



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
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A CANADIAN VIEW OF THE COMMONWEALTH

(Excerpts from a Press Conference by Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Pierre Elliott Trudeau, Ottawa, January 5, 1971.)

I am going to Singapore as the leader of one government to meet the leaders of other governments. We will have many things to discuss having to do with the Commonwealth and the many facets of the Commonwealth and of world problems. There is one issue which perhaps seems to dominate the speculations - the issue of the sale of arms to South Africa, just as a couple of years ago it was the issue of Rhodesia. There is always some issue which seems to be the most exciting one, in the sense that people can speculate on whether it is going to lead to disaster or not. But there are many many other things we are going to be doing in Singapore. There are many many things that the Commonwealth is performing and many more that it can perform.

One item that I suggested be put on the agenda was to use to the utmost this occasion of heads-of-state and heads-of-government meeting from various continents so that they could exchange techniques of improving, shall we say, the Parliamentary democratic system. This to me is very fundamental; it is as important as any other issue. Arms sales to South Africa is very important for some countries who want to proceed with the sales and very important for those who don't want to see it proceeded with. But to me it is just one item on the agenda.

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The value of the Commonwealth as I see it is to be able periodically to sit down at the head-of-state or head-of-government level and to discuss issues which transcend continents, transcend colour, transcend racial origin, economic basis and so on. It is a forum wherein free men try to find ways to progress in a difficult world and to me there is no single issue so important that it is worthwhile breaking up the Commonwealth.

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I was just fascinated at the last Commonwealth meeting by the possibilities of learning from other heads of government the techniques with which they govern their countries, how they meet the challenge of a moving