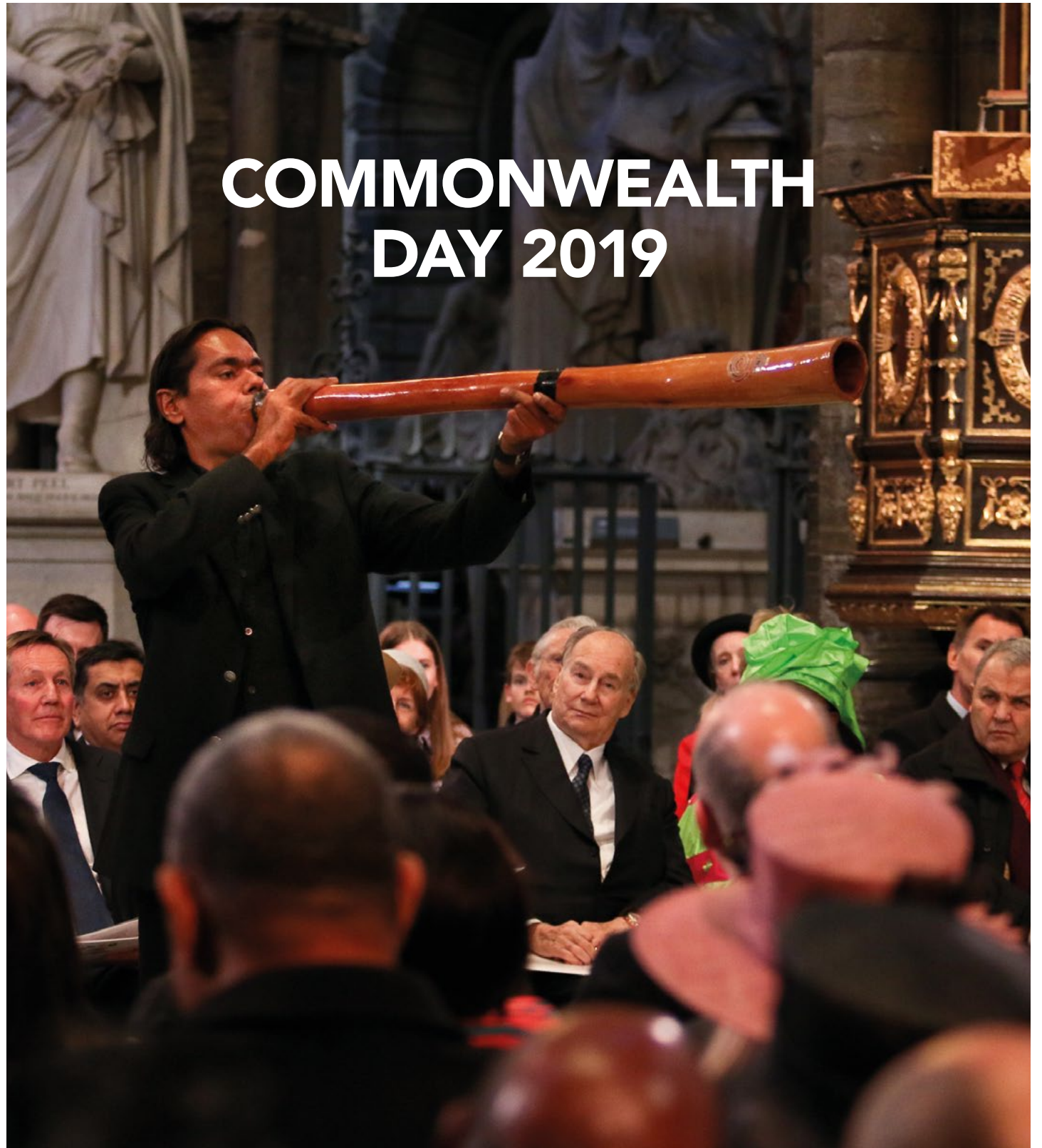


VOICES



COMMONWEALTH DAY 2019

 **COMMONWEALTH AT 70**
How the Commonwealth has evolved

 **RWANDA'S JOURNEY**
25 years on from the genocide

 **BRUNEI DARUSSALAM**
Commonwealth Family speaks out

Commonwealth



Celebrating the modern Commonwealth

In the 1949 London Declaration, leaders agreed that Commonwealth countries are “free and equal members of the Commonwealth of Nations, freely co-operating in the pursuit of peace, liberty and progress”

WELCOME



We have just reached the 70th anniversary of the London Declaration, which brought into being the modern Commonwealth (pages 2-3). The history of Commonwealth evolution is often portrayed in terms of these two phases – between the old British Commonwealth and Empire up to 1949, and the modern Commonwealth of realms, republics and independent monarchies which the Declaration brought into being. But this two part history is misleading. It implies that the new Commonwealth of 1949 is much the same as the Commonwealth network we see today. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Commonwealth network of states we have today is not only strikingly different in size (53 members against the original 8) but also in character and performance.

What used to exist was an association of member states with common origins under British rule or influence, a common commitment to the basic values of the rule of law and democracy and a general friendliness between governments, but not much else. In fact on some issues, such as how to destroy apartheid, there were sharp governmental differences.

Yet what we have today is the opposite, an entirely new phase in Commonwealth togetherness and vitality. New member states seek to join the family, new links are forming at every level, in every profession and at every age group. Trade in both goods and even more in services and data is growing.

What has caused this extraordinary transformation? The answer is quite simply connectivity – the miracle of total, instant and almost free dialogue and communication between peoples. With a common working language, common legal systems and common values it becomes the ideal network of cooperation and mutual support for the digital age.

A third Commonwealth age has truly arrived. Nothing like it ever existed before. In a dangerous world it shines through as the network or club of those who want to help each other, do no harm and wherever possible do good for humankind. No wonder so many want to join it!

David Howell

The Rt. Hon. the Lord Howell of Guildford PC,
President, The Royal Commonwealth Society



THE ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY
CELEBRATING 150 YEARS

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THE

COMMONWEALTH

AT 70

The modern Commonwealth came into being 70 years ago with the London Declaration, signed on 26 April, 1949. **The Rt Hon Patricia Scotland QC**, Secretary-General of the Commonwealth reflects on how the association has changed over the last seven decades.



From its earliest beginnings, and through successive stages of expansion and development, the Commonwealth has been a pioneer of invention and innovation, with diversity and inclusiveness as watchwords. The resilience and strength of our members, individually and collectively, depend on continual evolution and adaptation. This requires vigilance and agility in adjusting to changing circumstances and in responding to emerging needs. There have been decisive points in our shared history when bold vision and decisive joint action have opened up broad new opportunities for cooperation and connection.

One such occasion, seventy years ago, was when Commonwealth leaders agreed the new basis on which they would work together. Through the London Declaration of 1949, our founding eight nations resolved that they would “remain united as free and equal members of the Commonwealth of Nations, freely co-operating in the pursuit of peace, liberty and progress”. Since then, the Commonwealth has expanded in scope and grown in stature, with many more nations growing to maturity. As independence has been achieved and celebrated, awareness of our interdependence has also grown, and it is by recognising and building on this that our cooperation continues to flourish and our connections to develop.

At this time when multilateralism is under threat, and we see nationalism and narrow self-interest on the rise, the Commonwealth shines as a beacon of hope and promise, inspiring confidence in the benefits of international collaboration and combined purpose. An understanding of how as countries, as communities and as individuals we are interdependent and mutually supporting lies at the heart of all that the Commonwealth brings to our world. In so diverse and geographically widespread a family of nations, it is advantageous that some countries and communities are able to lead the way on particular areas of concern.

The Commonwealth spirit of goodwill and mutual support enables lessons learnt in one setting to be shared so that the benefits of progress can be enjoyed more swiftly by others and for the good of all. Some will lead on holistic interventions that reduce negative human impacts on the environment and regenerate our common earth, some on measures to advance social inclusiveness, while others pioneer pathways towards greater political or economic development. By sharing knowledge of what has worked, and understanding better what has not, any of us may encourage others to move in positive directions. By offering practical guidance and support, all can help hasten beneficial change.

Reviewing the seventy years since the Commonwealth we know today came into being, we see an impressive record of impact and achievement. This continues today, with our Commonwealth Charter pointing the way and sustainable development offering ever more inclusive progress and prosperity to the people of all our member nations. There is the Commonwealth Blue Charter,



← King George VI with leaders at the 1949 Commonwealth Prime Ministers Meeting in London 22 – 27 April, 1949

© The Commonwealth Secretariat

through which our member countries collaborate on protocols and practices to safeguard the health of the ocean which connects the continents, the islands and the countries in which we live. Alongside this, our Commonwealth Climate Change Clean Campaign led by our youth and championed by the President of Seychelles and other leaders is mobilising action in support of our work on the Commonwealth Common Earth programme. The Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda on Trade and Investment is another example of how we are currently responding to the needs of our countries and communities. So too is the Commonwealth Cyber Declaration, which supports economic and social development and rights online so that a free, open, inclusive and secure cyberspace can be enjoyed by all.

Recent events in several of our member countries bring home to us very starkly the urgent need to strengthen national, regional and global action on countering violent extremism. If extremists are able to recruit young persons with such seeming ease, we need to know how and why, so that we can engage them with our message of hope and inspire them to work instead towards our joint goals, values of peace and understanding and the common good. The Countering Violent Extremism Unit within the Commonwealth Secretariat is helping member states to share knowledge, and to devise and implement national strategies for preventing radicalisation and

the pernicious harm it generates. We also offer specialist expertise and assistance for strengthening national human rights institutions and the rule of law. Our way is always to encourage positive engagement, by promoting alternative narratives, strengthening justice institutions, and building platforms for dialogue.

Violence can be defeated, but we need the widest and most inclusive alliances of government, international agencies, civil society organisations, private sector actors, legal bodies, educators, youth workers and healthcare professionals. We also need to mobilise faith leaders alongside those of no religious belief, and unite in upholding and expressing the values of our common humanity. That is why we are working through initiatives such as Faith in the Commonwealth and Peace at the Crease to bring together broad coalitions capable of overcoming division and fostering respect and understanding across boundaries. This builds on our longstanding Commonwealth work in the field of Sport for Development and Peace.

So as we look back on the journey we have travelled together over the past seventy years, with cooperation based on deep affinity and equal partnership in pursuit of peace and progress, we look forward with confidence in our continuing Commonwealth connection towards a future that is more secure, more inclusive, and more sustainable for all.



THE COMMONWEALTH SERVICE

On Monday, 11 March 2019, people across the Commonwealth, and beyond, celebrated Commonwealth Day with community gatherings, services, flag-raising ceremonies, school assemblies and meetings. In London, Her Majesty The Queen, Head of the Commonwealth, was joined by 2,000 guests from across the Commonwealth in Westminster Abbey for the annual Commonwealth Service.

The Prince of Wales and The Duchess of Cornwall, The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, The Duke and Duchess of Sussex and The Duke of York also attended the largest annual inter-faith gathering in the United Kingdom. Organised by The Royal Commonwealth Society, the Service provides an opportunity to focus attention on this voluntary association of 53 countries and their commitment to promoting democracy, human rights, the rule of law and equality for its 2.4 billion citizens.

↑ TRHs The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge and The Duke and Duchess of Sussex meet participants

Guests of honour included UK Prime Minister and Chair-in-Office of the Commonwealth, The Rt Hon Theresa May MP, His Highness The Aga Khan, members of the diplomatic community, faith leaders, senior politicians and the Commonwealth Secretary-General, The Rt Hon Patricia Scotland QC. Over 800 schoolchildren and young people from 74 school and youth groups joined them. This number included nine special needs schools, primary and secondary schools, state and private schools and a number of youth clubs. Eight groups from Northern Ireland benefited from the Dean's Fund, which provides financial assistance to those groups, which are normally under-represented at such events.

The theme for this year's Service, 'A Connected Commonwealth', sought to highlight the practical value and global engagement made possible because of cooperation between the culturally diverse and widely dispersed family of nations, who work together in friendship and goodwill. The theme highlights how this network can be harnessed to tackle some of the Earth's biggest challenges such as protecting our natural resources and the environment.

Outside the Abbey guests were welcomed to the Service with a colourful display at the Great West Door by Tropical Flowers Séga Dancers, a group of female British Mauritian dancers based in South London. Inside the Abbey, guests were greeted by the sounds



of The Hertfordshire Commonwealth Choir and string quartet, The Dionysus Ensemble, the ensemble in residence for The Commonwealth Resounds. Together, they performed 'The Commonwealth Chorale' whilst the flag-bearers processed through the Abbey carrying the flags of Commonwealth member states. Following the arrival of The Royal Family and the Bidding by The Very Reverend Dr John Hall, Dean of Westminster, The Dhol Foundation opened the Service with 'Drummer's Reel' – a form of traditional drums from North India. The Service also featured special performances by the Grammy-winning group, Clean Bandit, who performed 'Symphony'; and acclaimed tenor, Alfie Boe, who stunned the congregation with an a cappella rendition of Snow Patrol's 'Run'. During the Service, there were also performances from William Barton, an internationally celebrated didgeridoo artist who performed 'Kalkadungu's Journey'; and from B Positive (the choir of NHS Blood Donation), featuring Lurine Cato, who sang 'Rise Up'.

Endurance swimmer and UN Patron of Oceans, Lewis Pugh, spoke to the gathered guests on the importance of protecting the environment. He described how he has witnessed the oceans "change completely" during his 32 years of swimming and how this was due to three things: climate change; over-fishing; and plastic pollution. He noted how the Commonwealth is perfectly placed to address this crisis due to our unique make-up of predominantly island nations who have "a deep affinity with our oceans".



Lewis concluded by calling for a new generation of Marine Protected Areas and a new generation of marine protectors, adding, "We stand at a crucial moment in the history of our planet".

Prayers were said by Rabbi Debbie Young-Somers, representing Reformed Judaism; Maulana Sayed Ali Abbas Razawi, Shia Muslim community; Lord Singh of Wimbledon, Sikh community; and Father Daniel Humphreys, Roman Catholic Church.

“ The young people here with us today did not cause this crisis, and yet it will completely shape their lives. It's our responsibility to ensure that their voices are heard, and acted upon. ” Lewis Pugh, OIG

The Rt Hon Theresa May MP, Prime Minister, read 1 Corinthians 12: 14-26 and the Commonwealth Secretary-General, The Rt Hon Patricia Scotland QC, led the Act of Affirmation to the Commonwealth, reaffirming belief in the Commonwealth as a force for good in the world, now and for the future.

The Service was broadcast live on BBC One and relayed live on the BBC World Service. It is also available for citizens across the world on the BBC YouTube channel.

↪ Lewis Pugh speaks on the importance of protecting our oceans

↑ The Dhol Foundation perform 'Drummer's Reel'.

Photos © Picture Partnership/ Westminster Abbey

MORE INFORMATION

www.thercs.org/our-work/commonwealth-day-2019 includes HM The Queen's Commonwealth Day Message, information about speakers and performers, videos and transcripts.

RWANDA'S JOURNEY

25 YEARS ON FROM THE GENOCIDE AGAINST THE TUTSI, RWANDA IS LOOKING AHEAD TO CHOGM 2020

It was 25 years ago, starting on 7 April, 1994, that Rwandans endured the most tragic events which left us with wounds of the worst kind of injury that our nation, our people will carry forever. Each year in April, we pause to remember and honour the lives of 1,074,017 men, women and children who perished due to hatred, we unite through the strength and dignity of our nation, and we renew our determination to build a prosperous future for generations to come.

Three rules were applied to post-genocide Rwanda: as a nation, we made a pact to **stay together**, to **think big** and to **be accountable**. Under an enlightened leadership, led by His Excellency President Paul Kagame, Rwanda has become a reference point for good governance, political stability with well-functioning institutions, observance of the rule of law and zero tolerance for corruption. Today, Rwanda ranks as the safest country to live in Africa, 9th safest in the world, 2nd easiest to do business in Africa, a regional ICT and innovation hub, home to the world's first drone delivery port for blood and vaccines, a conservation success story and a unique touristic destination. Our country is safe, secure, firmly committed to making 'Never Again' a reality and is positively looking towards the future.

Rwanda's accession to the Commonwealth, 10 years ago this year, was testament to the progress made and the strides it continues to make towards meeting its development goals – all of which are in line with the objectives set out in the Charter of the Commonwealth. Chapter 12 of the Charter on Gender Equality resonates particularly with Rwanda, as our country has had the highest proportion globally of women in political leadership roles for over 9 years in a row, with 61% in Parliament, 50% in



↑ Kwibuka25 in Kigali: Leaders lighting the flame at Kigali Genocide Memorial



← World leaders, President Kagame, First Lady Jeannette Kagame and Rwandans join for Walk to Remember ahead of Night Vigil, 7 April, 2019



←← H.E. President Kagame lighting candle with youth at Kwibuka25 Night Vigil in Rwanda, 7 April, 2019



← H.E. Yamina Karitanyi lighting Commemorative Candle at Kwibuka25 in London

Cabinet, along with 43% of registered business owners in Rwanda being women, contributing to Rwanda ranking 6th on the World Economic Forum’s gender gap report 2018. Women are amongst the driving forces that have contributed to the rebuilding of Rwanda following the Genocide against the Tutsi, coupled with visionary leadership, reforms, unity, reconciliation and home-grown solutions drawn from our cultural history.

As the youngest member of the Commonwealth, we consider it a duty to share our story, lessons and experiences with others, and to learn from member states who have achieved what we are striving to achieve. As His Excellency Paul Kagame, President of the Republic of Rwanda, noted:

“ The Commonwealth is a family which can be strengthened by each members’ contribution and cooperation. If we all work together, there is no challenge that is insurmountable. ”

We are therefore very proud to be hosting the next Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Kigali in 2020, and we look forward to sharing all of what Rwanda has to offer with the Commonwealth family.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



H.E. Yamina Karitanyi is currently the High Commissioner for the Republic of Rwanda to the United Kingdom, and non-resident Ambassador to Ireland since December 2015. Prior to her posting in London, Ms. Yamina Karitanyi was the Head of Tourism and Conservation at the Rwanda Development Board (RDB), the Government’s agency mandated with fast-tracking economic development in the country, prior to which she was High Commissioner for the Republic of Rwanda to the Republic of Kenya, having previously served as Minister Counsellor at the mission since August 2010. Ms. Karitanyi has a proven track record in international business, operations management, business negotiations and Diplomacy, having also held various senior positions at Goodworks International, a strategic advisory firm. H.E. Yamina Karitanyi holds a Bachelor of Science in Business Studies from Buffalo State College, USA, and an MBA from Rochester Institute of Technology, USA. She is fluent in English, French, Kinyarwanda and Swahili.

BRUNEI DARUSSALAM: COMMONWEALTH FAMILY SPEAKS OUT IN DEFENCE OF COMMONWEALTH VALUES

The official Commonwealth is strong on rhetoric but often weak when confronted with reality of its members' adherence to 'Commonwealth values'. Brunei Darussalam's legal code has never been in line with Commonwealth values, but the 2013 Syariah Penal Code Order (SPCO), which became fully implemented on 3 April, 2019, is an outrage.



The previous code contained the same colonial legislation as 41 other former British colonies outlawing 'unnatural sex acts'. The punishment was 10 years' imprisonment. The new punishment under SPCO for this, and other acts including adultery and blasphemy, is death by stoning.

On 1 April, 2019, the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative called for robust action from the Secretary-General. This was followed by strong statements from the Commonwealth Lawyers Association on 3 April, noting their Association was 'appalled' by the SPCO

and the fact it would overturn the 'de facto moratorium on capital punishment since 1957', and calling for it to be overturned. On 9 April The Commonwealth Equality Network, pointed out that '(n)ot only are these punishments dehumanising and violent, but the new provisions within the Code affect the most vulnerable parts of the population'.

It is not unusual for Commonwealth Accredited Organisations to release statements in the face of egregious breaches of Commonwealth values. What is uncommon is public action from the Secretary-General. On 11 April, however, action did come. The Secretary-General put out a statement indicating that she had:

'...communicated my concern to the Government of Brunei, strongly urging it to reconsider the introduction of the punishments proposed under the new Penal Code which, if implemented in its current form, will potentially bring into effect cruel and inhuman punishments which contravene international human rights law and standards'.

And that:

'[t]he Commonwealth Secretariat is ready and willing to provide Brunei Darussalam with technical assistance and to advise on the formulation of a revised Penal Code in accordance with the values and principles of the Commonwealth Charter and in compliance with international human rights law and obligations including on the issue of harmonisation'.

The Secretary-General's public initiative is bold. We need more, not less collaboration. Even if it fails, it should be welcomed by all who would like to see a Commonwealth where values are realised and respected.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



David White is Director of the London office of the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI), a position he has held since 2015. He leads engagement with the Office of the Secretary-General, Commonwealth Secretariat, Commonwealth Foundation, and Commonwealth Accredited

Organisations, as well as officials based in London. He also leads CHRI's programme on SDG Target 8.7, and the development of two interlinked projects: the development of the first set of Commonwealth indicators for SDG Target 8.7; and development of a civil society network that will link activists from across the Commonwealth for joint advocacy at the 2020 CHOGM in Kigali.

TACKLING TRANSNATIONAL CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE

On Thursday, 18 April 2019, His Excellency Mr Euripides L. Evriviades, High Commissioner for the Republic of Cyprus, hosted a High Commissioners' Round Table discussion, convened by The Royal Commonwealth Society and It's a Penalty, on the issue of child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA).

More than fifteen High Commissioners or their representatives were joined by the Commonwealth Games Federation, unicef UK, the Child Investment Fund Foundation, Trust Law and others, to discuss the issue of transnational CSEA in the Commonwealth.

A growing phenomenon, the rise in low-cost travel, increased usage of the internet and easier movement of people has meant that cases of child exploitation, where the perpetrator commits an offence in a foreign state, is on the rise. Yet there is a worrying lack of prosecutions.

The discussion began with a presentation of the findings of a mapping report written by It's a Penalty (with research facilitated, by the Commonwealth Secretariat). The co-Chairs, Dr. Greg Munro (RCS) and Sarah de Carvalho (It's A Penalty), outlined the topic by emphasising the need for Commonwealth member states to increase utilisation of the legislation that already

exists, and highlighted that change has to come not only from putting capacity and resources into the legal framework, but also ensure civil society has increased awareness of existing laws and the confidence to come forward. It was noted that at present 43 member states lack fully comprehensive extraterritorial legislation against CSEA. Furthermore, even where such legislation does sufficiently exist, significant improvements are needed to be made regarding prosecution and reporting rates.

Key outcomes from the discussion included support for the RCS and It's a Penalty to look to Commonwealth moments such as the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Rwanda in 2020 and the 2022 Birmingham Commonwealth Games as opportunities to raise awareness of the issue with key stakeholders including Commonwealth Heads of Government and policy makers. There was also broad agreement that with a population of 2.4 billion, of which 60% are under the age of 29, the Commonwealth arguably holds a degree of responsibility to protect its children and to address the issue of transnational child exploitation. With combined willingness, stronger legislation and stronger institutions, the Commonwealth could find ways of working together to raise the resilience of its member states and the individuals they serve.

→ Co-chairs, Dr Greg Munro and Sarah de Carvalho with H.E. Mr Euripides L. Evriviades who hosted the discussion

© Lara Taylor



YOUNG VINCENTIANS DISPLAY THEIR CREATIVITY

On Wednesday, 20 March 2019, attention was focused on St. Vincent Girls' High School (GHS) when it received a visit from HRH The Duchess of Cornwall. **Jodie Dennie**, local representative for The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition and RCS Associate Fellow, talks us through the day.



Upon arriving, HRH The Duchess of Cornwall received a warm welcome from the student body and staff and was escorted to Form 1 G Dacon. She sat in on a presentation where I encouraged students representing various secondary schools to share their views and experiences on a global platform by entering The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition 2019. For student Anna Warrican, the presentation given in the presence of The Duchess of Cornwall gave the Competition greater significance and Anna felt more compelled to enter the Competition and exhibit her creativity.

↓ HRH The Duchess of Cornwall presents a certificate to a GHS student. Photo credit: Clarence House

After the presentation, The Duchess interacted with students in the Language Library, who were uploading their entries for the 2019 Competition on the new, user-friendly on-line platform. Student





Kayla Bobb described the comfort she felt whilst talking with The Duchess about their shared love of reading and her favourite author. Kayla described the Competition as a great way for readers and writers like herself to portray their talents and achieve her goal as a writer for kids and young adults.

Finally, Her Royal Highness was entertained by a melodious steel pan performance from GHS Steel Orchestra during a special assembly. At the assembly, The Duchess encouraged the country's young people to continue participating in the Competition. She presented Gold Award Certificates to GHS students Rianna Blake, Paige Cadogan, Jonoliah John and Emma Rouse, in recognition of their outstanding writing skills in the 2018 Junior and Senior Categories. Rianna said she was "elated to be awarded after overcoming her anxiety to enter". Paige Cadogan and Junior Bronze Awardee, Kiera Rogers, respectively read excerpts of their 2018 Competition entries to the audience. This gave a student in the audience, Reanna Davis, the greatest motivation to enter this year's Competition because it shows that creativity opens up a new world.

This country has many gifted young people who deserve a chance to sharpen and showcase their creativity while representing their homeland. The Competition will help them, and you, to gain the needed to progress in life. If there is anyone who is capable of reaping the benefits from this opportunity, why not you? Erase any doubts you may have about your ability to participate in this opportunity – you can do it!

MORE INFORMATION

 The competition is open to all citizens and residents of the Commonwealth aged 18 and under and runs until 1 June, 2019.
 <https://competitions.thercs.org/home>

YOUTH, PEACE & SECURITY DIALOGUE IN KUALA LUMPUR

For five days, 60 aspiring young leaders from across the Commonwealth Asia Region came together to learn new skills and practices on how they can take action to prevent violent extremism and build peace in their communities through dialogue. The workshop, entitled 'Youth Summit on International Peace and Security and Building Community Resilience from the Ground Up', was delivered by the RCS in partnership with the Commonwealth Secretariat's CVE Unit.

One year on from the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in London, 60 young people aged between 18 and 23 gathered to take part in a Youth Summit, simulating the discussions, negotiations and consensus building approach of a CHOGM. Debates centred on key issues that affect young people – from unemployment and lack of opportunities to civic conversation.

As part of an intensive five-day workshop, participants were assigned to an unfamiliar country and asked to represent the citizens of that state on the Commonwealth stage. This demonstrated how the skills they were learning could be used on a global scale, and then used in a domestic context.

↓ Participants engage in CHOGM simulation



Sessions such as Non-Violent Communication, Hate Speech & Human Rights and Values Based Leadership developed essential soft skills including dialogue and respect & understanding. Theme-focused seminars on areas such as Skills to Counter Violent Extremism, and Social Media for Social Change allowed participants to develop useful skills for enacting positive change in their communities. Shomy Hasan Chowdhury (Associate Fellow and CSA Asia Representative) and Dhanesh Basil (Associate Fellow and RCS Regional Youth Coordinator for Asia) led a session on advocacy, highlighting youth opportunities.

“ Thank you for creating a safe space for me to learn and grow ”

Pakistani participant

These strands introduced key concepts at the local level, demonstrated their impact at the global level and concluded with the power of young change-makers in creating a better future. The programme aimed to build the capacity of aspiring young leaders, to empower communities and instil resilience to extremism. This invaluable opportunity for young people to connect with each other and learn about different cultures and perspectives built a network of engaged, like-minded individuals.

We are grateful to the Government of Malaysia for hosting this workshop; whilst opening the programme, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Saifuddin Abdullah, highlighted Malaysia's longstanding commitment to the Commonwealth and Steven Sim Chee Keong, Malaysia's Deputy Minister of Youth and Sports, gave a compelling talk on democracy, encouraging young people to be active citizens.

MORE INFORMATION
[www.thercs.org/youth-and-education/
 model-commonwealth-summits](http://www.thercs.org/youth-and-education/model-commonwealth-summits)

ADVANCING POSITIVE DIALOGUE TO REFORM DISCRIMINATORY LAWS



The Royal Commonwealth Society has a proud history of supporting both gender equality and LGBT+ rights in the Commonwealth. That is why we are honoured to be one of four partners in the innovative Equality & Justice Alliance programme, which supports Commonwealth governments and civil society organisations that want to reform colonial laws that discriminate against women and girls and LGBT+ people.

Our work as part of the Alliance is to utilise the underpinning principles of the Commonwealth – of dialogue, discussion and consensus – to show that a Commonwealth problem can also have a Commonwealth solution. After all, the ‘Commonwealth Advantage’ is that similar laws and political and legal systems make peer learning particularly beneficial.

In February, it was our pleasure to host the Equality & Justice Forum for Commonwealth Parliamentarians in Cape Town, South Africa. At the event, the Vice President of the Republic of Kiribati, H.E. The Hon. Kourabi Nenem, more than 40 parliamentarians, civil society leaders, youth champions and

ministers discussed how to advance legal reform and end discrimination in the Commonwealth. The meeting was hosted in South Africa in recognition of the country’s history of overcoming apartheid, which led to the drafting of the world’s most progressive constitution concerning equality and non-discrimination for all people. We are grateful to the Government of South Africa for providing a tour of the Parliament of South Africa. This provided delegates with an opportunity to learn more about the role of South Africa’s Parliament in realising the values found in South Africa’s Constitution to protect women and girls and LGBT+ people.

We were also honoured to be joined by Dr. Josephine Ojiambo, former Deputy Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, who gave the opening address in which she voiced support for concerted Commonwealth action to end discrimination.

During the Forum, participants discussed case study examples of reform from Mozambique, Belize, Solomon Islands, and Pakistan, and how these may be applicable in their own countries. In the Pacific, for example, Solomon Islands is one of many countries that has implemented comprehensive

↑ Delegates of the Equality & Justice Forum for Commonwealth Parliamentarians gather for a photo in front of Table Mountain in Cape Town

Photos © Steven Booth

legislation to combat violence against women. Meanwhile in Pakistan, the country has introduced legislation to protect the rights of transgender people, who continue to face marginalisation and decriminalisation following the British colonial period, despite a long history of acceptance in Pakistani culture.

For the closing session, we were privileged to host the former Presidents of Mozambique and Botswana, Their Excellencies Joaquim Chissano and Festus Mogae, to speak about the importance of ending discrimination as a path to achieving an AIDS-Free Generation in Africa. In his closing address, President Chissano voiced his hope that other Commonwealth nations would follow in the footsteps of his nation, Mozambique, in repealing discriminatory legislation, which perpetuate hate and violence around the world. A highlight of the Forum was an opportunity for our Commonwealth youth champions to have a private breakfast with the Presidents to discuss the key voice of youth in advancing global change.

The conversation did not end at the Forum. In April, the RCS convened leaders from across the Caribbean in St Lucia, to explore how Caribbean countries can lead the path to a more inclusive world. Topics discussed included Belize's comprehensive modernisation of sexual offenses legislation, and how Caribbean countries can better protect women by reforming legislation that criminalises safe abortion.

At the RCS we are always struck by how, even in vastly different cultures and contexts, the shared experiences of the political and civil society leaders we work with resonate across the Commonwealth, as they collaborate to overcome shared challenges brought about by our shared history. Through the Alliance, we are delighted to support this cross-Commonwealth dialogue, and to support governments that want to utilise their peers' good practice examples to advance equality in their own countries.

MORE INFORMATION

www.equalityjusticealliance.org

 Includes a repository of legal resources, articles and briefings.



↑ Hon. Ana Rita Sithole MP of Mozambique speaks about the recent Penal Code reforms which advanced human rights in her country



↑ RCS Chief Executive Dr Greg Munro chairs the Forum's opening session



↑ Equality & Justice Alliance youth champions and EJA staff enjoy a private breakfast meeting with the former Presidents of Botswana and Mozambique

RCS ASIA CONFERENCE



The first RCS Asia Conference was hosted by the Hong Kong Branch from 14-17 March 2019 comprising 40 delegates from 12 countries. RCS branches in Bangladesh, India, Hong Kong, Japan, Malaysia, Pakistan and Singapore were represented, together with delegates from Australia, Canada, Nigeria and the United Kingdom.

launch of the Commonwealth Chamber of Commerce in India.

The conference included a welcome Parsee banquet at the Zoroastrian Club, a cocktail party on 45/F of Cheung Kong Centre and a St Patrick's Day cultural tour and seafood lunch on Lamma Island with songs from China, India, Japan and Malaysia.

It is intended that the RCS Asia Conference should become a biennial event and India has agreed to consider hosting the event in 2021.

28 speakers, including the Consuls-General of Australia, Canada and Pakistan, gave cutting-edge presentations on a Connected Commonwealth, youth affairs, a sustainable environment, peace building, trade, branch reports and future directions.

The purpose of the conference was to strengthen bonds between branches through personal contact and to discuss important social issues. Delegates agreed that a strong civil organization like The Royal Commonwealth Society could bring about significant changes in people's attitudes. One example was the friendship developed between the Indian and Pakistani delegates culminating in a joint presentation on peace-building.

Another interesting announcement in the trade session was the soft

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Peter Mann was born in England and read English at Exeter College, Oxford. He served in the Hong Kong Administrative Service for 25 years in the fields of transport, housing, security, environment and tourism. He is currently Chairman of The Royal Commonwealth Society, Hong Kong Branch and RCS Regional Co-ordinator, Asia. He is author of the memoir, *Sheriff of Wan Chai*.

ASSOCIATE FELLOW SPOTLIGHT

Gideon Commey is an RCS Associate Fellow and Regional Youth Co-ordinator for Africa. He was personally trained by former US Vice-President Al Gore to educate people on the causes, impacts and possible solutions to climate change and runs the company Solar People, in Ghana. Gideon outlines his work placement with Squire Patton Boggs (SPB).

My short work experience with global law firm Squire Patton Boggs (SPB) is without doubt the best I've had so far this year. SPB is an international organisation with 47 offices in 20 countries. By revenue, total headcount, and number of lawyers and attorneys (more than 1,500), it stands tall as one of the Top 30 law firms in the world. The Royal Commonwealth Society (RCS) has an ongoing partnership with the firm through the Associate Fellows network, which facilitates a practical placement for African Associate Fellows at Squires to gain relevant experience, and build a long-term relationship with the company. I was selected as the first Associate Fellow for this opportunity after a rigorous application process.

I spent two weeks with SPB to build on the insight I have gained over the past decade in Ghana working as an environmentalist and a renewable energy entrepreneur. Since 2017, I have worked on an advocacy project to review and enforce Renewable Energy (RE) Act 832 (2011) to promote the RE industry in the country. Another key motivation for me was to build capacity in maximising business opportunities in the energy sector. SPB is a full service global law firm providing insight at the point where law, business and government meet, and this fit perfectly into the expertise and experience I was looking to gain from working in the sector.

I must admit that what makes Squires different from other law firms is the working environment created by the amazing and friendly people. My experience was deeply enriched by spending time with different departments (Corporate, HR, IT, Finance and Business Development) both in the London and Leeds offices. I also had a video conference meeting with an experienced partner in the Brussels office, who opened my eyes to their work in public policy, an area of expertise that makes the firm a leader in the industry. Most of my time, however, was spent with the incredible Energy & Natural Resource department, where I gained insight into project finance and the complex agreements surrounding large-scale energy infrastructural projects. Squire Patton Boggs has established itself over the years as a premier firm for Africa-based transactions in the electricity, telecommunications, projects and infrastructure sectors. Representing the private sector and government interests, it offers second to none in-depth market knowledge and experience on the continent.

This opportunity with Squires will stay with me forever. I walked in with no background in law, finance or banking and left not only with knowledge and capacity, but invaluable contacts, relationships and friendships for life.

 **MORE INFORMATION**
bit.ly/Associate_Fellows



COMING UP IN THE COMMONWEALTH

3 MAY

World Press Freedom Day (United Nations)

19 MAY

Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting, Geneva

21–23 MAY

Council for Education in the Commonwealth Annual Conference, Grenada



THE QUEEN'S
COMMONWEALTH ESSAY COMPETITION 2019

1 JUNE

Closing date for entries to The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition

3–6 JUNE

Women Deliver 2019 Conference, Vancouver, Canada

5 JUNE

World Environment Day (United Nations)

8 JUNE

World Oceans Day (United Nations)

11–13 JUNE

Conference of the States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, New York

6–9 AUGUST

Commonwealth Local Government Conference, Colombo, Sri Lanka



12 AUGUST

International Youth Day (United Nations)

3–6 SEPTEMBER

Commonwealth Games Federation General Assembly, Kigali Convention Centre, Rwanda

8 SEPTEMBER

International Literacy Day (United Nations)

9–12 SEPTEMBER

9th Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning, Edinburgh, Scotland

22–29 SEPTEMBER

64th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference, Uganda

SEPTEMBER

Commonwealth Foreign Affairs Ministerial Meeting, New York

SEPTEMBER

12th Commonwealth Women Affairs Meeting, Kenya

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THE QUEEN'S
COMMONWEALTH ESSAY COMPETITION 2019



Share *your ideas, celebrate* your story
and write for a *better world*

The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition (QCEC) 2019 is now open for entries on the theme *A Connected Commonwealth*, calling upon young people to consider how they can work to use cultural, technological and environmental connections for positive change across the Commonwealth.

'Enter the Competition, you have nothing to lose. In the end, you might learn something new and wonderful about yourself'

**Manka Ennie, Kenya –
Gold Award Winner 2018.**

The QCEC is a unique opportunity for young people aged 18 and under across the Commonwealth to share their views, experiences and thoughts on key issues of the day; entries are accepted in all forms of creative writing from poems to essays to letters. It recognizes the achievement of young writers, celebrates creative writing and is an excellent tool for developing key skills in areas such as critical thinking and English language.

For 2019, the RCS wants to hear from more aspiring young writers from all corners of the Commonwealth regardless of background, region or education level. All stories are important and all stories deserve to be heard.

Entries are accepted through an online platform (<https://essay.thercs.org>) until **1 June, 2019**.

Visit www.thercs.org/competition for entry topics and T&Cs



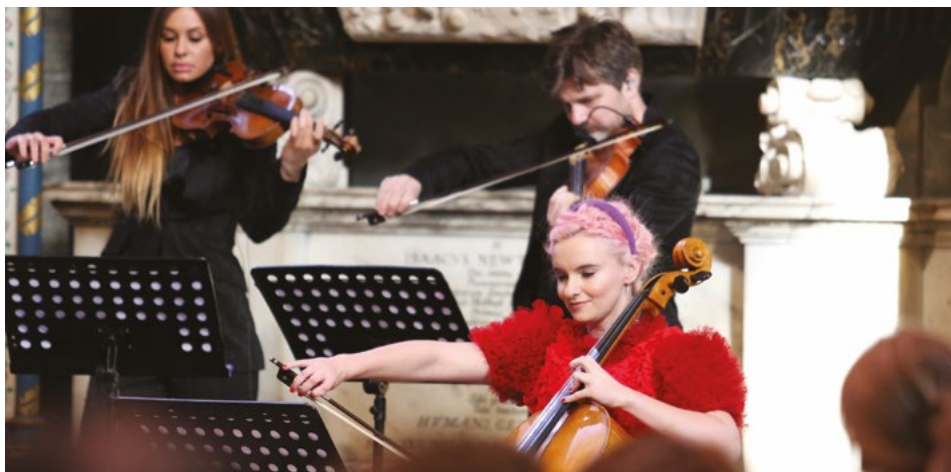
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WESTMINSTER ABBEY
Monday, 11 March 2019

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