

and freely associated as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations". The Statute of Westminster of 1931 gave legal effect to the substance of the decisions reached in 1926 and established the legislative equality of the dominion parliaments with the British Parliament.

The decision of the Imperial Conference of 1926 also gave rise to another significant development in the character of relations between the dominions. Even before the First World War, the dominions had maintained high commissioners in London to deal directly with the British authorities<sup>6</sup>. When the 1926 conference decided that the governor-general in each of the dominions should cease to be the representative of the British Government and become the representative of the monarch, the British Government appointed high commissioners to the dominions. High commissioners gradually assumed a diplomatic identity and functioned as the usual channels of communication between the dominions and British Government; eventually, the dominions exchanged high commissioners among themselves. A significant aspect of the high commissioner's function, which differentiates it from that of an ambassador, is that high commissioners are accredited to the head of government rather than to the head of state. This practice has been maintained despite the decision of many Commonwealth countries not to retain the British monarch as their common head of state. Today it is valued as a reflection of the special relations between members of the association. Most Commonwealth countries have now exchanged high commissioners among themselves as well as with Britain.

In part as a result of developments during the Second World War, the movement towards independence in the colonial areas of South and Southeast Asia became irresistible. On August 15, 1947, the Indian subcontinent was divided, to create the two sovereign countries of India and Pakistan. A year later, Ceylon (since 1972, Sri Lanka) achieved complete independence.

An important step in the evolution of the modern Commonwealth was taken soon after these countries attained independence. When India decided to become a republic yet opted to remain within the Commonwealth, it became clear that common allegiance to the

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<sup>6</sup>Canada appointed the first high commissioner to London in 1880.