

**17 April 2018**

**Commonwealth Forums Joint Plenary**

**'Towards a Common Future'**

**Notes for remarks by the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, The Rt Hon Patricia Scotland QC**

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Prime Minister May, Prime Minister Holness, Excellencies, distinguished speaker, Mr Gates, Commonwealth friends and colleagues...

What a gathering!

This is more than a plenary session of a conference, today this building becomes more than a conference centre.

Across Parliament Square are the House of Commons and the House of Lords.

You are making this the House of Dreams.

Not unfulfillable dreams, realisable dreams – the aspirations and vision of the Commonwealth Charter.

Two weeks ago, we marked the fiftieth anniversary of the assassination of Dr Martin Luther King.

He is honoured as a martyr of the twentieth century with a statue above the Great Door of Westminster Abbey across the road from this building.

Martin Luther King, famously declared 'I have a dream'.

We too have dreams, the vision of a common future.

Aspirations for a future that is fairer, more prosperous, more sustainable, and more secure.

We are working to make those dreams the new reality – here, today, now – for all those we represent, our 2.4 billion sisters and brothers, in 53 countries of the Commonwealth. We are one third of humanity.

There is another statue across the road from this building, honouring one of the greatest sons of the Commonwealth, Nelson Mandela.

This year is the centenary of his birth.

With sagacity to match his humility, Madiba observed, 'The anchor of all our dreams, my dreams,' he said, 'is the collective wisdom of mankind as a whole.'

Collective wisdom is our greatest Commonwealth asset.

Indeed, as I said in my Commonwealth Day message this year: 'We draw wisdom and insights from secular streams of thought, and from the many communities and traditions that are the sea of faith.'

I have faith in our Commonwealth.

And do you know why?

Because we also draw wisdom and inspiration from business, from youth, from women and from civil society – and each and all of these tributaries are adding from the glorious diversity of their hinterland to our vast Commonwealth ocean of knowledge and understanding.

This practical grounding to all our collaboration means that collectively we are responsive to needs.

Most valuably, it enables us to scan the horizon from many vantage points and perspectives, alert to emerging threats and on the lookout for fresh opportunities.

We then take counsel together, we plan, we imagine, we innovate.

As a convoy on the high seas, or a caravan in the desert, we draw protection from being together, and we guard to make sure that none are left behind.

These are not poetic flights of fancy; they are practical realities for a globalised world.

At the Commonwealth, we were made for this moment, we are, together, indeed the face of the future.

So this House of Dreams can fire our imagination.

Imagination can be turned into reality; and the outworking of that reality towards a common future becomes our Commonwealth future. We are joined together, not by treaty, but by will. We are choosing to be members of this Commonwealth, conjoined by our values which are precious, hard won and durable. Friends and colleagues, comrades and counterparts, let me leave with you some words of Nelson Mandela – who, as a young man, stood in the street outside this building looking skywards and dreamed of a better future.

And he said this: 'Vision without action is just a dream, action without vision just passes the time, and vision with action can change the world.'

This is what we are doing together now: changing the world. And our Commonwealth, our one third of the world can, if we choose, lead the way for a common future not just for our Commonwealth but for everyone.

I know in this room we have everything we need to do that. So go change the world!