

Canada's Role in the Commonwealth

Canada is one of the Commonwealth's strongest supporters and promoters, and values the role this organization — with its diversity of races, religions and cultures — plays on the world scene. Cutting across regional and interest blocs, the Commonwealth is seen as a model of multilateralism, an ideal instrument with which to broaden international understanding and consensus. The association also enriches and deepens Canada's bilateral relations with 51 other member countries in nearly all regions of the world and reinforces Canadian foreign policy goals.

The Commonwealth furthers Canada's foreign policy objectives through its numerous programs supporting common principles and values. Good governance and the promotion of fundamental political values, as articulated in the 1991 Harare Declaration, are at the heart of the Commonwealth's activities. In a world confronted with many challenges to peace and security, the Commonwealth's ongoing interest in conflict identification, its unique experience with preventative measures, and its success with peaceful resolutions, place the Commonwealth high among multilateral organizations capable of resolving such threats.

By these means, the Commonwealth complements the UN's efforts. Canada believes that the Commonwealth can help to strengthen the multilateral institutions, using their co-operative and consensus-building abilities to deal with major issues and to contribute to the negotiation and implementation of multilateral agreements.

Canada has been a Commonwealth country since 1931 and its membership remains a key element of its external relations. Commonwealth membership offers privileged access to a large group of developing countries. This has helped Canada play a constructive role in North-South issues and added weight and credibility to Canadian foreign policy efforts generally.

Canada strongly welcomed the emergence and development of the modern Commonwealth after 1949. Canada's condemnation of apartheid in South Africa in 1961 led to that country's departure from the Commonwealth and encouraged African members to remain and to join as new states.

In 1985 and 1986, Canada strongly supported the Commonwealth's lead in international efforts to peacefully dismantle apartheid in South Africa. Canada has chaired the Commonwealth Committee of Foreign Ministers on Southern Africa, established at the 1987 Vancouver Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. South Africa rejoined the Commonwealth after free elections were held in 1994.