support for each other's work, particularly in the fields of youth and education.

This will add to existing cooperation through reciprocal representation at our respective Youth Forums, policy workshops and high level meetings.

We in the Commonwealth are particularly grateful that we are able to draw on UNESCO's expertise and guidance as a member of the Technical Advisory Committee for our Youth Development Index which will be published later this year.

Mr Chair, I thank you for this opportunity to give an overview of my vision for the Commonwealth, and of how combined UNESCO-Commonwealth intervention and teamwork can have a beneficial impact in the lives and livelihoods of people throughout the world.

I'm a classic child of the Commonwealth and am incredibly lucky to come from one of the smallest islands in the 53 Commonwealth countries - Dominica. My mother is from Dominica, my father from Antigua, and I am the tenth of twelve children.

The Commonwealth I now serve covers a third of the globe's population, of which over 60% are under the age of 30. We account for almost one third of UN membership, a quarter of G20 membership, two members of the G7, 31 Small States and 24 Small Island Developing States.

It is an amazingly diverse constellation of people, of nations, shining with ideas, bright with potential and opportunity.

I set out on my watch determined to magnify and revitalise our Commonwealth contribution to global development, particularly in respect of my four priorities:

**1. First, tackling violence against women and girls.**

This has always been a priority for me.

There can be no greater responsibility than ensuring the personal dignity, safety and individual security of each one of our citizens - particularly the most vulnerable.

Domestic violence affects one in three women across the world and causes untold pain and lasting damage for those directly affected and for us all.

Violence and abuse robs children of the ability to develop and grow into their full potential, and so it is literally stealing all our futures.

**2. Secondly, the existential threat of climate change.**

I come from a small island so this is something I understand all too well.

And for so many of the Small Island States this is not about the future, we are living with the reality of climate change now and have been for decades.

But people have also told me how working together can make a difference.

Put simply, we would not have the global climate change agreement without the work started by Commonwealth countries in the Caribbean and the Pacific, and then carried forward from the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting to success in Paris last November.

And yet there is still so much more we can do.

Everyone wants to see the commitments we've made in Paris implemented and turned into practical action.

I am convinced there is much we can learn from each other and much we can show the world about building resilience and finding innovative solutions that work, and which make the world safer for all of us.

**3. Thirdly, trade and good governance.**

Among the most pressing issues of our times - not least within the context of the UN Sustainable Development Goals - is how together we address corruption, champion good governance, and build respect for human rights and the rule of law.

Action in these areas aligns closely with the values and principles set out in the Commonwealth Charter, and to which our member states have freely committed themselves.

In the Commonwealth we are particularly fortunate that we share the common law, and so can with relative facility work together within a similar legal context to create best practice toolkits that help us to deal with corruption and with other related challenges.

The Commonwealth has a long history working with UNCTAD, the International Trade Centre and the World Trade Organisation in promoting trade and

development for emerging and small economies. As Secretary-General I look forward to reinforcing and enhancing these close and constructive partnerships.

**4. Fourthly, young people - 60% who are below the age of thirty in the Commonwealth - who are our greatest asset.**

So many young people have shared with me their vision for a future that is bright and hopeful, and we need to make sure they have the health, the security, the equality of opportunity, the support in social and cultural skills, and the education to make those dreams a reality. Delivering on expectation, and enabling aspirations to be fulfilled, will do much to divert energy and attention away from the negative and destructive agenda of extremists.

Education about the other, teaching that difference is something to celebrate and not to fear, needs to start early - in primary schools and through well supported and professionalised youth work.

The Commonwealth has for decades supported youth-led organisations and networks to give young people a voice. This has included pioneering the development of youth workers and youth work as a profession.

We need to guide young people towards positive involvement with their peers, and with wider society as nation builders.

But this work needs to start earlier and younger than it traditionally has.

Our Heads of Government agreed in Malta last November to establish a new dedicated unit within the Commonwealth Secretariat to strengthen national, regional and global action on preventing violent extremism; and I committed our support to efforts of the high-level group which was set up by the UN last week when I was in Geneva for the Conference on Preventing Violent Extremism, to help us spearhead the implementation plan in June.

This will be carried forward in collaboration with civil society and education networks, and by empowering young people to work with us on the solutions we need. Our joint MOU that Ms Bokova and I signed this morning will go a long way to collaborating and contributing to promoting respect and understanding as a means of combatting violence in our world.

We are facing some of the most critical challenges many of us have ever seen - challenges that threaten our very existence - but together, working and acting as one people - we can make a different future.

I believe passionately in what the Commonwealth and UNESCO stand for and what we can achieve together because no one achieves anything on his or her own.

Our real wealth is what we have in common - our shared humanity and our common desire for a world in which everyone - no matter who they are - can expect to live their life to the full. I believe this is something the UN family also has in common.

We have ambitious plans, yes, but they are achievable with help from friends in the UN and around the Commonwealth.