



# STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

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## THE COMMONWEALTH HEADS OF GOVERNMENT MEETING, SINGAPORE - I

A Statement by the Prime Minister, the Right Honourable  
Pierre Elliott Trudeau, in the House of Commons on  
February 1, 1971.

Mr. Speaker, it is not possible, in the few minutes which the rules permit me, to describe to the House in more than a summary fashion the Singapore conference of Commonwealth heads of government. I should like to convey to the House some of the impressions that I brought away with me. These impressions, I hope, will add to the information already received from Singapore in the form of the conference communiqué and the very full journalistic reports.

The meeting was, as the House is aware, the first regular Commonwealth conference to take place outside of London, and the first at the head-of-government level to be sited in Asia. I think that an Asian location was most fortunate, partly because it was in Asia that momentum was first initiated for the Commonwealth to be transformed from its older, more confining structure into the widely-representative association which it is today, and partly because an Asian site permitted conference delegates to live and work in a newly-independent community in which racial harmony is a necessary fact of life. The world, as we know but so often tend to forget in the immediacy of our own domestic problems, is populated to an overwhelming degree by persons who are desperately poor and whose colonial experience in many instances leads them to question the values and the sincerity of the developed countries. All too often, as well, "rich" and "white" are regarded by them as synonymous. We forget these facts at our peril.

In Singapore it quickly became apparent that the future of the world would not necessarily be determined in accordance with European conceptions. The Commonwealth, viewed from Singapore, presented challenges to the ingenuity and goodwill of its members to find ways of communicating across differences measured, in many instances, by thousands of miles and by centuries of experience, yet without insisting upon adherence to preconceived notions or attitudes. In the result, the value of the Singapore conference might best be described in terms of the comprehension gained by delegates, and not by the persuasion which anyone attempted to exercise.