

Meeting of Commonwealth Heads of Government,
Lusaka, Zambia,
August 1-8, 1979
Background Notes

Commonwealth Heads of Government will meet this year in Lusaka, Zambia, from August 1-8, the twenty-first such occasion since the practice of these biennial meetings began in 1944. In earlier years, from 1911 to 1937, Imperial Conferences of Prime Ministers and other Ministers of Britain and the Dominions were held periodically to discuss matters of common concern. This year's meeting in Lusaka will be the second held in Africa and President Kenneth Kaunda, as host, will act as Chairman.

The Heads of Government Meeting is the senior of several levels of Commonwealth Conferences. It was last convened in London, England in 1977 and coincided with the Silver Jubilee of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth's accession as Head of the Commonwealth. Unlike most international conferences, the meetings of Commonwealth leaders are private and confidential gatherings for an informal exchange of views. Unanimity is not necessarily a primary objective of these gatherings, but where decisions are reached they are on the basis of consensus.

Details of the proceedings of Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings are not published but it has generally been the practice for a Communiqué to be issued at the close of each meeting summarizing its results.

In 1966, there were two Heads of Government Meetings. The earlier of these, held in Lagos, Nigeria, was the first to be held in a Commonwealth capital other than London, the first to be held in Africa and the first to be devoted to a single subject (Zimbabwe/Rhodesia). No meetings were held in 1967 or 1968.

The Commonwealth Secretariat organizes Heads of Government Meetings in close co-operation with host governments. By the Singapore meeting of 1971, because of the growing size of the Commonwealth (there are now 41 independent member countries) the facilities and in some respects the procedures had little resemblance to those of the first meeting in 1944.