




# VOICES



## COMMONWEALTH DAY CELEBRATIONS

 **TOWARDS A COMMON FUTURE**  
Hopes for fairness, prosperity,  
security and sustainability

 **HUMANITY FIRST**  
Save the lives and protect the  
dignity of displaced millions

 **EDUCATION CAN DELIVER**  
Commonwealth Education  
Ministers conclude



THE ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY  
CELEBRATING 150 YEARS

BECOME A 150 FELLOW OF THE  
ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY  
IN THIS OUR 150<sup>TH</sup> YEAR

150

1894 – 2016

1957 – 2017

1883 – 2018

### Champion of Equality

The RCS has long championed the use of dialogue to challenge the most pressing Commonwealth issues and has been at the forefront of debate on gender discrimination, domestic violence and child marriage within the Commonwealth. As far back as 1894, the RCS promoted Gender Equality, inviting a woman to read a paper at a meeting for the first time and admitting women as Fellows to the Society in 1922. Since 2016 we have enabled a youth voice to address the United Nations on gender issues.

### Trusted Convenor

Statesmen of newly independent countries, including Ghana's first Prime Minister, Kwame Nkrumah in 1957, sought the platform of the RCS to share their visions for the future. In the 80's Oliver Tambo, Thabo Mbeki, Chief Buthelezi and Desmond Tutu joined us to speak about South Africa's future and Nelson Mandela gave his first UK press conference from the RCS in 1990. This reputation continues and saw us convene a number of former Presidents in 2017 to discuss 'leaving no one behind' in global development.

### Promoter of Youth

Each year, since 1883, the RCS has encouraged the creativity and imagination of tens of thousands of young people. With its rich history of empowering young voices and recognising the achievement of aspiring writers, the international schools' writing contest, now The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition, continues to be a vehicle for the development of young people's literacy and critical thinking skills, helping to expand their world view.

Through youth empowerment, education and advocacy, the RCS champions human rights, equality, democracy and sustainable development.

For 150 years The Royal Commonwealth Society (RCS) has played a leading role in promoting the values that define the Commonwealth.

In this our 150th year, we invite you to donate £150 to The Royal Commonwealth Society, becoming an RCS 150 Fellow and helping us to continue our work of improving the lives and prospects of Commonwealth citizens around the world.

#### RCS 150 Fellows receive:

- An invitation to the multi-faith Commonwealth Service, in the company of the Royal Family and Commonwealth dignitaries
- A commemorative gift
- An invitation to a prestigious celebration of the RCS' 150 years
- Inclusion on the RCS 150 Fellow Register
- Books and magazines throughout the year

# WELCOME



As the turmoil of world politics increases, the stability and reassurance of likeminded networks and families of nations and peoples grows stronger.

In a totally changed international landscape the Commonwealth network is assuming more significance and relevance by the day.

In the following pages you will find many reflections of this powerful trend – ranging from the Commonwealth's handling of the world-wide refugee crisis, to the key position of India with its need for a better visa regime, and to the plans and themes for the forthcoming Commonwealth Summit, or CHOGM, in London.

This latter is turning out to be much more than a heads of government affair. It will stretch out to involve civic society, business, youth and all regions of the UK as never before. It will be a huge and welcome leap forward in Britain's commitment to its Commonwealth connections – on every side and at every level.

Above all, there is the central message that the Commonwealth is young. It is also growing, with 53 member states – now that Gambia has re-joined – and others wanting to be more closely associated. Sixty percent of its citizens are under 30. It is indeed, literally and in The Queen's telling words, 'the face of the future'.

An article here by our Director of Youth Affairs and Education Programmes describes the role the RCS has played in convening and delivering the Partners' Forum at the recent Commonwealth Conference of Education Ministers (CCEM), and moves to revitalise the partnership for education in the Commonwealth.

*Commonwealth Voices* covers the large and the small aspects of our increasingly connected network, the great issues and the small things which shape daily life. The Commonwealth today, more than ever, touches them all.

## David Howell

Lord Howell of Guildford, President  
of The Royal Commonwealth Society



THE ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY  
CELEBRATING 150 YEARS

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## KEEP IN THE CONVERSATION

- [www.thercs.org](http://www.thercs.org)
- [/thercs](https://www.facebook.com/thercs)
- [@TheRCSLondon](https://twitter.com/TheRCSLondon)
- [/TheRCSociety](https://www.youtube.com/TheRCSociety)



# THE GAMBIA REJOINS THE COMMONWEALTH

'The Gambia is ready to regain its former glory on the international stage and reiterates its commitment to the fundamental values of the Commonwealth Charter', the Gambian government said in a statement.

8 February 2018 marked the readmission of The Gambia to the Commonwealth family following a four and a half year absence, increasing the number of member states to 53. The occasion was marked by a flag-raising ceremony at the Commonwealth Secretariat at Marlborough House in London, attended by the Commonwealth Secretary-General, High Commissioners and representatives of Commonwealth civil society organisations.

Speaking at the event, The Gambia's High Commissioner, HE Francis Blain said: "The government and people of Gambia are ecstatic and overjoyed. The Gambia looks forward to being able both to contribute to and benefit from the collective wisdom of the Commonwealth family of countries, and to playing an active role in supporting the work of the Commonwealth Secretariat and the many other organisations and

initiatives that flourish as expressions of Commonwealth connection."

The High Commissioner continued: "The Government and people of The Gambia will also draw on all that the Commonwealth collectively has to offer, assisting in practical ways to address a wide range of pressing issues – including protecting the environment and tackling climate change, and the empowerment of women and young people."

The small West African state's decision to rejoin the Commonwealth followed a dramatic 2016 election, where long-time president Yahya Jammeh was unexpectedly ousted by opposition leader Adama Barrow. Jammeh had previously withdrawn The Gambia from the Commonwealth in 2013 after sustained criticism of his increasingly autocratic rule. After initially trying to hold on to power, President Jammeh was persuaded to leave the country by other West African leaders. Following his departure, The Gambian parliament unanimously approved the country's reapplication to the Commonwealth in December 2016.

Commonwealth Secretary-General, Patricia Scotland QC said: "We were delighted when, after his election victory in December 2016, President Barrow pledged to return. The Gambia's application to re-join has been unanimously accepted by all 52 member states, who welcome back their brothers and sisters to again play their full part in the Commonwealth family."

The Gambia will now be attending the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in April, in London.

↓ **The Gambia's High Commissioner, HE Francis Blain at the flag-raising ceremony at Marlborough House.**  
© Commonwealth Secretariat



 **MORE INFORMATION**  
[www.thecommonwealth.org/media/news/gambia-rejoins-commonwealth](http://www.thecommonwealth.org/media/news/gambia-rejoins-commonwealth)



© Picture Partnership

# TOWARDS A COMMON FUTURE

Commonwealth Day Message from Her Majesty  
The Queen, Head of the Commonwealth.

We all have reason to give thanks for the numerous ways in which our lives are enriched when we learn from others. Through exchanging ideas, and seeing life from other perspectives, we grow in understanding and work more collaboratively towards a common future. There is a very special value in the insights we gain through the Commonwealth connection; shared inheritances help us overcome difference so that diversity is a cause for celebration rather than division.

We shall see this in action at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting which takes place in the United Kingdom next month, bringing together young people, business and civil society from across the Commonwealth.

These gatherings are themselves fine examples of how consensus and commitment can help to create a future

that is fairer, more secure, more prosperous and sustainable. Having enjoyed the warm hospitality of so many Commonwealth countries over the years, I look forward to the pleasure of welcoming the leaders of our family of 53 nations to my homes in London and Windsor.

Sport also contributes to building peace and development. The excitement and positive potential of friendly rivalry will be on display next month as we enjoy the Commonwealth Games on the Gold Coast, Australia. Contributing to the success of the Games, alongside athletes and officials, will be thousands of volunteers.

Voluntary effort, by people working as individuals, in groups or through larger associations, is so often what shapes the Commonwealth and all our communities. By pledging to serve the common good in new ways, we can ensure that the Commonwealth continues to grow in scope and stature, to have an even greater impact on people's lives, today, and for future generations.

# HUMANITY FIRST

## ENSURING SAFETY AND DIGNITY FOR ALL MIGRANTS AND DISPLACED PERSONS

The plight of those who have fled their homes has become one of the major humanitarian challenges facing the international community. It needs to be a priority for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in April.

↓ July 2017. Uganda hosts over 780,000 South Sudanese refugees, (UNHCR). Red Cross teams accompany refugees to settlements and deliver essential services.  
© IFRC/Jess van Spengen

↓ June 2017. Gampaha, Western Sri Lanka. A clinic was set up to attend to those with symptoms of dengue, cholera and leptospirosis, diseases which can spike after floods.  
© IFRC

In recent years, tens of millions of people have been forcibly uprooted and displaced by armed conflict, violations of international humanitarian law and human rights, and natural and technological or other man-made disasters.

There are some 25 million refugees and asylum seekers, as well as more than 40 million Internally Displaced People (IDPs) who have fled violence and persecution. This is continuing all around the world and impacting many Commonwealth countries. For example, since 25 August 2017, hundreds of thousands of people have crossed the Myanmar-Bangladesh border, fleeing violence in northern areas of Myanmar's Rakhine state. This is one of the largest and most complex crises in the region in decades.

Natural disasters are also an important cause of displacement and are likely to continue increasing in number and intensity owing to global warming and climate change. It is estimated there were 25 million new displacements due to disasters, including drought, floods and earthquakes, during 2016. In the first half of 2017 floods killed close to 300 people in Sri Lanka and displaced over half a million. Further floods in August 2017 led to millions more being displaced and almost 250 deaths in India, Nepal and Bangladesh.

It is not only those displaced by violence and natural disaster that need our help. Migration can be voluntary or involuntary, and migrants may find themselves in a vulnerable situation regardless of the reasons for their movements.

We know that CHOGM will be discussing security, and many see the movements of migrants and displaced persons as a security issue. The right of States to control migration and secure their own national borders is the focus of much of the current public debates around the world. But states can have a migration system that is both







more orderly and more humane, and we would suggest that this become an objective of the upcoming meeting.

In 2016 the UN Secretary General hosted a meeting to look at mass movements of people. From that began a process to develop two global compacts, one on refugees and one on safe, orderly and regular migration. This CHOGM is an opportunity to discuss where it stands on these two compacts and to seek to influence them in a way that will promote the safety and dignity of migrants and displaced persons all over the world.

At the outset of the global compacts process, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) called on States to prioritise the safety and dignity of all migrants, irrespective of their status. More needs to be done to protect migrants from death, violence, abuse and violations of their fundamental rights, along the entire migratory route.

The IFRC also hopes that States will ensure that migrants, irrespective of legal status, have effective access to essential services, including access to humanitarian assistance and protection without fear of arrest or

detention. All over the world National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies are helping to ensure this through creating, with support from governments, 'safe spaces' where migrants and displaced persons can access the assistance they need, and where governments agree not to arrest people due to their immigration status. We stand ready to continue and to scale up this work.

Our message is simple and unchanged: save lives and protect dignity. Our message is about humanity. The London CHOGM provides important opportunities to develop a new approach to migration that is both more effective and more humane. It is a chance that we cannot afford to miss.

 **MORE INFORMATION**  
[www.ifrc.org](http://www.ifrc.org)

↑ **India, Bihar 2017.** Flooding in India has affected more than 32 million people. In the eastern state of Bihar, floodwaters from Nepal wiped out homes and livelihoods. Red Cross has been responding with distributions of aid, and providing clinics for people affected by flooding.  
© IFRC/Hannah Butler

INTERNATIONAL  
  
FEDERATION

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**Elhadj As Sy** is the Secretary General of the IFRC. He took up this role on 1 August, 2014 and is based at the IFRC secretariat in Geneva, Switzerland. Mr. Sy has extensive experience in leadership roles in the humanitarian sector, having previously served at a senior level with UNICEF, UNAIDS and other agencies for over 25 years.

# SUSTAINABILITY AND RESILIENCE EDUCATION CAN DELIVER

The 20th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (CCEM) took place in Nadi, Fiji, from 19-23 February 2018 and was attended by over 400 delegates plus official delegations from 34 member states.

Held every three years, this was the first CCEM to be held in a Pacific Island country. The overarching theme of sustainability and resilience was made even more pertinent by the ministerial meeting coinciding with the second anniversary of the devastation of Cyclone Winston and also in the wake of Tropical Cyclone Gita, which caused severe damage in the Pacific only a few days before the gathering.

Opened by Prime Minister Rt Hon Commodore Frank Bainimarama, the theme for the conference was 'Sustainability and Resilience: Can Education Deliver?'. The 20th CCEM was the first largescale meeting of the Commonwealth education community since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015. Publication by the Commonwealth Secretariat of the SDG4 Status Update Report provided Ministers with an overview of progress with the new global education agenda, and highlighted the need for the Commonwealth to increase efforts to achieve Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 – inclusive and equitable quality education for all. In the Commonwealth, only one third of children in developing countries have access to early childhood education, approximately 17 million primary

children remain out of school, and more than 400 million adults are illiterate. Some of the Commonwealth's most pressing education challenges, therefore, include education financing, low enrolment rates in pre-school, primary and secondary schools and persisting gender disparities in education as well as inadequate technical and vocational training and a lack of lifelong learning opportunities for all across the Commonwealth.

Keynote speaker Rt Hon Helen Clark, former Administrator of UNDP and PM of New Zealand, provided a particular focus on the issue of those who have been left behind from the formal education system when she spoke at the Integrated Partners Forum in a session chaired by the RCS' Director of Youth Affairs and Education Programmes, Helen Jones. She said 'Globally, we still have tens of millions of children not enrolled in school, and quite a number of those are in Commonwealth countries. It is very important to leave no-one behind in education because if there's anything that makes for inclusive development it is the opportunity of every child and every young person to have access to schooling'.

All attendees were very aware that they have a significant leadership role for their countries in improving outcomes for future generations. Every country is being challenged to have inclusive education for all and to leave nobody behind; to educate for sustainable development; to build resilience and help communities adapt to the impact of climate change; and to foster inclusive and cohesive societies. The Commonwealth provides an ideal platform to learn from one another and share policy solutions that have worked for some countries and explore adaptation in different contexts.

The Royal Commonwealth Society served on the International Task Force for the Ministerial Meeting and also played a key role in helping to plan and convene the successful Integrated Partners Forum (IPF), held for the first time at a CCEM. This brought together key stakeholders from the main education sectors of teachers, Higher Education, youth, and civil society, reflecting the importance of sectors working together as partners





in the context of achieving the SDGs. The format for the IPF meeting aimed to foster increased collaboration and dialogue among the various groups. Representatives also had the opportunity to engage with Commonwealth Ministers and senior government officials and communicate their key priorities for education.

For their part, ministers also affirmed the importance of partnership and collaboration between all stakeholders, and welcomed the Commonwealth Education Partnership (CEP) as a renewed commitment by the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU), Commonwealth of Learning (COL) and

other partners to work together to support member states. The final Nadi Declaration outlines the priorities and agenda for education across the Commonwealth for the next three years (2018–2021) and will be presented to Commonwealth Heads of Government in London. The statement recognises that education is crucial to attaining a common future that is fairer, more prosperous and more secure and meets the needs of all, especially young people, girls and women and the most vulnerable.

↑ **Equity and Fairness panel at the IPF, chaired by RCS' Director of Youth and Education Programmes, Helen Jones (R)**

 **MORE INFORMATION**  
[www.thercs.org/youth-and-education/commonwealth-youth-gender-and-equality-network](http://www.thercs.org/youth-and-education/commonwealth-youth-gender-and-equality-network)

**CYGEN at the CCEM**

The CCEM created an important advocacy opportunity for CYGEN, the Commonwealth Youth Gender and Equality Network, which is facilitated by the RCS and supported by the Australian government through DFAT. CYGEN representative Tahere Siisiialafia from Samoa was a speaker at the IPF on the panel which explored Equity and Fairness, addressed ministers at the roundtable on skills, and was proactive in advocating on gender matters and framing recommendations for the final statements.

↑ **CYGEN advocate, Tahere Siisiialafia (L) with Keynote Speaker, Rt Hon Helen Clark**



# THE COMMONWEALTH SERVICE

Commonwealth Day 2018 marked the beginning of a six week period during which the eyes of the world will be on the Commonwealth through the events of Commonwealth Day, the Commonwealth Games and the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting.

Commonwealth Day provides an annual opportunity to celebrate the links between Commonwealth communities around the world. On Monday 12th March, citizens from across the Commonwealth and beyond came together to celebrate the rich diversity of the Commonwealth's 53 nations by hosting Commonwealth Big Lunches, community gatherings, services, flag-raising ceremonies, school assemblies and meetings all in celebration of the Commonwealth's shared values of peace, democracy and equality.

In London, Commonwealth Day began on a reflective note with a wreath-laying ceremony at the Memorial Gates, Constitutional Hill. This year's memorial honoured the contribution of Caribbean service men and women and featured music provided by the Royal Gurkha Rifles.

In Westminster, Her Majesty The Queen, Head of the Commonwealth, was accompanied by TRH The Prince of Wales and The Duchess of Cornwall, TRH The

Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, HRH Prince Harry and Ms Meghan Markle, HRH The Duke of York, HRH The Princess Royal, HRH Princess Alexandra, HRH The Countess of Wessex and HRH The Duchess of Gloucester for the Commonwealth Service at Westminster Abbey, the UK's largest annual inter-faith event.

Amongst the 2,000-strong congregation were members of the Commonwealth diplomatic community, faith leaders and senior politicians including the Prime Minister of the UK, The Rt Hon Theresa May MP; the Prime Minister of Malta, The Hon Dr Joseph Muscat MP and the Commonwealth Secretary-General, The Rt Hon Patricia Scotland QC. They were joined by 800 school children and young people from across all four of the UK's home nations (England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland) who travelled to the Service from as far afield as Belfast, Fyfe, Aberystwyth, Stoke-on-Trent, Alnmouth, Berwick-upon-Tweed and York for a programme of Commonwealth activities.

The Service was based around this year's Commonwealth theme, 'Towards a Common Future', which emphasises how the Commonwealth can address global challenges and work to create a better future for all citizens through sub-themes of sustainability, safety, prosperity and fairness.

↑ **Portsmouth Gospel Choir sings Bridge over Troubled Water**



Outside the doors, guests were treated to the sounds and acrobatic displays of the Ghanaian dance and drum troop, One-Drum. Inside, the Service began with the procession of the flags of the 53 Commonwealth countries and a spirited 'Call of Welcome' from Ngāti Rānana, the London Māori Choir, resounded throughout the Abbey. Other performances included Liam Payne singing 'Waiting on the World to Change' and the Portsmouth Gospel Choir which performed 'Bridge Over Troubled Water'.

Reflections were read by poet and teacher, Jaspreet Kaur and Dr Andrew Bastawrous, Founder of Peek Vision, who spoke about his work developing technology to improve vision and eye health throughout the Commonwealth.

Prayers were offered by the Reverend Dr Martyn Atkins of the Methodist Church, Mr Patrick O'Mara from the Bahá'í community, Rabbi Dr Andrew Goldstein

of Liberal Judaism, Mr Malcolm M Deboo, from the Zoroastrian community, Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra from the Muslim community and His Eminence Archbishop Angaelos of the Coptic Orthodox Church.

The Rt Hon Theresa May MP, UK Prime Minister, read Romans 12: 3-13 and the Commonwealth Secretary-General led the Act of Affirmation to the Commonwealth.

Following the conclusion of the Service TRH The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge and HRH Prince Harry and Ms Meghan Markle had the opportunity to meet with some of the school children who had travelled from around the UK to attend.

The Service was broadcast live on BBC One and the BBC World Service and is available to watch on BBC iPlayer until 11th April 2018.

↓ Clockwise:  
**UK Prime Minister with performers**  
**One-Drum entertain awaiting crowds**  
**HRH The Duchess of Cambridge meets school children**  
**HRH Prince Harry and Ms Meghan Markle arrive**

 **MORE INFORMATION**  
[www.thercs.org/our-work/commonwealth-day-2018](http://www.thercs.org/our-work/commonwealth-day-2018)



© Picture Partnership







# COMMONWEALTH FAMILY DAY

On Friday 16th February, over 600 children, young people and parents visited Westminster Abbey to attend the first Commonwealth Family Day, an initiative organised by the Westminster Abbey Education team in partnership with The Royal Commonwealth Society.

With the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in London this spring, Commonwealth Family Day was a pre-emptive celebration of the diverse range of cultures, arts and talents of this unique network of 53 countries. Families were invited to take part in activities, watch unique performances and explore the links between the historic venue, Westminster Abbey, and the Commonwealth.

↑ Young dancers from Arunima Kumar Dance Company outside the Great West Door

Westminster Abbey, with its distinguished history, has an endless supply of intriguing sights, and families were delighted to take part in a Commonwealth Family Trail through the Abbey, highlighting such prestigious memorials as those of Isaac Newton, Geoffrey Chaucer and Charles Darwin. Many links with the Commonwealth are to be found, from the start of the trail at the magnificent Great West Door, entrance for the annual Commonwealth Service, to the tomb of Sir Herbert Baker, nicknamed 'The Architect of The Commonwealth' for his extensive work designing schools, churches and government buildings across South Africa, India and Kenya. Included in the trail was a display of the 53 flags of the Commonwealth, arranged in the Chapter House of the Abbey, built in 1250 and a former meeting place of The King's Great Council. Arranged in the order in which each country joined the network, the flag display proved a colourful tool for children to match flags to countries.

Throughout the day, families were treated to a range of performances from citizens of countries across the Commonwealth. Miishejelo Dance Theatre, a Ghanaian



dance and drumming troupe, performed their exciting, fast-paced piece in the Nave, inviting children to join them and dance to the drumbeats. This was followed by classical Indian Kuchipudi and Kathak Dance from Arunima Kumar Dance Company and ANKH Dance, performed by dancers of all ages, from 4 to 44! The afternoon brought a Malay dance performance from Lili Mushlihah and Siti Farahnazirah from Singapore and Songs from Belize with Mike Lindup. The day was closed by a Calypso performance from Alexander D Great of Trinidad and Tobago. The atmosphere in the Abbey was joyful as hundreds of families gathered to watch the performances, each of a very different technique and style, as their music rang throughout the building.

**“ We learnt that the Commonwealth countries help each other in good times and in bad. ”**

Community Education Officer at Westminster Abbey, Aaron Paterson, said: “Commonwealth Family day was a wonderful event. It was a joyful celebration of co-operation and respect. Children created images that really spoke to their concern for the environment and demonstrated an understanding of peace over war, they really are looking out for the common future they will be living in.”

**“ What a fantastic event thank you! An amazing experience for adults and children. ”**

To incorporate the 2018 Commonwealth theme of Towards a Common Future, community artist Donna Vale held craft workshops for children, encouraging them to draw what a ‘Common Future’ meant to them. This popular activity allowed children to have fun interacting with the theme and to share their views and ideas on our collective future. The drawings were then transferred to fabric and bound together into a navy-blue velvet book to be kept by Westminster Abbey and The Royal Commonwealth Society and displayed at the Commonwealth Service and in the run-up to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting.

In celebration of The Queen’s Commonwealth Essay Competition, a creative writing workshop was held as part of the Commonwealth Family Day



celebrations; young people from across London came together to consider how they would interpret the theme of the Competition and produce unique essays, stories, poems and plays. Led by Man Booker Finalist, author Stephen Kelman, the workshop included inspiring discussions on technique, motivation and how to choose your best ideas, followed by a question and answer session in which Stephen answered questions on how to get published, the biggest challenges he faced as a writer and how to finish a piece. All the aspiring young authors present said they thoroughly enjoyed the workshop and left eager to begin working on their next pieces.

**“ Wonderful day in a stunning building. ”**

The Royal Commonwealth Society is grateful for the hard work of those involved in creating such an exciting, colourful and varied day. It was an excellent event that appealed to and engaged all ages – an excellent opportunity for families to engage with the Commonwealth through the arts. Though this event was the first of its kind, it will definitely not be the last!

**↑ In the Nave, children enjoy songs from Belize with Mike Lindup**

**↑ ANKH Dance perform classical Indian Kuchipudi and Kathak dances**

# THE COMMONWEALTH EQUALITY NETWORK'S ROAD TO CHOGM

The Commonwealth takes pride in its values of diversity, tolerance and the formal equality of its members. Yet for the Commonwealth's lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) citizens, the reality often falls well short of these ideals.

The Commonwealth Equality Network (TCEN) was formed in response to the ongoing marginalisation of LGBTI people across the Commonwealth. Formed in 2013, TCEN is a coalition of Commonwealth civil society organisations – including The Royal Commonwealth Society – which are working to challenge inequality in the Commonwealth based on sexual orientation and gender identity. The Network's bold aim is to give a voice to diverse LGBTI communities and to support joint advocacy in identifying a Commonwealth solution to a Commonwealth issue.

The issue is that 37 of the 53 Commonwealth countries still criminalise consensual same-sex activity between adults and many more do not properly uphold the rights of their trans and intersex citizens. UK Prime Minister Theresa May has

↓ TCEN members with  
Randy Boissonnault  
during TCEN advocacy  
week in London.  
© Eivind Hansen



acknowledged that these laws 'are often directly based on the very laws which [the UK] repealed in this country fifty years ago. Britain has a special responsibility to help change hearts and minds'. The Commonwealth Equality Network, largely made up of members from Africa, Asia and the Caribbean, is now focusing on The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in April 2018 to play its part in changing hearts and minds.

The Network has already proved that putting LGBT communities at the forefront of this approach is a winning strategy. At CHOGM 2015, a Caribbean representative of the Network addressed Foreign Ministers and diplomats about how discrimination had cost members their jobs and the support of their families. This non-confrontational but powerful approach to dialogue was lauded by those she was addressing. After years of work, the Network has gained formal accreditation to the Commonwealth through a process that requires the agreement of all member states.

The Network has an even more ambitious plan to put LGBT equality on the agenda for CHOGM 2018. In January, 25 TCEN members came to the UK to have a dialogue with the UK Government, the Commonwealth Secretary-General, the diplomatic community and Parliament. Highlights included meetings with Randy Boissonnault, Canada's Special Advisor on LGBTQ2, and Victor Madrigal, the UN Special Representative for Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, in what was his first official engagement. All of this has laid the groundwork for CHOGM in April, where TCEN delegates from across the Commonwealth will be attending all four CHOGM fora.

The RCS is proud of its work as a TCEN member to support and advise the Network's interactions with the Commonwealth. It is this positive approach to dialogue and practical action where the Commonwealth is its best and where its values are most effectively realised.

 **MORE INFORMATION**  
[www.commonwelthequality.org](http://www.commonwelthequality.org)  
[bit.ly/RCSLGBTrights](http://bit.ly/RCSLGBTrights)



# UK AND INDIA BUILDING A NEW VISA PARTNERSHIP

As one of the fastest growing economies in the world, a new visa deal with India represents a huge opportunity for a UK looking to reinforce its global network.

Since 2016, The Royal Commonwealth Society has been campaigning for a new visa agreement between the UK and India that would boost prosperity, mobility and the enduring friendship between two great Commonwealth powers.

Working with partners in UK tourism and Indian business, the RCS is calling for a bilateral visa agreement, similar to that already in place between the UK and China, to be signed between the UK and India. The UK-China arrangement makes it easier and cheaper for frequent travellers between the two countries to obtain a two year multiple-entry visa. This simple change of policy would be of huge benefit to diaspora families, tourists and frequent business travellers that want to make repeat visits without the inconvenience and expense of repeat applications. A new agreement would reduce the cost of the two year visa by more than two-thirds – from £338 to £89.

↓ **Consular Minister  
Shri S. Ramesh.**  
speaks with guests  
at the parliamentary  
reception.



The timing of this campaign could not be more critical. RCS research revealed that in 2016, the last year for which records were available, France attracted more Indian tourists than ever before, while the number of Indian nationals visiting the UK declined by nearly 2%. Given the UK and India's enduring Commonwealth bond, it's concerning that France is now attracting over 185,000 more Indian visitors per year than the UK.

In March, the RCS and partners from UK tourism and Indian business held a parliamentary reception, calling on the UK and Indian governments to adopt this bilateral visa policy. Addressing parliamentarians, representatives of tourism and business, and officials from the India High Commission, Deirdre Wells, Director of UKinbound said:

"If the UK is to be a truly globally-focused nation, then we need to reach out to the economic powerhouses of the future like India – a growing market which speaks our language, knows our culture, and even drives on the same size of the road! Our visa system must enable trade, not impede it. We have a proven model in the reduced cost and streamlined Chinese two year visa; a model that has supported nearly 20% growth in the market in two years".

Following the Mayor of London's recent trip to India, we were pleased to have London's Deputy Mayor for Business, Rajesh Agrawal speak at the event. He urged the UK Home Office to introduce the two year visitor visa for Indian citizens. This message was reinforced by speeches from Uday Dholakia of Birmingham Airport, and Nathan Stower of Virgin Atlantic.

The Commonwealth Summit, to be hosted by the UK Government in April 2018, will be a key moment for the campaign, with Prime Minister Modi confirmed to attend and the UK keen to promote a bold, global image. The recent announcement, that a new Memorandum of Understanding will be signed between the UK and India, has also bolstered hopes for the future enhancement of UK-India mobility.

**MORE INFORMATION**  
[bit.ly/RCSIndiaFactSheet](http://bit.ly/RCSIndiaFactSheet)  
[bit.ly/RCSIndiaVisaReport](http://bit.ly/RCSIndiaVisaReport)

# THE SUMMIT AND THE FUTURE COMMONWEALTH

The summit's theme is 'Towards a Common Future' and is focused on building on the strengths of the Commonwealth to ensure this unique organisation is responsive to global challenges and delivers a more prosperous, secure, sustainable and fair future for all its citizens, particularly its young people. Here our contributors offer their views on what aspects of the individual themes should be addressed.



**Olaoluwa Abagun** is a Nigerian Lawyer and Founder of Girl Pride Circle Initiative. Olaoluwa is also a member of the Commonwealth Youth Gender & Equality Network (CYGEN).

## A FAIRER FUTURE

The 2018 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting will host only three female Heads of Government out of all 53 member states. Without doubt, this is a striking reflection of the level of fairness, equity and equality in governance, inclusion of diverse voices in democratic processes, and recognition of fundamental freedoms across the Commonwealth.

Today, democracy continues to be a mirage for many women, girls, young people and other marginalised populations whose voices and contributions are routinely excluded from fundamental decision-making processes. While the concept of good

governance within the Commonwealth is fluid, what is clear is that any socio-political structure which reinforces inequalities, is one that leaves much to be desired.

For the Commonwealth, attaining a common future requires conscious efforts in keeping the tables unreserved and recognising every individual as a full and equal political citizen whose voice matters. The Commonwealth Youth Gender and Equality network (CYGEN), is actively working to create a fairer Commonwealth, in which meaningful participation in governance by youth is a norm and gender is not a silent criterion for political leadership.



**Lucy Slack** is the Deputy Secretary General of the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF), with responsibility for the organisation's policy and programmes. This includes management of CLGF's regional offices in Asia, Africa, the Pacific, and the Caribbean.

## A MORE SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

The impacts of natural and man-made disasters across the Commonwealth in recent years have starkly reminded us of the many complex challenges facing member states. Commonwealth countries are grappling with the impacts of climate change and food security, civil conflict and lack of access to basic services, poverty, and rapid urbanisation, with many small states particularly vulnerable.

When the Heads met in 2005, they embraced the 2030 Agenda for Change and governments are actively working towards achieving the SDGs. A sustainable Commonwealth is one of the four themes of our Common Future to be addressed at

the Commonwealth Summit in London. The Commonwealth plays a valuable role in sharing learning and supporting implementation towards sustainable development. It has established the Small States Centre of Excellence in Malta to assist countries in critical areas such as disaster preparedness, debt management and women's economic empowerment; at the CHOGM in London we look forward to welcoming the Blue Charter for sustainable ocean development.

It is important that the Commonwealth also addresses urbanisation and the critical role that cities play in development. According to UN Habitat, cities make up 2% of the

land area but they are responsible for 70% of global GDP, 70% of greenhouse gas emissions and 70% of global waste. However they also offer economies of scale for infrastructure development and are important engines of economic growth. CLGF has established a Commonwealth

Sustainable Cities Network and in the spirit of multilevel governance envisaged in the Agenda 2030, there is huge potential for the Secretariat to work strategically with CLGF and other Associated and Accredited organisations to support cities in the Commonwealth.



**Mark Albon** is a former South African Diplomat who has over 25 years of international experience in multilateral fora. He is currently Head of the Commonwealth CVE Unit which was established in January 2017 to provide support to Commonwealth member countries in their efforts to Prevent and Counter Violent Extremism.

## A MORE SECURE FUTURE

Unprecedented security threats are a shared 21st century issue. Terrorism, organised crime, cyber-crime, violent extremism and human trafficking are universal, ignoring borders, language, gender, political persuasion and national identity. At the London CHOGM, Heads of Government will address security issues such as cyber security and the importance of cyber governance; they will reaffirm their commitment to SDG 8.7 to take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking, and they will recommit to SDG 16.2 to end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence and torture against children. They will also address the enablers of serious and organised crime, money laundering and terrorist financing by promoting cooperation through international and regional bodies

and by enhancing cooperation between jurisdictions in criminal justice matters.

In tackling the threat of violent extremism, the Commonwealth's CVE unit will continue to promote the most appropriate mechanisms to share best practice amongst member states and support mutual efforts to counter the efforts of violent extremists both on-line and on the ground.

The Commonwealth is uniquely placed to draw on its collective strength, capacity and skills and form partnerships with member countries to share learning and practice. It harnesses the positive role women and young people play in building more cohesive, secure societies, by actively involving them in finding solutions to security challenges. This 'Commonwealth Advantage' can lead to a more secure future for member countries.



**Faith Nafula Wafula** is Director at Brydges Center Skills Development Project and represented CBW at the 9th Commonwealth Youth Ministers' Meeting in Uganda in 2017. She is an Executive Committee member of the Commonwealth Youth Gender and Equality Network and an RCS Associate Fellow.

## A MORE PROSPEROUS FUTURE



The Commonwealth Businesswomen's Network (CBW), an accredited organisation focused on women's leadership and economic empowerment, has been at the forefront in advocating for gender-responsive procurement systems and supplier diversity. This is now reflected in the Commonwealth Priorities for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment 2017–2020 and Beyond, which specifically calls for 'gender-responsive procurement systems.' The CHOGM Prosperity agenda can make a measurable difference to women's economic empowerment if governments review how tenders can be made more easily available for women-owned business, for example by Open Contracting to ensure a level playing field for access to tenders for women.

Another area that needs to be addressed is for all governments to strengthen legal frameworks and tackle laws that hamper women's opportunities. Across the Commonwealth, 89% of countries have at least one law that hinders women's ability to work or to set up and operate a business and 43% have at least one restriction on women's employment. This holds back growth and needs to change.

We also need to do more to encourage links between businesswomen and higher education such as the CBW involvement in the hackathon for the SDGs during Global Entrepreneurship Week (Social Storm) and the development of the MBA between CBW and the Commonwealth of Learning using open educational resources.



# SPORT WITH A SOCIAL PURPOSE

Everyone across the Commonwealth Sports Movement believes in the exceptional power of sport as a force for good, writes **David Grevemberg** CBE, Chief Executive Officer of the Commonwealth Games Federation.



↓ Twelve-year-old student Ikanau Conway given the honour of carrying the Queen's Baton on the relay's first ever visit to the aboriginal community on the Great Barrier Reef's Palm Island (c) Gold Coast 2018

Sport is a force that brings us together, reconciles our differences and has the inspiring potential to change lives for the better. A force that drives our commitment to humanity, equality and destiny and encapsulates our passion for, and belief in, the triumphant, generous spirit of humanity.

We have seen this brought to life as the Queen's Baton Relay has visited every nation and territory of the Commonwealth, passed from athletes to citizens, community leaders to schoolchildren and carried across terrains and time zones, whether it be Nauru, with a population of just 10,000, or India, with its 1.2 billion people.

As the baton nears then end of its journey to the Games Opening Ceremony on

4 April, our attention turns to the Games themselves. It will be a thrilling spectacle in one of the world's sunniest sporting destinations: with 18 sports, including exciting firsts like the introduction of Beach Volleyball, Women's Rugby Sevens and the largest-ever para-sport programme in Games history. More than that, however, the Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games will demonstrate just how committed we are to ensuring the benefits of the Games stretch beyond the thrilling impact of 11 days of sport.

All our efforts are focused on delivering worldwide recognition and respect for the Gold Coast and Queensland; jobs and economic growth across Australia and above all, the promise of greater reconciliation and social justice.

It's why Gold Coast 2018 will be the first Mega Sporting Event in Australia with a Reconciliation Action Plan, why Festival 2018 will celebrate the diverse and dynamic cultures of the Commonwealth, and why we're proud to become the first multi-sport event in the world to create a truly level playing field of gender equality – with an equal number of medal chances for men and women.

These very clear examples of progress are the reason the resurgent, modern Commonwealth Sport Movement is alive and thriving today.

It has been tremendous to see the Gold Coast and the global Commonwealth community embrace this 'sport with a social purpose' identity and contribute so successfully to what will undoubtedly be a memorable Games.

The Commonwealth Games are built on partnerships and we have benefited from and sincerely appreciate the support of The Royal Commonwealth Society and its network, working together to raise the profile and impact of today's Commonwealth. Together, in this hugely exciting year, I know we will all ensure that Gold Coast 2018 will be a loud and proud celebration of the Commonwealth.



 **MORE INFORMATION**  
[www.thecgf.com](http://www.thecgf.com)

# THE QUEEN'S COMMONWEALTH CANOPY

On Tuesday 13th March 2018, His Royal Highness, The Duke of Gloucester used Commonwealth Week to officially unveil Malawi's dedication to The Queen's Commonwealth Canopy (QCC), making Malawi the 33rd Commonwealth country to join this important pan-Commonwealth initiative.



Officially recorded in 1926, the 160,000 hectare Chimaliro Forest Reserve is covered with indigenous brachystegia woodland and grassland and plays an important part in local life. The Malawi government has worked closely with those communities surrounding the reserve to inculcate a philosophy of assimilation that encourages both a sense of collective ownership of this important site and a duty to protect and care for it.

Malawi's dedication joins other recent African commitments to the QCC, including Rwanda's 200 hectare Ruhande Arboretum and Sierra Leone's 16,700 hectare Tacugama Reserve – Western Area Peninsula National Park (WAPNP). Situated in the Huye District, the Ruhande Arboretum was planted in 1933 as a research forest and, importantly, serves as a 'gene bank' of the forests found within

↓ HRH The Duke of Gloucester unveils the QCC plaque in Malawi



Rwanda, whilst the WAPNP is one of Sierra Leone's eight biodiversity hotspots, hosting 80-90% of its terrestrial biodiversity.

With the approach of the 2018 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in London, commitments from across all Commonwealth geographic regions continue to increase with dedications received in recent months from Guyana, Malaysia, Tonga, and Trinidad and Tobago.

Malaysia's dedication of the 23,000 hectare Raja Musa Forest Reserve brings to the QCC its second peat swamp forest, which is rich in biodiversity and instrumental in climate regulation, biodiversity, conservation and is a source of livelihood for the local community. Meanwhile dedications from Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago continue to highlight the important link between sustainable forest conservation practices and water security, particularly in areas of limited rainfall.

Guyana's Kanashen Amerindian Protected Area is the first Community Owned Protected Area in Guyana and one of the largest at 648,567 hectares. Home to the indigenous Wai Wai people, Kanashen houses the headwaters of the Essequibo River, which contributes about 20% of the freshwater produced in the country. It also forms part of the High Biodiversity Wilderness Area of Amazonia and is a key part of the Guiana Shield.

Trinidad and Tobago's Arena Forest Reserve Project aims to provide a protected and sustainable water source to the Caroni Area Dam, which provides drinking water to the central part of the island of Trinidad. It also provides ecosystem services to the surrounding community and non-timber forest products to the handicraft trade.

Since its creation in November 2015, the QCC has received 87 dedicated projects and sites across the Commonwealth. Numerous countries continue to work towards committing to this high-profile programme to mark Her Majesty The Queen's lifetime of service to the Commonwealth and to conserving forests for future generations.

 **MORE INFORMATION**  
[www.queenscommonwealthcanopy.org](http://www.queenscommonwealthcanopy.org)

# RCS BRANCHES CELEBRATE COMMONWEALTH DAY

Branches around the world organise and partner in celebrations each year. Reports of youth participation, inter-faith services, diverse performances and capacity audiences demonstrate a year-on-year enthusiasm for celebrating the significance of the modern Commonwealth.



## Ghana

RCS Africa Regional Co-ordinators partnered with the British Council in Ghana for a celebration which included the presentation of certificates in recognition of excellence in The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition. An engaging Model CHOGM was staged, run by students from the Ghana International School, at which a resolution banning the use of plastics was discussed. Guests included both the British and Australian High Commissioners to Ghana, current and former Ministers, representatives of the Commonwealth Enterprise and Investment Council and the Head of the Africa Office of the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative.

## Auckland

At the Commonwealth Day Service, Michael Derevianko, an Auckland Grammar School pupil and recipient of a Gold Award in the 2017 Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition, gave an address emphasising the importance of youth as future leaders, serving and representing all cultures in society. He said: "Education is the route for everyone to have a voice and be a contributor to meaningful discussion and change on the world stage. ...There is a very special value in the insights we gain through a shared understanding and the Commonwealth connection. However, this connection can only be achieved by all of us having the tools, knowledge and education that enable us to work more collaboratively 'Towards a Common Future'.



## Barbados

Commonwealth Day was celebrated in Barbados at a multi-faith service in St Patrick's cathedral. Organised by RCS Barbados Branch, the 53 Commonwealth flags were paraded through the cathedral by the Barbados Cadet Corps. Trumpeters of The Band of The Royal Barbados Police Force announced the arrival of Her Excellency Dame Sandra Mason, GCMG, DA, QC, Governor-General of Barbados, long-standing council member and patron of RCS Barbados branch, who read The Queen's Commonwealth Day Message. Anthems were performed by local school choirs and readings given by members of the Jewish, Bahá'í, Buddhist, Muslim and Christian faiths. The Service was followed by a parade of the Commonwealth flags around Bridgetown.





### Cayman Islands

Celebrations to commemorate Commonwealth Day were launched with the annual Observance Service at the St. George's Anglican Church on Sunday, 11 March 2018. Boy Scouts, Cub Scouts, Brownies and Girl Guides participated, along with violinists from several primary schools, a Kotti Dance troupe and a steel band. On Commonwealth Day the eleventh annual meeting of the Cayman Islands Youth Parliament, organised by the local branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, was held in the Legislative Assembly. Nineteen High School and University College students had the opportunity to act as members of the Legislative Assembly for a day, debating two motions: an amendment to Election Law and one to amend Education Law. Students from educational institutions on Cayman Brac and Grand Cayman participated.



### Jamaica

Jamaica marked Commonwealth Day with a celebration hosted by Governor-General, Sir Patrick Allen, and Lady Allen at King's House and the RCS Jamaica branch. The event was attended by High Commissioners from Nigeria, Canada, South Africa and the British High Commissioner, His Excellency Asif Ahmad, along with the Chairperson of The Royal Commonwealth Society Jamaica, Indera Persaud and Immediate Past Chairperson of the Caribbean Regional Youth Council and RCS member, Tijani Christian, who performed the role of Master of Ceremonies. The event observed the 2018 theme 'Towards a Common Future' and featured the reading of the Commonwealth Day message from Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II by the Governor-General, who also raised a toast to The Queen. There was a cultural performance from a student of the Liguanea Preparatory School.

### Cyprus

Commonwealth Day was celebrated by the new RCS Cyprus branch which, together with a group of students from the University of Nicosia representing eleven different Commonwealth countries, were guests of the British High Commissioner to Cyprus, Mr. Matthew Kidd CBE. The occasion presented an opportunity for a Commonwealth Big Lunch which the High Commissioner hosted at his residence. The reception featured a band from the Fiji islands playing traditional Fijian music. Later in the week RCS Cyprus launched its Commonwealth Cultures project, aimed at promoting the mosaic of different Commonwealth cultures and spreading the message of diversity, unity and friendship of our Commonwealth. Under the umbrella of this project, a series of yoga sessions showcasing Indian culture were delivered by Mr. Gaurav Vohra, Teacher of Indian Culture at the University of Nicosia. The event was organised in collaboration with the Indian High Commission to Cyprus and the Student Affairs Office of the University of Nicosia.



**MORE INFORMATION**  
Additional photos on back cover and  
[bit.ly/RCSCelebrationsAroundTheWorld](https://bit.ly/RCSCelebrationsAroundTheWorld)  
[www.thercs.org/international-network/](http://www.thercs.org/international-network/)

# COMING UP IN THE COMMONWEALTH

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## 12 MARCH-22 APRIL

Commonwealth Big Lunches  
Eden Project Communities

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## 3 APRIL

9<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Sports Ministers  
Meeting, Gold Coast, Australia

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## 4-15 APRIL

XXI Commonwealth Games, Gold Coast,  
Australia (Commonwealth Games Federation)

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## 7 APRIL

International Day of Reflection on the  
Genocide in Rwanda (United Nations)

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## 13 APRIL

CHRI CHOGM Report Launch, London

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## 14-18 APRIL

21<sup>st</sup> Commonwealth Law Conference,  
Livingstone, Zambia (Commonwealth  
Lawyers Association)

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## 16 APRIL

Ageing in Common: An International  
Perspective Inaugural Commonwealth  
Elders' Forum, Reading, UK

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## 16-20 APRIL

Commonwealth Heads of Government  
Meeting, London and Windsor

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## 21 APRIL

The Queen's Birthday Party  
Royal Albert Hall, London

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## 23 APRIL

English Language Day (United Nations)

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## 3 MAY

World Press Freedom Day (United Nations)

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## 21 MAY

World Day for Cultural Diversity for  
Dialogue and Development (United  
Nations)

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## 21-23 MAY

Commonwealth Cybersecurity Forum  
2018, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

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## 1 JUNE

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

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## 5 JUNE

World Environmental Day (United Nations)

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## 18-20 JUNE

Commonwealth ICT Ministers Forum  
2018, London

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## 26 JUNE

The Royal Commonwealth Society  
celebrates its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary

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## 12 AUGUST

International Youth Day (United Nations)

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## 5-7 SEPTEMBER

Commonwealth Broadband Africa  
Forum 2018, Port Louis, Mauritius

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## 15 SEPTEMBER

International Day of Democracy  
(United Nations)

## KEEP IN THE CONVERSATION

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## THE QUEEN'S COMMONWEALTH ESSAY COMPETITION 2018

*"I would like to say a profound thank you to The Royal Commonwealth Society for the way you have managed the competition over the past years. I know you have exciting plans to develop it even further in the future."*  
**HRH The Duchess of Cornwall, on behalf of Her Majesty The Queen**



### 'TOWARDS A COMMON FUTURE'

The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition is the world's oldest schools' international writing competition, established in 1883. With thousands of young people taking part every year, it is an important way for the young voice of the Commonwealth to be developed and heard.

Through the sub-themes of sustainability, safety, prosperity and fairness, the 2018 theme asks young writers to explore how the Commonwealth can address global challenges and work to create a better future for all citizens. Enter at [www.thercs.org/youth-and-education](http://www.thercs.org/youth-and-education)

**CLOSING DATE 1ST JUNE 2018**

[www.thercs.org/competition](http://www.thercs.org/competition)



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TO LEARN MORE OR TO PURCHASE: [www.ariverofstories.com](http://www.ariverofstories.com)





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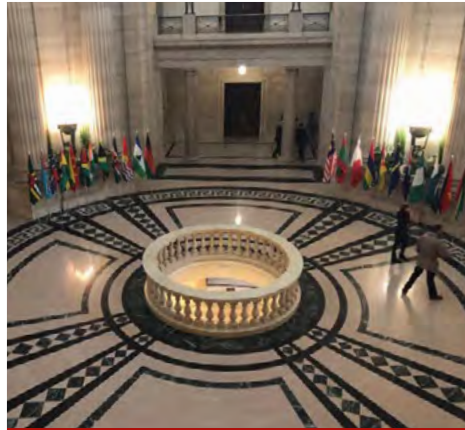
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Commonwealth House, 55-58 Pall Mall, London SW1Y 5JH  
T: +44 (0)20 3727 4300 E: info@thercs.org [www.thercs.org](http://www.thercs.org)

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