

After a week, most of you will have been immersed in the history of the Commonwealth, and rallied to common traditions you might otherwise have never known you had. That is important in a family like ours, because we are far flung, we do not often get together, yet we are unique in both our roots and our relevance. But history is a moving process, and the Commonwealth an actor, not an artifact. So I want to focus my remarks tonight on what we are doing, and can do in the future. Let me place that in the current international context.

Immediately after World War II, an enormous proportion of the world's power rested in two countries - the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. Two military blocs took shape which, in effect, divided world power. The countries not in those blocs were the Third World, and there weren't too many of them in 1945 or even 1955. Since then, dozens of countries have become independent, and stayed out of the military blocs. Many of them have industrialized, and some have become major economic powers.

At the same time, changes in communications and technology created what Marshall McLuhan called "The Global Village", in which our weapons, our subsidies, our successes, our failures, ripple beyond our borders in ways we can't foresee, and can't ignore.

International organizations grew up around these various clusters of countries - NATO, the Warsaw Pact, the OECD, the Non-Aligned Movement. More sets of international rules and standards were agreed to - the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, the Non-Proliferation Treaty and, through the United Nations, agreements on standards in Human Rights, the Environment, Refugees, Health and other issues. The UN is a permanent meeting place for all nations, sometimes stronger, sometimes weaker, always essential. For a period, we discussed international issues, particularly economic issues, mainly in a "North-South" context, North being defined more by wealth than by winter; South being defined by underdevelopment. But that line too has started to blur in the last decade or two. We have become more completely a world community, as we grow to understand that the major issues leave none of us alone.

But agreeing to build a system does not necessarily mean agreeing to make it work. There has to be a will to work together internationally, and often that will cannot be created artificially.