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THE COMMONWEALTH

As self-government and independence were gradually assumed by the colonies within the British Empire, similarities of language, habits, institutional traditions, and working methods convinced many national representatives of the great value of maintaining some form of association in place of the old Empire. The fruit of that decision is the modern Commonwealth. The Commonwealth (or Commonwealth of Nations) is a voluntary association of 32 independent states from six continents and five oceans.(1) Bahamas is the most recent member (July 10, 1973). One other country, Nauru, is a special member, which participates fully, except in Heads of Government Meetings.

The Commonwealth, which embraces a marvellous diversity of races, languages, religions and cultures, is a unique association in which leaders in various fields may, on a level of informality and intimacy, forgather to exchange views on a multitude of questions and attempt to determine what may be usefully done together. In a world that seems in danger of splitting into antagonistic groups based on common interests such as ideology, race, region, economic level of development, or religion, the Commonwealth association possesses the unusual ability of being able to transcend group interests and so bring a global perspective to bear on matters of concern to all members.

The principles of the association were most eloquently expressed in the Commonwealth Declaration, issued at the Meeting of Commonwealth Heads of Government in Singapore in 1971.(2) This statement of common principles affirmed the belief of Commonwealth members in: the United Nations and its efforts to promote international peace and order; the liberty of the individual and each citizen's inalienable right to participate in framing the society in which he may live; the principles of human dignity and equality and the iniquities of colonial domination and racial oppression; the need for the progressive removal of disparities in wealth existing between different sections of mankind; and the value of the Commonwealth as a most useful means to promote international co-operation. In pursuing these principles the members of the Commonwealth believe that they can provide a constructive example of the multinational approach, which is vital to peace and progress in the modern world.

In a geographic sense, the term Commonwealth is understood to include self-governing states associated with a Commonwealth member for the purpose of foreign policy and defence, protectorates, protected states, trust territories administered by a member on behalf

(1) A list of members appears in Appendix A.
(2) The text of the Declaration appears as Appendix C.

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