

The Commonwealth: A window on every world region

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Min. des Affaires extérieures
OTTAWA

27 1991



The Prime Minister, the Rt Hon Brian Mulroney, with Chief Emeka Anyaoku, Commonwealth Secretary-General

Prime Minister Brian Mulroney will travel to London for a meeting of the Commonwealth High-Level Appraisal Group on June 11-12, which will review priorities for the future of the Commonwealth.

The High Level Appraisal Group was established at the Kuala Lumpur Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in 1989 to look ahead to the role of the Commonwealth in the 1990s and beyond, and to examine whether its institutions, including the Secretariat, are adequately equipped for the task. The High Level Appraisal Group was also asked to examine modalities for strengthening democratic institutions through election observer missions and related assistance, and to consider the question of Commonwealth membership in light of new applications for membership.

The High Level Appraisal Group will be meeting for the first time at Head of Government level in London in June, following preparatory work done by the Committee of Senior Officials which has met three times, most recently in Kuala Lumpur. The London meeting will be chaired by Prime Minister Mahathir of Malaysia and comprise leaders of Australia, Bahamas, Britain, Canada, India, Jamaica, Nigeria, Singapore, and Zambia. The High Level Appraisal Group is to report to the next Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting which will be held in Harare, Zimbabwe from October 16 to 22, 1991.

The appraisal of the Commonwealth which is being carried out by the High Level Group did not stem from doubt about its past contribution or continuing relevance. The motivation was rather

to take stock and ensure that in the rapidly shifting international landscape the Commonwealth focused on those tasks where it has unique or special aptitude rather than duplicate the activities of other multilateral bodies.

The main working document for the London meeting of the High Level Group will be a draft declaration setting out a charter to replace the Declaration of Commonwealth Principles adopted almost twenty years ago at the Singapore Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. The London meeting will not make public the results of its work but transmit a draft declaration to Harare for adoption by the full membership of the Commonwealth.

The principal Canadian objective at the London meeting will be to safeguard the unique qualities of the Commonwealth for example, as a forum for informal, frank exchange and planning on joint action among government leaders. At the same time, Canada will seek to give greater prominence to the role of the Commonwealth on advancing democratic institutions and good government, as well as the equality of women and human rights. Canada will also wish to promote the role of non-official associations and institutions as well as to enhance sport relations as a means of strengthening the Commonwealth and to examine a strategy projecting a clearer and more positive public appreciation of the Commonwealth's usefulness.

In his Commonwealth Day message, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney said Canadians could take pride in the vital role the country plays in the Commonwealth.

'The Commonwealth is defined by its success in meeting the changing needs and challenges of its members. It is a force for peace, progress, dialogue and understanding on an international level.'

'The Commonwealth's strength rests in its capacity to forge a common purpose out of its diversity. Our membership provides a window on virtually every region in the world, and gives us a firsthand look at the problems and aspirations of over one quarter of the world's population.'

Through the Commonwealth, Canadians have been at the forefront in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. They are also working to raise living standards through practical assistance to developing countries, are committed to the task of advancing human rights, democratic institutions, and equality of women in all member countries.

Canada also offers expertise to the Commonwealth. Robert Stanfield and Roy McMurtry are, respectively, chairman of the Commonwealth Foundation and chairman of the working party on strengthening Commonwealth sport to build amateur sport links for physical health and personal development.

Mr Mulroney said: 'Canada's role in the Commonwealth will continue to grow in the 1990s and beyond. More than ever, it is important that people of different faiths, races and cultures address issues through partnership and understanding fostered by the Commonwealth'.