

That definition of the Commonwealth, and that commitment to the Commonwealth as so defined, came from the Queen in Her Majesty's Christmas Day broadcast in 1953 the year after succeeding to the Throne and becoming Head of the Commonwealth. It has been a commitment unswervingly discharged.

If I may now borrow an analogy from a source close to the Queen, the Commonwealth is no longer a wheel with one country at its central hub. Today's Commonwealth has no centre and no periphery; no inner core and no outposts. It is polycentric; its links are multilateral. It is a web of relationships that binds Canada to the Caribbean and West Africa to the South Pacific even as it links the Mediterranean to East Africa and Britain to Botswana. The radial spokes that joined rim to hub have rearranged themselves in the criss-crossing lines of an asymmetrical lattice.

The old Commonwealth drew its strength from the easy and natural affinities of race and culture, from the cosiness of kinship. The new Commonwealth is marked by its diversity. It is that diversity, the bringing together of a variety of peoples, with different cultures, from different continents, at different levels of economic achievement, that gives today's Commonwealth its character and its importance.

A good example of this variety and its enrichment of Commonwealth relations is what I might call our 'French connection'. Canada's own French cultural heritage is a much valued dimension of the Commonwealth's rich diversity. And in Mauritius and, now, the Seychelles are predominantly French-speaking countries among our family of member States. Not surprisingly, in this context, and given the outward-looking character of our new Commonwealth, we are forging links of functional co-operation with the Agence de Co-operation Culturelle et Technique. We have recently shared with the Agence our particular experience with the Fund for Technical Co-operation and, later this year, I will be paying an official visit to its Paris headquarters.

These are all important developments. They reflect, I believe, how much in tune we are with the mood of our times that rejects the division of the world into exclusive spheres. It is the same mood that has helped to develop among the Africans, Caribbean and Pacific States in their negotiation and operation of the Lome Convention with the EEC a new unity of purpose and a new capacity for joint action. It is a matter of great satisfaction that Commonwealth countries should have played no small part in making this possible. Canada, whose very nationalism is founded on unity within diversity and who is so active a practitioner of the politics of consensus, contributes in no small measure to the emergence of this ethos of the Commonwealth.

What, then, has taken the place of the old Commonwealth is a community of a quarter of the world's states reflecting all the rich variety of the human condition - a sample of the international community that brings to the human dialogue the global awareness that its variety demands. And, in doing so, it has managed to preserve its rather special facilities for consultation and co-operation. Its leading players still meet, and informality is continued; indeed it is treasured. They assemble in no one centre, but in