



Statements and Speeches

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THE COMMONWEALTH — AN ASSOCIATION UNSTRUCTURED AND UNFETTERED

Opening Statement to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, Ottawa, by the Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Pierre Elliott Trudeau, August 2, 1973.

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I hope that each one of you will find this gathering to be as valuable and as irreplaceable as I have found those Commonwealth meetings I have attended elsewhere. Since men and women first gained the gift of speech, they have been aware of the importance of wise counsel and of the value of communicating honestly and fully with their neighbours. Today, when the term neighbourhood has been extended by science to include every nation, wherever located, the need for communication has increased immensely. And today, when technology has deepened our awareness of a better life much more rapidly than we have been able to acquire it, the need to understand one another has become critical.

Within the Commonwealth we have the opportunity and the means for both communication and understanding. In this forum of discussion all Commonwealth members are equal. None is senior; none is superior. None is distinguished by economic self-sufficiency; none is possessed of all political virtue. In our discussions the next few days, I have no doubt that we shall be able to demonstrate to one another and to the world the advantages of our dissimilarity, the richness of our diversity, the excitement of our variety. We shall be able to do so because we are members of an association, not an institution. In this Commonwealth there is no structure to contain us; there are no fetters to chafe us. The Commonwealth is a reflection of its 32 members and of their desire to consult and co-operate with one another. There is no artificial adhesive. Nor is there any voting, any constitution, any flag, any headquarters. This association is neither regional in nature nor specialized in its interests. The Commonwealth is an organism, and this fact guarantees both its vitality and its flexibility.

At this meeting, several steps are being taken in an attempt to respond to the need for more effective communication. First, it is proposed that meeting procedures be less rigid and less formal than in recent years; second, the shorter agenda reflects the fact that many international issues are interrelated and are best examined in a broad context; third, the weekend arrangements promise two
