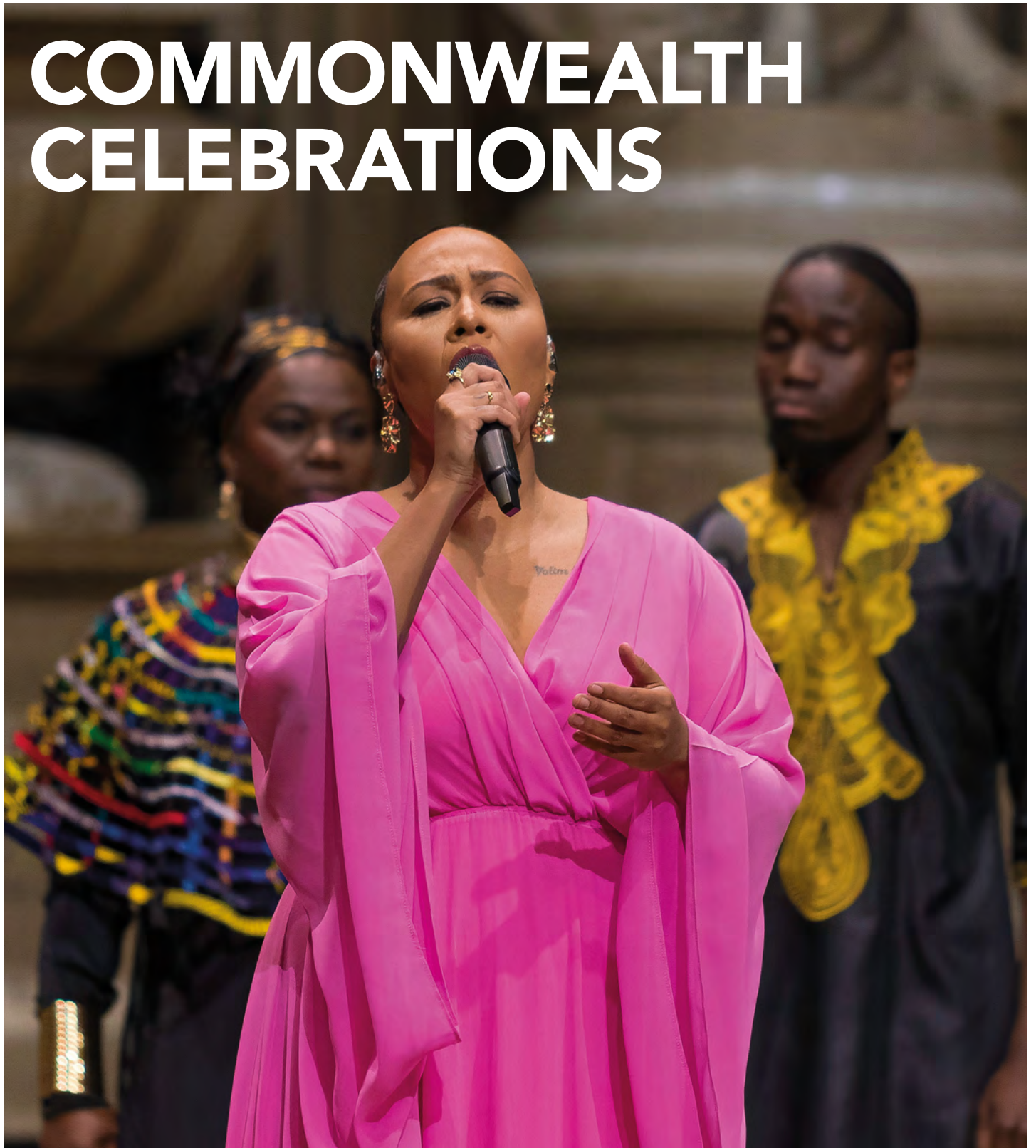


# VOICES

## COMMONWEALTH CELEBRATIONS



# THE VALUE OF A LEGACY TO THE ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY

Leaving a legacy is an impactful way to help ensure the valuable work of the Royal Commonwealth Society continues well into the future.

Remembering us in your will is a way of ensuring that we can continue to improve the lives and prospects of all Commonwealth citizens across the world by championing literacy, equality and inclusion, the environment and connected communities across the Commonwealth's 56 nations.

Including a legacy to the Royal Commonwealth Society in your will is straightforward. You can make a gift of a specific sum of money or a proportion of your residual estate. If you have already made a will, you can add a codicil which we would be happy to supply.

## LETTER OF WISHES

If you have a Charities Aid Foundation Charity Account, you may want to adjust your Letter of Wishes to include the Royal Commonwealth Society. A Letter of Wishes is a legal document which you use to provide instructions on how the balance of funds should be distributed on the closure of your CAF Charity Account. That way, you can rest assured that the remaining money will go to the causes you care about the most.

By completing a Letter of Wishes now, it can make the distribution of funds a very straightforward process.

- For more information please visit <https://www.royalcwsociety.org/leave-a-legacy>
- or contact our Head of Public Affairs, Elizabeth van der Valk by telephone 020 3727 4300
- or email [Elizabeth.vandervalk@royalcwsociety.org](mailto:Elizabeth.vandervalk@royalcwsociety.org)



ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY

Registered charity in England and Wales (226748), incorporated by Royal Charter.



# WELCOME



2022 has been a busy and exciting year so far for the Commonwealth. From Commonwealth Day and the Commonwealth Service, to Her Majesty The Queen's Platinum Jubilee, the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Kigali, Rwanda and the Birmingham

Commonwealth Games there has been ample opportunity to celebrate and shine a light on this diverse and growing Commonwealth family.

Each year, we are honoured to host the Commonwealth Service at Westminster Abbey, a highlight in the Commonwealth calendar, and this year the beginning of our Patron Her Majesty The Queen's Platinum Jubilee celebrations in the Commonwealth. Through a journey around the Commonwealth we were privileged to hear from leading Commonwealth figures including Lord Bishop Sentamu.

In June, Her Majesty The Queen's Platinum Jubilee and her 70 years of service to the people of the Commonwealth was celebrated across the world. In London, the Society organised a Commonwealth Market on King's Road showcasing Commonwealth cuisine to the local community (p. 9). We were also pleased to support River of Hope, a central part of The Platinum Jubilee Pageant (pp. 6-7) and to hear from our Vice-Patron, HRH The Duchess of Cornwall on the critical role The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition plays in promoting literacy in a special Jubilee edition of 'The Cultural Frontline' (p. 8).

The focus on the Commonwealth continued in Rwanda, with the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 2022. Governments, business leaders, civil society and youth leaders from across the Commonwealth gathered together to discuss shared challenges and opportunities for the Commonwealth (pp. 12-19). As Secretariat to the Commonwealth Youth & Gender Equality Network we were delighted to support the launch of their Commonwealth Knowledge Hub – a fantastic resource for youth advocates, which I highly recommend you check out!

I do hope you enjoy reading this edition of 'Commonwealth Voices'. If you are interested in finding out more about our work or how you can support us please visit our website.

Thank you for your continued support.

**Linda Yueh**  
Executive Chair



ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY

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# KEEP IN THE CONVERSATION

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# A CELEBRATION FOR COMMONWEALTH DAY



On Monday, 14 March 2022 The Prince of Wales and The Duchess of Cornwall, The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge and Princess Alexandra attended the Commonwealth Service at Westminster Abbey to celebrate Commonwealth Day.



↑ Jonny Brownlee MBE carries the Commonwealth Mace.

Organised by the Royal Commonwealth Society (RCS), the annual Commonwealth Service provides an opportunity to focus attention on this voluntary association of 54 (now 56 with the recent addition of Togo and Gabon – read more on pages 14-15.) countries and their commitment to promoting democracy, human rights, the rule of law and equality for its 2.5 billion citizens.

This Commonwealth Day was a particularly special one, occurring in the Platinum Jubilee year of Her Majesty The Queen, the Society's Patron, and marked her 70 years of dedication and service to the Commonwealth family. Since 1952, when Her Majesty assumed the role of Head of the Commonwealth, she has seen it grow from an association of just eight members to a network comprising 56 member states and 2.5 billion citizens. During her extraordinary reign The Queen has visited almost all of these nations.

Known for her sense of duty and devotion to a life of service, The Queen has been an important figurehead for the United Kingdom, Her Realms and the Commonwealth during enormous social change. Public and voluntary service is one of the most important elements of her work and The Queen has links, as Royal Patron or President, with over 600 charities, military associations, professional bodies and public service organisations, providing vital profile for the work of these organisations and allowing their enormous achievements and contributions to society to be recognised.

In 2022, the Commonwealth Service celebrated the 70 years of service and dedication that The Queen has shown as Head of the Commonwealth and brought a focus to the commencement of her Platinum Jubilee year. Through stories of duty, service, and community, the reflections and performances in this service highlighted the journey of The Queen's first Commonwealth Tour in 1953, through to 1954.

Guests included High Commissioners, Ambassadors, senior politicians from across the UK and the Commonwealth, faith leaders, RCS Ambassador **David Walliams** and more than 600 school children and young leaders. They were welcomed to Westminster Abbey by the sounds of the **Melodians Steel Orchestra**, an award winning, South London based group formed in 1987 by Terry Noel MBE and now providing opportunities for young people from varied social backgrounds to develop their musical skills and techniques. Once inside the Abbey the musical welcome continued with songs performed by the **London Youth Chamber Choir** in the Nave.

The Procession of Honoured Guests and Participants began with **Prince Rahim Aga Khan**, Vice-President designate of the Royal Commonwealth Society, **Brigadier Anthony Faith CBE**, Chairman of The Victoria League for Commonwealth Friendship, **The Hon. Alexander Downer AC**, Chairman of the Royal Over-Seas League and **Mr Philip Maunder**, Interim Chair of the English-Speaking Union processing and representing the Four Loyal Societies.

The processions continued with representatives of the faith communities and representatives of the churches before members of the Royal Family arrived at the Great West Door, to be greeted by the **Dean of Westminster Abbey** and welcomed by Executive Chair of the Royal Commonwealth Society **Dr Linda Yueh**, the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, the UK Prime Minister, and representatives of the Abbey and church.

After the procession, guests watched Commonwealth young leaders carry their nation's flag through the Abbey creating a colourful and visual display of the diversity and breadth of the Commonwealth family.

Once all were seated, **The Very Reverend Dr David Hoyle**, Dean of Westminster gave the Bidding and highlighted how

**“In words and music, in the Abbey, we will now retrace the steps of her great Commonwealth tour begun seventy years ago. Then we will give thanks to God for our Queen and our common life.”**

The journey began in the Caribbean and the Americas, where Her Majesty's tour began nearly 70 years ago. **Mica Paris** performed 'Mama Said', before the tour continued on to the Pacific and members of the **Whānau London Voices** sang 'Ka Waiata'. We also heard from the first of our two speakers, **Elizabeth Kite**, a Queen's Young Leader and Royal Commonwealth Society Associate Fellow from Tonga, and named after The Queen. Elizabeth, as someone who has dedicated herself to a life of public service, reflected on the importance of giving back to one's community.



↑↑ RCS Executive Chair Dr Linda Yueh welcomes Society Vice-Patron HRH The Duchess of Cornwall.

↑ Commonwealth flag bearers process through the Abbey.



↓ Mica Paris sings 'Mama Said'.

↓↓ Elizabeth Kite speaks from the Nave pulpit.



Onto Asia where **Ayesha Dharker Taylor** and **Jasdeep Singh Degun**, virtuoso sitarist, performed 'Over the Moon', a poem written specifically for the occasion by Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry award winner, **Imtiaz Dharker**.

**Emeli Sandé** and the **London African Gospel Choir** (LAGC) came together to create a unique celebration of Africa's wonderful singing traditions. The LAGC began by singing 'Molweni', which simply means 'Hello', before joining with Emeli to perform 'Brighter Days'. Together these songs shared a message of hope and unity for the future.

**The Right Reverend and Right Honourable the Lord Sentamu**, the former Archbishop of York and an eminent member of the Commonwealth diaspora community in the UK gave an Address. In his Address he reflected on Her Majesty The Queen's Platinum Jubilee and her 70 years of dedicated service to the Commonwealth:

*“ Conforming her life to the example of Jesus Christ; her insight into God, the World, Self and Others; her Wisdom to know that her continual servanthood to the people of the Commonwealth depends on God alone; her companionship and friendship of Christ, in joy and desolation, is at the heart in the growth of her life in Christlikeness. The Holy Spirit working in her has made Service and Duty her everyday way of life. ”*

British Prime Minister, **The Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP** gave the Bible reading as Chair-in-Office of the Commonwealth; and the Commonwealth Secretary-General, **Baroness Scotland**, led the congregation in the Act of Affirmation to the Commonwealth.

The final performance was a fitting and uplifting end to this special service, and brought together British lyric soprano **Nadine Benjamin MBE** with singers from across the Commonwealth for the world premiere of 'Beacon of Brightest Light'. This anthem was inspired by Her Majesty The Queen's Platinum Jubilee. Young leaders from the Royal Commonwealth Society and The Queen's Commonwealth Trust wrote poems and sentiments about The Queen which were then collated into a lyric and set to music by composer **Debbie Wiseman OBE**.

The Dean concluded the Commonwealth Service by introducing the blessings. Faith leaders **Swami Suryaprabha Didi**, representing the Hindu Community, **Malcolm Deboo**, representing the Zoroastrian Community, **Rabbi Debbie Young-Somers**, representing Jewish Reform Synagogues, and **Maulana Sayed Ali Abbas Razawi**, representing the Shi'a Muslim Community offered words of blessing for the Commonwealth.

All photos credit: Dean and Chapter

**MORE INFORMATION**

The Commonwealth Service can be viewed on demand via the **BBC iPlayer** (UK only). The service programme and photos of the event are available to view on our website: <https://www.royalcsociety.org/commonwealthservice>



↑↑ Ayesha Dharker Taylor and Jasdeep Singh Degun perform 'Over the Moon' by Imtiaz Dharker.

↑ Emeli Sandé and the London African Gospel Choir perform.



↓ The Rt. Reverend and Rt. Hon the Lord Sentamu gives an Address.

↓↓ Nadine Benjamin sings 'Beacon of Brightest Light'.



# THE QUEEN'S COMMONWEALTH DAY MESSAGE 2022



Jacob King/PA Wire/PA Images

“ *In this year of my Platinum Jubilee, it has given me pleasure to renew the promise I made in 1947, that my life will always be devoted in service.*

*Today, it is rewarding to observe a modern, vibrant and connected Commonwealth that combines a wealth of history and tradition with the great social, cultural and technological advances of our time.*

*That the Commonwealth stands ever taller is a credit to all who have been involved.*

*We are nourished and sustained by our relationships and, throughout my life, I have enjoyed the privilege of hearing what the relationships built across the great reach and diversity of the Commonwealth have meant to people and communities.*

*Our family of nations continues to be a point of connection, cooperation and friendship. It is a place to come together to pursue common goals and the common good, providing everyone with the opportunity to serve and benefit.*

*In these testing times, it is my hope that you can draw strength and inspiration from what we share, as we work together towards a healthy, sustainable and prosperous future for all.*

*And on this special day for our family – in a year that will include the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting and the Commonwealth Games – I hope we can deepen our resolve to support and serve one another, and endeavour to ensure the Commonwealth remains an influential force for good in our world for many generations to come.*

**Elizabeth R.**





# RIVER OF HOPE

This spectacular project gave over 10,000 children the opportunity to have their artwork seen in Her Majesty The Queen's Platinum Jubilee celebrations.

River of Hope formed a central part of The Platinum Jubilee Pageant which took place in London, on Sunday, 5 June 2022. Schools from the UK and 17 Commonwealth countries took part. They made magnificent artworks inspired by Her Majesty's great love and respect for the natural environment. 200 designs were then chosen to be printed onto silk flags and these were paraded at the Jubilee Pageant, accompanied by the wonderful 'big band' sound of Kinetika Bloco and Oi Musica.

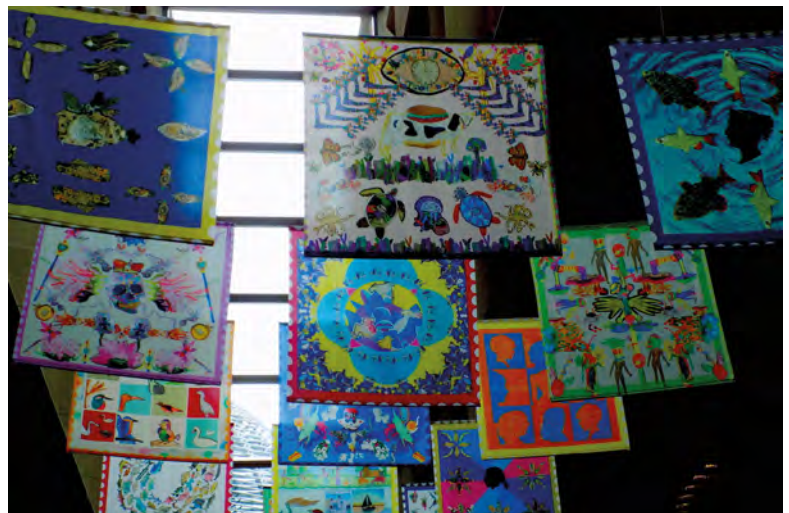
Commonwealth schools were recruited with the British Council and the Royal Commonwealth Society. The children worked with their teachers, who were guided by instructional videos and presentations which were readily accessible online. The young people responded with extraordinary imaginative pieces of artwork, using their art and design skills, and utilising natural and recycled materials.

↑ River of Hope procession at the Platinum Jubilee Pageant





↑ Princess Anne admiring the flags at a Save the Children event



↑ Flags on display outside the Bloomberg offices

The final flag designs have a scalloped edging which makes them look like a postage stamp, and each contains a silhouette of an inspirational person; be it a local hero, an environmental activist or a member of their school community. Chosen people include Sir David Attenborough, Marcus Rashford and Charlie the dinner lady!

The flags are being displayed at the **National Maritime Museum** in Greenwich from 24 September to the end of November.

**MORE INFORMATION**

Thames Festival Trust, the project organisers, hope to develop and grow River of Hope in the coming years. If you would be interested in your school or country taking part please do contact them for more information:  
[k.forde@thamesfestival.org](mailto:k.forde@thamesfestival.org)



↑ Artworks shown on the W1 Curates digital screens in Oxford Street

# CELEBRATING COMMONWEALTH WRITING

## WITH HRH THE DUCHESS OF CORNWALL



On Saturday, 4 June 2022 Her Royal Highness The Duchess of Cornwall, Vice-Patron of the Royal Commonwealth Society joined 'The Cultural Frontline' to talk with host Tina Daheley about **The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition**, the world's oldest international writing competition for schools.

In this special Platinum Jubilee weekend programme, Her Royal Highness shared her passion for literacy, and why she feels it is so important to get young people across the world reading and writing.

Asked by host Tina Daheley why giving young writers a platform is important, Her Royal Highness explained how The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition provides an opportunity to young people from all countries and communities across the Commonwealth, some of whom have probably not had a chance before to share their views, to tell us what they're thinking and to share their ideas for the future. The Duchess added that the competition is a wonderful way for young people to express their views to the world and the Commonwealth.

↑ HRH The Duchess of Cornwall speaks about the QCEC on The Cultural Frontline.

As part of this programme, Her Royal Highness was joined by two former competition winners, Ethan Charles Mufuma, the 2021 Junior Winner from Uganda, and Hiya Chowdhury, the 2017 Senior Runner-up from India. Both were able to ask The Duchess a question about the competition and share the impact the competition has had on their lives so far.

Since winning the competition in 2017 Hiya has gone on to become a published author and in 2021 acted as a Final Panel Judge for the Junior Panel of The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition. Asked how the competition has impacted her life Hiya said:

"The competition changed my life entirely. I think the biggest thing it gave me was confidence in what I was writing and faith in the fact that I could have a voice that was small but not insignificant. I don't underestimate how far something like that takes you and it was very much the reason that I was able to write more and publish more and hope to do so in the future."

As part of this programme Nigerian novelist Chigozie Obioma also spoke with Jamaican writer Nicole Dennis-Benn. Both novelists explored the peoples and cultures of their respective countries in their work and encouraged the next generation of writers. Sri Lankan writer Shehan Karunatilaka, 2012 Commonwealth Book Prize winner and one of the 70 BBC Big Jubilee Reads also spoke about the work of art that inspired him.

### MORE INFORMATION

To listen to this special episode visit <https://www.royalcwsociety.org/post/celebrating-commonwealth-writing-with-hrh-the-duchess-of-cornwall>



On Saturday, 4 June 2022, we were excited to host a Commonwealth Market as part of the King's Road Jubilee Street Party to celebrate our Patron Her Majesty The Queen's Platinum Jubilee!

# COMMONWEALTH MARKET

Partnering with Partridges of Sloane Square and Cadogan Estates the King's Road was pedestrianised from Sloane Square through to Cheltenham Terrace for a very special event – the King's Road Street Party and Commonwealth Market – to celebrate The Queen's Platinum Jubilee and bring together the local community.

The day's festivities included live music from the Melodians Steel Orchestra, an award winning, South London based group formed in 1987 by Terry Noel MBE and dance and drumming workshops led by the One-Drum Foundation, a UK registered charity made up of a collective of London-based African master drummers, dancers, musicians and performers emanating from the diversity of Africa's rich ethnic traditions.

As well as live entertainment, guests enjoyed delicious food and drink from across the Commonwealth. Countries including Nigeria, Seychelles, Singapore, South Africa, Trinidad and Tobago, Australia, Sri Lanka, Guyana and India showcased the incredible breadth of cuisines found across the Commonwealth with retailers including Crosstown Doughnuts, Biltong Boss, Basilur Tea, Dhava Ltd, Dorothy's Deli, Georgetown Kitchen Ltd, Ro's Kitchen, Sey Souls, Shiok's Kitchen, Susumba, Terry's Food, The Coconut Tree, The Tea Makers of London, Wellness Cuisine and Woodford & Warner taking part.

The Society joined in the celebrations by hosting our own stand, decorated with Commonwealth flags, to share with visitors more about the Commonwealth and the work of the Royal Commonwealth Society. As part of the day we also held a charity raffle with a fantastic prize – a set of signed books from RCS Ambassador and best-selling children's author, David Walliams.

Thank you to our wonderful partners, Partridge's and Cadogan Estate for helping us to mark this special weekend and to all the High Commissions, businesses and musicians who helped make this weekend such a success.





# CELEBRATING POETRY & THE COMMONWEALTH

## WITH THE COMMONWEALTH POETRY PODCAST

**“ I first got to know something about the work of the Royal Commonwealth Society a few years ago when I became involved with The Queen’s Commonwealth Essay Competition – the amazing annual competition in which around 25,000 young people from across the Commonwealth write essays, stories and poems on a subject of interest.**

I was lucky enough to meet some of the young winners from countries as varied as Kenya and Singapore, and what impressed me about them wasn’t just the quality of their writing but also their sense of optimism and their international outlook.

Meeting these young people made me want to explore the Commonwealth and meet more people from each of the 56 countries which is how the idea for the Commonwealth Poetry Podcast came about. With my own young person in tow, my daughter Aphra, we decided to explore each of the different Commonwealth countries in a special way – meeting someone from that country and finding out about that country, its history, its culture and its poetry.

Almost all of us have poetry as part of our childhood, starting with nursery rhymes and songs. We thought it would be an

interesting way of getting to know the culture of a country by meeting people and hearing about the poetry they knew when they were growing up.

As part of the Commonwealth Poetry Podcast, we are interviewing an extraordinary range of remarkable individuals from across the commonwealth – some like **H.E. Kevin Isaac**, High Commissioner of St Kitts and Nevis and also a published poet, others like the poet **Grace Nichols** born in Guyana and the most recent winner of the Queen’s Gold Medal for Poetry.

The Commonwealth is an extraordinary association, a family of free and equal countries which is home to 2.5 billion people. And the poetry of the Commonwealth is as varied as the Commonwealth itself. In each episode we begin with just a minute of facts and figures about that Commonwealth country and then we introduce our special guest, talking to them about their life story and hearing a couple of their favourite poems and they share why those poems are so special.

We began our journey at Clarence House in London with the Vice-Patron of the Royal Commonwealth Society, **HRH The Duchess of Cornwall**, hearing from her about the importance of poetry and the importance of the Commonwealth. Over the next two years our journey will take us across the Commonwealth to countries both large and small.



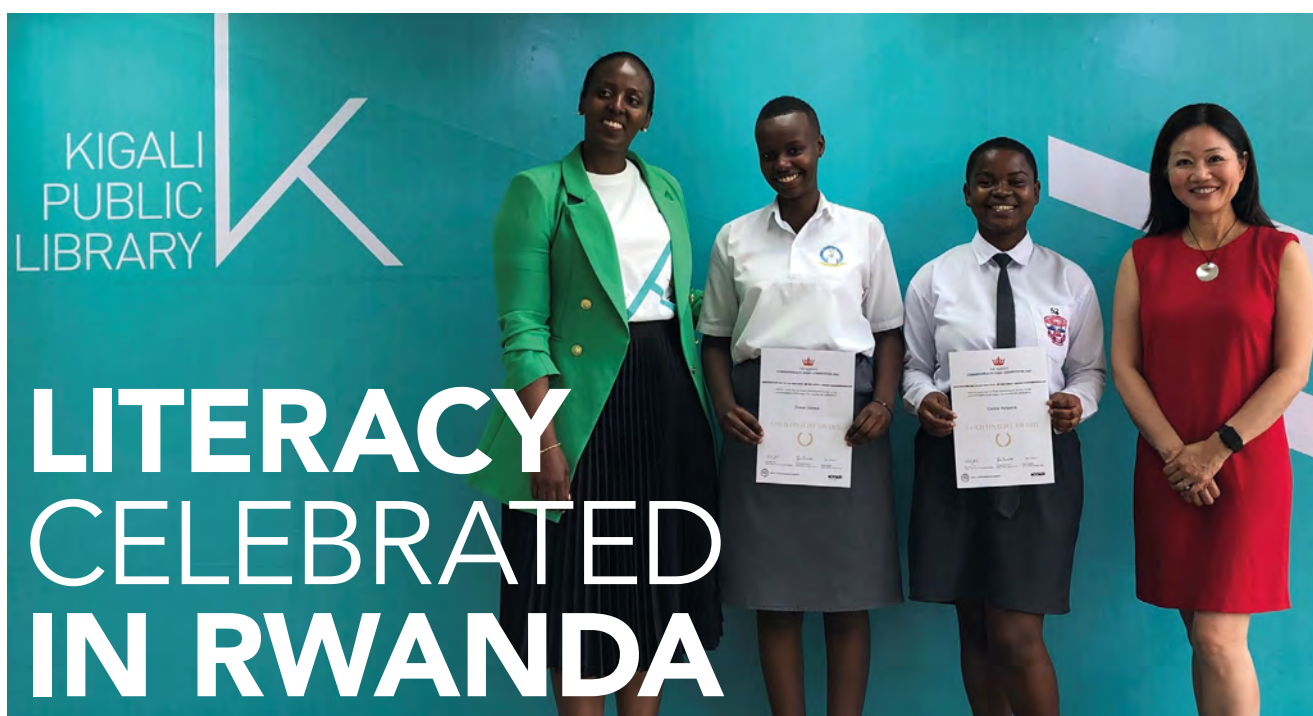
The podcast is produced by staff and students from the University of Chester, where they currently have students and staff from 28 different Commonwealth countries.

**Gyles Brandreth**



### MORE INFORMATION

You can catch up with earlier episodes and join us on our journey across the Commonwealth each fortnight. The Commonwealth Poetry Podcast is available through all major podcast providers, find out more or share a poem of your own at: [commonwealthpoetrypodcast.co.uk](http://commonwealthpoetrypodcast.co.uk)



On Thursday, 23 June 2022, Vice-Patron of the Royal Commonwealth Society, HRH The Duchess of Cornwall and Her Excellency Jeannette Kagame, First Lady of Rwanda visited Kigali Public Library to inspire the next generation of young readers and writers.

Eleni Bazikamwe, Junior Runner-up of The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition 2020, now resident in Rwanda, also joined us with her mother at the KPL and was presented with her certificate by The Duchess of Cornwall for her winning story, 'The Little Prince comes back to Earth'.

Speaking during the event, RCS Executive Chair Dr Yueh commented on the growth of The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition in Rwanda. She said:

"Indeed, despite the significant interruption to children's education caused by the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, last year's competition saw a record level of participation with nearly 26,000 children entering, demonstrating its ability to provide a platform for young people to express their views. This was no more evident than here in Rwanda, which saw a staggering increase in participation of 5345% from 2020 entries, with some 2,396 children entering the QCEC with the assistance and support of Rwanda's Education Board."

A couple of Gold Finalists from Rwanda were also recognised and presented with their certificates by Dr Yueh and Ms Rusera.

The 2022 competition is now closed and entries are being judged, but we look forward to receiving even more entries from Rwanda in 2023. Good luck to all those that have entered the competition this year!



This joint engagement highlighted the importance of literacy in transforming lives, and the magic of books for enjoyment, study and life-long learning. On arrival at Kigali Public Library, The Duchess and First Lady were greeted by Dr Linda Yueh, Executive Chair of the Royal Commonwealth Society (RCS), Ms Tessa Rusera, Director of Kigali Public Library (KPL) and Ms Alison Tweed, Chief Executive of Book Aid International. They then explored the library and met with children from across the district.



↑↑ Gold Finalists from Rwanda receive their certificates.

↑ The Duchess of Cornwall & First Lady of Rwanda tour the KPL.

→ The Duchess & First Lady meet with children from across the district.

# RWANDA BECOMES CHAIR-IN-OFFICE OF THE COMMONWEALTH

**H.E. President Kagame, President of the Republic of Rwanda**, welcomed leaders from more than 50 Commonwealth nations to the Rwandan capital, Kigali, for the official opening of the 2022 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), held under the theme, 'Delivering a Common Future: Connecting, Innovating, Transforming'.

He said:

**“** *It is a pleasure and an honour to welcome you to the 26th Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, the sixth in Africa, and the first since our world was turned upside down by a devastating pandemic.*

*The journey here has been long. But it was easier, because of the support we have rendered to one another.*

*I thank the Chair-in-Office, Prime Minister Boris Johnson, and the Secretary-General, for guiding our organisation through unprecedented times.*

*We are very honoured today to welcome Their Royal Highnesses, the Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall.*

*We join together to pay tribute to Her Majesty the Queen, the Head of the Commonwealth, and its most devoted champion. Over her seventy years of service, the Commonwealth has grown, both in number, and in the scope of its ambition.*

*The fact of holding this meeting in Rwanda, a new member with no historical connection to the British Empire, expresses our choice to continue re-imagining the Commonwealth, for a changing world.*



*The Commonwealth does not replace other institutions; it adds to them. That is why we always have important special guests with us. This year, let me recognise, in particular, His Highness the Emir of Qatar, and I thank him for being here with us.*

*The Commonwealth we need, is on the frontlines of global challenges, not on the periphery, watching events unfold. Our special strength is to bring issues into focus, that might otherwise be overlooked. For instance, the way that climate change puts the very existence of small island and developing states, into jeopardy. Or the possibility to transcend size and geography, by leveraging new technologies, to create high-quality, global jobs for our youth, right at home.*

*We are united by a shared language, whether English is our first, second, third, or even fourth one. But what really defines us, are the values enshrined in the Commonwealth Charter, and a commitment to good governance, the rule of law, and the protection of rights. That is why we shall always remain open to new voices, and new members.*

*And wherever we might fall short, we find solutions through consensus and dialogue; we build each other up; and we move forward, together.*

*In closing, I also want to welcome you to Rwanda. Ours is a country that was torn apart by genocide and division, just a generation ago.*

*Today, we are a nation transformed, in heart, mind, and body. Three-quarters of our population are young people, with no memory of those events.*

*Everything we do, including joining the Commonwealth in 2009, is aimed at making sure that our people are connected, included, and forward-looking.*

*We are delighted that, through CHOGM, you have the opportunity to get to know us, and we aim to repay that trust, with many years of continued friendship.*

*I thank you.*



# PRINCE OF WALES ANNOUNCES PAN-COMMONWEALTH QCC COMMITMENT

Following initial commitment by seven countries at its launch at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Malta seven years ago, His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales announced pan-Commonwealth commitment to The Queen's Commonwealth Canopy (QCC) at the CHOGM Opening Ceremony in Rwanda.



Announcing this achievement, The Prince of Wales remarked: "Throughout her Reign, The Queen has placed, and continues to place, the greatest importance on the common friendship, humanity, and values that all of us share... and I know how grateful she is that, in recognition of Her Majesty's unstinting service to our Commonwealth family, all Commonwealth Member States have announced that they have now committed themselves to The Queen's Commonwealth Canopy."



↑ HRH The Prince of Wales announces pan-Commonwealth commitment to the QCC.

Since its launch, more than 115 sites and projects around the Commonwealth have been dedicated to the initiative, conserving more than 12 million hectares of indigenous forests and botanical gardens. From the dense tropical forests of Barbados and Papua New Guinea to the dry woodlands of Malawi, and from the coastal mangrove forests of Maldives to the native pine forests of Cyprus, the QCC demonstrates the value of the Commonwealth working together in common cause to conserve forests for future generations.

Conceived by the Rt. Hon. The Lord Field of Birkenhead, CH, PC, DL, the QCC has been led by the Royal Commonwealth Society, in partnership with Cool Earth and the Commonwealth Forestry Association, and is the first environmental initiative in The Queen's name.

The Executive Chair of the Royal Commonwealth Society, Dr Linda Yueh, said: "The QCC is a truly remarkable example of the Commonwealth taking concrete action to create a brighter, common future for its 2.5 billion citizens.

This initiative has seen government and non-government actors come together to conserve a vast range of forest types around the Commonwealth, including several UNESCO World Heritage sites and forests that our Patron, The Queen, has visited during her 70 years of service to the Commonwealth. It is a delight to announce this pan-Commonwealth commitment during this momentous year and we look forward to welcoming new members to the QCC as the Commonwealth family grows in the future."

Alan Pottinger, Executive Director of the Commonwealth Forestry Association, said: "People and forests need each other, and it is this important concept that lays at the heart of this wonderful initiative. With project sizes varying from those covering millions of hectares to those covering just a few, the QCC demonstrates the ability of the Commonwealth to act together to conserve one of its most important habitats – forests."

 **MORE INFORMATION**  
<https://www.royalcwsociety.org/qcc>

# GABON AND TOGO JOIN THE COMMONWEALTH FAMILY



↓ Commonwealth leaders at the Opening Ceremony.



The Commonwealth has admitted **Gabon** and **Togo** as its 55<sup>th</sup> and 56<sup>th</sup> members respectively. Our continued growth reflects the advantages of Commonwealth membership and strength of our association.

By **The Rt Hon Patricia Scotland QC**,  
Secretary-General of the Commonwealth.

The Commonwealth family is growing. At the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Kigali, Rwanda, on 25 June 2022, Gabon and Togo became the 55<sup>th</sup> and 56<sup>th</sup> members of the Commonwealth. And very soon, their flags will be flying proudly alongside those of other members at Marlborough House, the Commonwealth Headquarters in London.

Neither Gabon nor Togo has historic associations with the Commonwealth, with both countries gaining independence from France in the 1960s.

We live in troubling times: the climate crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, the debt and economic trauma which has followed, together with food and fuel insecurity



which has been exacerbated by the Russia-Ukraine conflict, all mean we've never needed our friends more. As individual nations have faced these diverse exogenous shocks, it's been pleasing to see our commonwealth family bind together and become a beacon of hope not just for our members but for others too. So it's perhaps not surprising that both Togo and Gabon, having started on the road to membership before we were all battered by this catalogue of woes, showed such steadfast determination to complete the admission process, and in time for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Kigali.

They were motivated to join not only by the desire to expand their political, trade, social and diplomatic relations beyond the Francophonie network, but, most importantly, were attracted to the Commonwealth's values and aspirations as enshrined in our Charter. The attraction of this important, dynamic, and evolving network, which provides the opportunity to diversify and engage with international partners and strengthen cooperation with the Commonwealth family of nations was irresistible.

Membership to the Commonwealth also provides access to a variety of technical assistance resources aimed at strengthening institutions that support good governance, public sector, climate change adaptation and human rights framework.

### **From eight to 56 members, working together to deliver our common wealth**

In 1949, eight countries came together to form the modern Commonwealth where leaders agreed that members are "free and equal members of the Commonwealth of Nations, freely cooperating in the pursuit of peace, liberty and progress". This sense of the new Commonwealth was also recognised by Her Majesty The Queen in 1953 when she acknowledged that the Commonwealth "bears no resemblance to the Empires of the past". She spoke of a Commonwealth that is "an entirely new conception built on the highest qualities of the spirit of man: friendship, loyalty, and the desire for freedom and peace... an equal partnership of nations and races".

The Commonwealth today continues to shine as a beacon of hope and promise, inspiring confidence in the benefits of international cooperation and collective action. As an institution uniting 56 nations and 2.5 billion people – nearly a third of the world's population – across varying geographical regions, cultures and religions, the Commonwealth provides a platform for member countries to engage each other on how to transform their communities and address common challenges in innovative and dynamic ways.

Be it climate change or the impact of COVID-19, it is clear that our world is changing and so are the solutions and partnerships needed to address these challenges.

Together we are committed to the development of free and democratic societies, the promotion of peace and prosperity, and most importantly, solidarity in our quest to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and improve the lives of our people, across the Commonwealth, especially those in small and vulnerable states. Our work helps to grow economies and boost trade, deliver national resilience, address threats such as climate change, debt, and inequality, and empower young people, who account for more than 60 per cent of the population.

Our continued growth, beyond the scope of our history, reflects the strength of our association and our common belief in the values of democracy, human rights and good governance, which can be converted into progress for each of our member governments across a full range of priorities.

So, by joining the Commonwealth, Gabon and Togo will now have the opportunity to be part of critical discussions and a mutually supportive community of independent and sovereign states, aided by over 40 technical assistance tools and more than 80 Commonwealth organisations.

I am thrilled with the addition of these two vibrant countries to our family – a tight-knit family based on the certainty that no matter what challenges we face, the Commonwealth always comes together to face them as one. We leave no one behind. This, I believe, is what makes the Commonwealth special.



# COMMONWEALTH YOUTH FORUM



**Layne Robinson** is Head of Social Policy Development at the Commonwealth Secretariat. In this article he outlines why CHOGM 2022 was an important turning point for youth development.

When I landed in Rwanda for the Commonwealth Youth Forum 2022, I knew it was going to be a historic meeting. It was the first major Commonwealth youth gathering since COVID-19. Of course, it will be some time before we can accurately measure the implications of the pandemic on young people's prospects and their mental and physical health. But we already know from anecdotal evidence that, without urgent action, its ripple effects will be felt for generations to come. So, the stakes were high.

The Forum was our opportunity to regroup, reboot, and to find the will and the resources to continue our efforts towards sustainable youth development, which our last **Global Youth Development Index** suggests had already been bearing fruit, before the pandemic struck.

From the moment the doors of the Forum opened the energy and resolve of young leaders was clear. They sprang into action, launching **The Commonwealth Youth for Sustainable Urbanisation network**, as well as a new **youth initiative on cervical cancer called the A4HPV** and a **Digital Trade Hackathon**.

What was really encouraging was that the leaders and the representatives of global organisations – with whom the 2000 plus young people shared their vision for youth-led sustainable development, captured in their '**12<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Youth Forum Declaration**' – were just as primed and committed to identifying and implementing solutions to their shared challenges.

In fact, in their 22-page communique leaders declared 2023 the year of the youth; and their commitments to young people included, among others:

- a **landmark standalone 'Kigali Declaration on Child Care and Protection Reform'**;
- the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities;
- offering 12 years of quality and inclusive education and ensuring children can catch up on the learning they lost during the pandemic.
- acting on the mandates of the '**Youth Statement on Climate Change**', including its call for adequate financing on climate action;
- accelerating cervical cancer prevention and elimination efforts;
- increasing access to quality eye care, including strategies to eliminate trachoma and glaucoma;
- and supporting action in line with the UN General Assembly Resolution 74/299 on improving global road safety and committed to attaining the SDG target 3.6 to reduce road traffic deaths by at least 50 percent by 2030 compared to 2020 levels.

I left Rwanda convinced that we had reached a critical turning point in youth development, young people had led the conversation and demonstrated that they are taking charge of their future; heads had acknowledged that young people are central to sustainable development; and everyone agreed that the time is now – as we struggle to emerge from the shadow of COVID.

I know we can achieve these commitments, building on the foundation of our impactful Commonwealth Youth Programme, which will celebrate its 50<sup>th</sup> birthday next year.

The next step is implementation and we already have a head start with the formation of our **Commonwealth Alliance for Quality Youth Leadership**, which will help us bring increased skills to more than 250 million young people.

Photo: Moise Niyonizima

# POWER TO THE PEOPLE



## THE COMMONWEALTH FOUNDATION AT CHOGM 2022



← People's Forum delegates discussed what must change and what support they need to help lead the Commonwealth into the future. From right: Patricia Scotland, Ineza Umuhoza Grace, Dato' Sudha Devi K.R. Vasudevan, Dr Linda Yueh, Dr Justin Koonin, Alicia Wallace.

After two years of delay and postponement, of anticipation and frustration, the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) finally took place in Kigali in late June.

For the Foundation, this was the culmination of years of preparation and planning, most especially for the **People's Forum** – the largest gathering of Civil Society in the Commonwealth system that has been a fixture of the CHOGM calendar for almost two decades.

The Foundation and its partner, the Rwanda Governance Board, took advantage of the two-year delay to shape a strong and streamlined programme that focused on what is front and centre for so many people of the Commonwealth: health, climate change, and freedom of expression.

Weaving together all Forum sessions was the idea of participatory governance: the idea that the involvement of people in their governance is critical to democracy and democratic legitimacy; the idea that citizens have a central role to play in shaping the policies and decisions that affect their lives.

That's why the Foundation also took the lead in convening a half-day Roundtable

between participants of the People's Forum and Commonwealth Foreign Ministers in what is now an established fixture on the CHOGM calendar: a powerful embodiment of the Commonwealth identity as an organisation of *people* – and not just of states.

The People's Forum involved intense discussion from civil society and was attended by former Prime Ministers, current senior officials, and the Commonwealth Secretary-General. The Roundtable also boasted the largest-ever number of Ministers in attendance, including a substantial contingent of Foreign Ministers and excellent representation from Commonwealth civil society and accredited organisations.

Despite the optimism and the intensity of the engagement we witnessed in Kigali, civil society were clear throughout: the **promises made at CHOGM** risk becoming irrelevant unless Member States commit to measuring their actions against the goals they have set.

Our analysis of the sentiment coming out from the Forum and Roundtable indicates that progress on climate could be usefully measured by the practical steps that Commonwealth countries and institutions take to protect small island developing countries in the years ahead. Progress on freedom of expression is even easier to measure: the Commonwealth must take the final step to adopt a robust set of principles on media freedom and put in place mechanisms to monitor implementation. Progress on health requires concerted action to break the debt deadlock that is strangling efforts to deliver universal health care in so many of the Commonwealth's low and middle-income countries.

So much more could and should be done. But we must start somewhere if the Commonwealth is to hold its head high. Let us decide to hold ourselves – and each other – to account. The people of the Commonwealth deserve no less.

**Dr Anne T. Gallagher AO** is Director-General of the Commonwealth Foundation.

# COMMONWEALTH WOMEN'S FORUM

The 2022 Commonwealth Women's Forum (CWF) was held on the 20-21 June in Kigali, Rwanda ahead of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM). The CWF is an important platform for the voices from civil society and the women's movement to be heard at CHOGM.



Government of Rwanda

The CWF 2022 brought together over 500 delegates from across the Commonwealth and 60 speakers for two days, and in nine sessions to discuss wide ranging issues facing women and girls.

The discussions yielded some recommendations for governments and included some of the following key points:

- A repeated theme was the need for increased resources to strengthen gender equality and women's empowerment in all spheres and the importance of collecting accurate and regular disaggregated data. Without sufficient data, we do not know where the gaps and opportunities for progress are.
- The need to link economic empowerment with access to quality education for all was also raised. Including financial education and literacy, and education for older women.
- Trade and women's economic empowerment are deeply interlinked, and the barriers women face are high. The transactional costs are also high, and there is a need for clear and accessible information on taxes and customs.
- The economic empowerment of women is not possible without addressing violence against women and girls first. Listening to survivors' voices and needs, including in designing and implementing initiatives engaging men and boys, is of fundamental importance in efforts to end violence. To be effective, this work also requires high-level political commitment and leadership, active collaboration and allocation of sufficient, sustainable funding.
- Dignity and respect for older people should not only be promoted but ensured through provision of quality healthcare, palliative care for older people and support carers of the aged; and tackling poverty in old age. There should be a focus on addressing discrimination against older women, and provision of platforms for intergenerational dialogue; recognising the role older people play in our societies and to enable transfer of skills between younger and older women.
- Accountability mechanisms need to be inclusive and consider the intersectionality of women: disability, sexual orientation, gender identity and age.
- In the area of Human Capital Development, it is increasingly important that skills and literacy are a focus area across sectors so that girls and women can fully participate in the digital economy.
- Lastly, the Commonwealth accounts for 40% of the global cervical cancer incidence and 43% of global mortality due to cervical cancer.
- Cervical cancer is one of the only cancers with proven elimination strategies, namely the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine.
- Cervical cancer elimination is a health equity and social justice concern that transcends gender. It requires combined joint efforts by many actors, including addressing inequity of access to HPV vaccines and screening.

➤ Delegates come together for the CWF from across the Commonwealth.

## MORE INFORMATION

The full set of discussions are captured in the CWF Outcomes Document, which can be read online on the Commonwealth Secretariat's website:

<https://thecommonwealth.org/events/commonwealth-womens-forum-2022>

# THE INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS COMMUNITY GATHERS AT THE **COMMONWEALTH BUSINESS FORUM** IN KIGALI

Over three days at the end of June, 1700 delegates from across the Commonwealth and beyond gathered in Kigali for the 12<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Business Forum (CBF). It was the first CBF held in Africa since 2007, and the tremendous uptake has once again demonstrated the Commonwealth's capacity to deliver opportunities for the global business community.



Commonwealth business leaders convene in Kigali.

From the 21-23 June the Forum, hosted by the Commonwealth Enterprise and Investment Council (CWEIC) in partnership with the Rwanda Development Board, held 35 sessions, breakfasts, and networking sessions at the Kigali Convention and Exhibition Centre. Under the CHOGM theme of 'Delivering a Common Future: Connecting, Innovating and Transforming', delegates gathered to discuss issues most pressing to the Commonwealth business community. The CBF programme is purposely designed to be as diverse as possible and provides a platform for large corporates, SMEs, and international organisations from every corner of the Commonwealth.

The world is in a vastly different place to when the Commonwealth last met in 2018, and the topic at the forefront of the Forum was the power of the Commonwealth's network to provide inclusive economic growth and recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic, and the ongoing effects of recent war in the Ukraine. While the Commonwealth is not a formal trading bloc, the discussion also looked at how the Commonwealth can work together to leverage new markets and new opportunities. The Forum was opened by H.E. Paul Kagame, President of Rwanda, and addressed by Heads of Government and Ministers from the UK, Nigeria, Gambia, Malta, Jamaica, Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas and Botswana among others.

Following the Opening Ceremony, two key sessions 'A Global Reset: Leveraging the Commonwealth for Global Recovery' and 'Commonwealth Trade: Challenging Protectionisms and Reducing Barriers to Business' focussed on the key thematic areas which drove the rest of the programme. Panels and sessions were constructed to represent the width and breath of Commonwealth perspectives and issues, and the programme included sessions on the future of work, fashion, health, technology, to the importance of impact investing, among many more.

CBF 2022 also convened, for the first time, 'Think Tank' style roundtables, which convened groups of sector experts on Food Security, Energy Security, Business and Professional Services and Skills and Education. These Think tanks will continue to meet and will support the Government of Rwanda during its two years as Chair-in-Office of the Commonwealth to develop policy directions and outcomes.

The Forum included its traditional exhibition and networking spaces, allowing delegates to meet, connect, and forge new business relationships throughout their time in Kigali.

As well as an extensive programme, the Commonwealth Business Forum also featured networking events, including, mixer sessions, a drinks reception at the International Conference Centre, overlooking the city, and a gala dinner, hosted by the Prime Minister of Rwanda.

The Commonwealth was ready to meet in person once again, as was the business community. As Lord Marland, Chairman of CWEIC concluded in his opening remarks "Let the business begin".

**MORE INFORMATION**  
Visit CWEIC's website:  
<https://www.cweic.org/>



# INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY ROUNDTABLE WITH GERI HORNER

On International Women's Day 2022 (8 March) members of the Commonwealth Youth Gender & Equality Network (CYGEN) including **Nafesha Richardson** (Co-ordinator), **Firhaana Bulbulia** (Child, Early and Forced Marriage (CEFM) Lead and contributor to the CEFM Workshop Report), **Precious Ozemoya** (Gender and Governance Lead and contributor to the Youth and Women Leadership Toolkit), and **Melissa Fairey** (Member and author of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Commonwealth Policy Review) joined Chair of the Royal Commonwealth Society (RCS) **Dr Linda Yueh** and RCS Ambassador **Geri Horner** to discuss gender equality in the Commonwealth and three new CYGEN resources.

Beginning the discussion Geri thanked the panellists for inviting her to be part of a discussion with such inspiring women. She emphasised the importance of coming together, sharing and learning from each other's experiences. Drawing on her own work as a UN Goodwill Ambassador she explained why gender equality is critical. She said: "The reason why it is so important is it is empowering, and gives freedom for women to make the world a better place. When every gender and culture is included it makes the world a better place, which is what we want to do."

Tackling the issue of gender equality, as well as sexual and reproductive health rights, is not new to CYGEN members. Outlining the work of the network, Nafesha Richardson, CYGEN Co-ordinator explained how the network was formed in 2015 at a youth convening in Malta in advance of the 2015 CHOGM. She explained how youth advocates recognized a gap in the Commonwealth youth agenda for a network that actively supports and promotes the meaningful inclusion of youth voices on gender equality issues in local, national, regional, Commonwealth and international agendas. With the

support of the Royal Commonwealth Society as Secretariat, CYGEN developed the 'Gender Five' – five critical thematic areas: gender and governance; child, early and forced marriage; sexual reproductive health and rights; youth transitions in education, employment and entrepreneurship; and sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics (SOCIESC). Nafesha explained how over the years CYGEN has utilized the 'Gender Five' as their foundation, developing campaigns including #REFORM53.

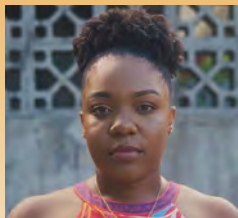
Now in 2022 the network is hoping to foster the virtual collaboration of its members through a Knowledge Hub – a digital library which will host publications, blogs, toolkits and other resources to support further capacity building across the Commonwealth and support members in their own gender equality advocacy.

Each of the panelists: Firhaana Bulbulia, Precious Ozemoya and Melissa Fairey provided an overview of the new resources they have authored and contributed to, outlining why they are needed and how to utilize them.

- **'Youth and Women Leadership Toolkit'**
- **'Ending Child Early Marriage in the Commonwealth: Advocating for Legal Reform and Social Change'**
- **'Sexual and Reproductive Health & Rights (SRHR) in the Commonwealth: Analysis and Recommendations for a Path Forward'**

 **MORE INFORMATION**  
<https://www.royalcsociety.org/cygenhub>

# LAUNCH OF THE CYGEN KNOWLEDGE HUB AT CYF 2022



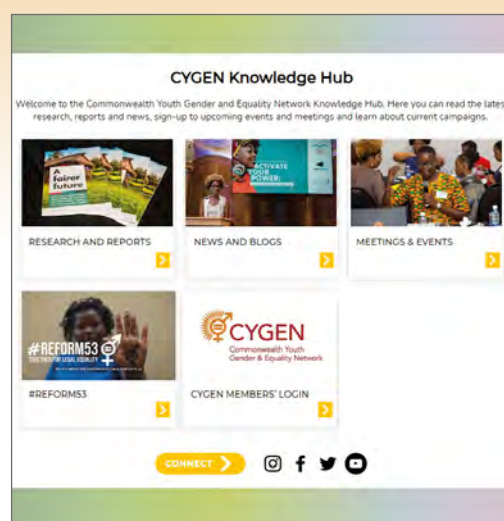
Commonwealth Youth Gender & Equality Network (CYGEN) Co-ordinator Nafesha Richardson shares with us details of the CYGEN Knowledge Hub which was launched in Kigali, Rwanda during a side-event at the Commonwealth Youth Forum as part of the lead-up to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in June 2022.

Dubbed 'Commonwealth Café', the event saw three rounds of conversations focusing on shared capacity building for gender equality advocacy at the local, regional, and international levels. The major takeaway was that the knowledge, expertise, and skills needed to achieve gender equality already exists within Commonwealth youth, they just needed an easy way to connect and share their experiences; and this is the aim of the Knowledge Hub.

The Knowledge Hub is a collection of resources, blogs, case studies and articles which youth from across the globe can use to advance their advocacy for gender equality. The **'Youth Advocacy – Learning and Reflection Toolkit'** by Nandini Tanya Lallmon can be used by gender advocates interested in leading advocacy campaigns. The toolkit uses previous campaigns such as CYGEN's #Reform53 campaign to share best practice and tips for youth, NGOs, CSOs and other relevant stakeholders. If you work within government, are an activist or you simply want to understand and change sexual and reproductive health rights in the Commonwealth, then Melissa Fairey's **'SRHR in the Commonwealth – Analysis and Recommendations for a Path Forward'** is a great place to start.

Another fantastic resource featured on the Hub is the **'Youth and Women Leadership Toolkit'** by Mpule Kgetsi, Precious Ozemoya, Eudora Ogechi Nwangwu, Ifechukwu Juliet Obiajulu and Warda Batool. This toolkit is perfect for young people and women interested in running for public office and leadership positions. Similarly, following CYGEN's workshop on Advocating for Legal Reform and Social Change, the resource on **'Ending Child Marriage in the Commonwealth'** by Firhaana Bulbulia and Sophia Lane is useful for advocates whose aim is to learn more and facilitate events geared at ending Child Early and Forced Marriage (CEFM).

The launch of this Knowledge Hub is an exciting opportunity for CYGEN as the resources featured showcase the high level of knowledge and expertise which exists within the network. It is my hope that for decades to come, the Knowledge Hub will be the premier platform for young gender advocates to access useful tools to advance their advocacy from the grassroots all the way up to heads of government.



## MORE INFORMATION

 <https://www.royalcwsociety.org/cygenhub>

# COMMONWEALTH YOUTH EXCHANGE: CYPRUS RESIDENTIAL



In May, the Commonwealth Youth Exchange: UK and Cyprus came to an end. Participants from across the UK travelled to Cyprus to meet with their Cypriot counterparts for a four day programme in Nicosia.

On day one, our young leaders met with the Cyprus Youth Board, including Mr Kleanthis Koutsoftas, President of the Administrative Board of the Youth Board of Cyprus, and learnt about the general situation of youth policy matters in Cyprus, some of their programmes and how they are collaborating with the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth. During the session Commonwealth Youth Exchange Programme (CYEP) participants discussed the most pressing issues facing young people in Cyprus today, including housing, opportunities, and how these have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Now understanding some of the issues facing young people in Cyprus, we travelled onto meet with Mr Ben Rawlings, British Deputy High Commissioner for a working lunch. At the residence Ben provided an outline of the UK's priorities within Cyprus, how they are working with the government, the role of a diplomat and how to enter this field of work. Our young leaders also shared what they have been doing as part of the programme, the social action projects that they have developed to address issues such as mental health, access to education, and sustainability within their communities.

↑ Tsemberi Exhibition opening



The journey continued with a visit to the Home for Cooperation, a unique community centre located in the middle of the dividing lines in Cyprus, in the Ledra Palace area, UN Buffer Zone, Nicosia. At the centre we heard how today, the Home for Cooperation has become a landmark building in Nicosia, acting as a bridge-builder between separated communities, memories and visions through its physical presence and its peacebuilding programs, which use the transformative power of arts and culture.

On the second day of the exchange we were privileged to be welcomed to the House of Representatives where we received a tour and learnt about the Cypriot parliamentary system.

At the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), our delegates were honoured to meet with Ambassador Korneliou, Permanent Secretary and Mr Stelios Georgiades, Head of Cultural Diplomacy. Ambassador Korneliou discussed Cyprus's foreign affairs priorities and the role of Cyprus as a Commonwealth member.

Onto the University of Nicosia, where the Royal Commonwealth Society (RCS) Cyprus Branch hosted our young leaders for lunch. During this session they were able to share details of their work with RCS Cyprus Vice-Chair Dr Emiliou Solomou.

The discussions continued in the afternoon, this time with Her Excellency Ms Fiona McKergow, High Commissioner for Australia in Cyprus. Topics focused on the importance and power of youth voice, youth priorities and the work of the Australian High Commission in Cyprus.

After such an inspiring couple of days, we were finally able to see one of the social action projects in action – Tsemberi, an inter-communal fashion project, celebrating Cypriot heritage and culture and founded by two of the CYEP Cypriot participants (read more in the December 2021 edition). On the Friday evening, Tsemberi hosted an exhibition at the Stelio Philanthropic Foundation showcasing their work. The exhibition remained open to the public for the weekend.

With the formal component of the exchange at an end, the participants were able to enjoy a cultural day. Leaving Nicosia we first visited the Troodos Botanical Gardens, home of The Queen's Commonwealth Canopy site in Cyprus, before driving down to Kourion Beach for a lunch by the sea, a chance to dip our feet in the Mediterranean and a tour of the Kourion Archaeological site – one of the island's most important city-kingdoms in antiquity and one of the most impressive on the island.

With the tour at an end, we travelled back to the hotel for an outdoor Cypriot mezze feast, live music and even a birthday cake for a 21<sup>st</sup> birthday celebration – a memorable way to mark the end of such a wonderful trip and cultural exchange.

Thank you to our partner Clarion Futures, to all of the participants who joined us on this journey, and to everyone who hosted us in Cyprus – our young leaders were truly inspired and look forward to continuing their Commonwealth journey.

**MORE INFORMATION**

Visit our website [www.royalcw society.org](http://www.royalcw society.org) to read more about the Commonwealth Youth Exchange Programme and the social action projects that were developed.



↑↑ House of Representatives

↑ Ministry of Foreign Affairs with Ambassador Korneliou



↑↑ Troodos Botanical Gardens

↑ Visit to the British Deputy High Commissioner's residence

# COMING UP IN THE COMMONWEALTH

## AUGUST

- 12 International Youth Day
- 29 Deadline for applications to the Commonwealth Youth Exchange: UK and Malta

## SEPTEMBER

- 8 International Literacy Day
- 13-27 77<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN General Assembly

## OCTOBER

- 5 World Teachers Day

## NOVEMBER

- 7-18 COP 27
- 25 International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women

## DECEMBER

- 5 High Commissioners' Banquet, Guildhall, London
- 10 Human Rights Day

## JANUARY 2023

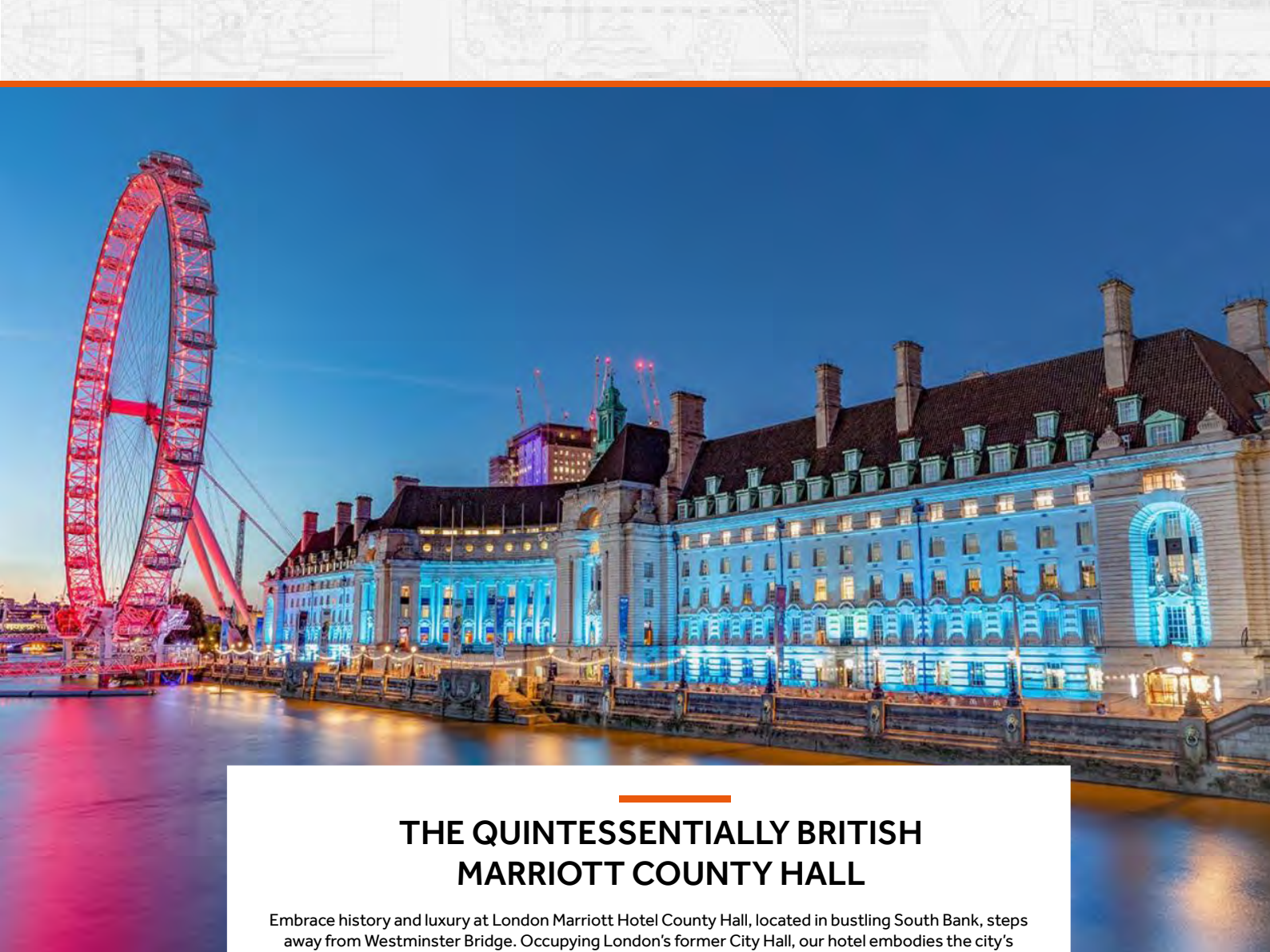
- 24 International Day of Education

## MARCH 2023

- 8 International Women's Day
- 13 Commonwealth Day  
Commonwealth Service, Westminster Abbey, London

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ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY

40-41 Pall Mall, London SW1Y 5JQ

T: +44 (0)20 3727 4300 E: communications@royalcwsociety.org

www.royalcwsociety.org

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