

Commonwealth Day in Canada:

Notes to Students

What is Commonwealth Day?

It is an annual day to celebrate Canada's membership in the Commonwealth.

Its purpose is to promote understanding and learning about the Commonwealth.

What is the Commonwealth?

It is an organization of 50 countries, from the six continents sharing a common heritage of the English language, as well as certain traditions in government, in the law, in education and in other fields.

It brings together 1.3 billion people of various faiths, races, languages, traditions and levels of economic development. The Commonwealth represents about a quarter of the world's population and about one third of the membership of the United Nations.

It uses the English language as a common tool to promote fundamental values towards greater human understanding and a more peaceful world.

The modern multiracial Commonwealth began to take shape in 1949 when India became a Republic but retained its Commonwealth link.

The growth of the Commonwealth accelerated in 1957 when Ghana gained its independence. Since then many nations from all parts of the world have become Commonwealth members.

Queen Elizabeth II is the Head of the Commonwealth.

What does the Commonwealth do?

It promotes continued partnership and cooperation among its members.

It promotes understanding and tolerance amongst members' citizens.

It works towards reducing prejudice, ignorance, disease and poverty in member countries.

It contributes to better understanding and goodwill among people around the world.

It promotes economic development, democracy, respect for human rights, women's equality, and technological development among member countries.

The Commonwealth Secretariat also conducts a very wide range of activities and programs mainly for its developing country members. These include:

The Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation, which is the primary mechanism for development cooperation among member countries. The Fund responds to requests for small-scale technical assistance, provides experts and short-term consultancy services, offers education and training opportunities, and performs economic feasibility studies in industrial and export market development;

The Commonwealth Youth Program seeks to involve young people in their local and national communities by providing them with training and advice. It also conducts programs dealing with issues affecting young people like literacy, employment and the environment;

The Commonwealth of Learning has a mandate to create access to education by using new techniques that make educational opportunities more widely available. Established in 1988 and located in Vancouver, it is a Canadian-sponsored initiative and the first Commonwealth agency to be based outside Britain;

The Commonwealth Immunization Program is another Canadian initiative, complements member countries' existing immunization efforts. The expertise of Canadian NGOs is used to plan local immunization campaigns, supply vaccines

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