

Riddle: What is black and brown and yellow and white, and yet is colour-blind, has 36 members, is a body that organizes but is not an organization, has no regulations and yet is regulated, and is alive and well and living in London, Ottawa, and a host of other places?

Answer: Would you believe the Commonwealth?

Question: What *is* the Commonwealth, anyway? I thought it was a private club for retired British diplomats.

Answer: The Commonwealth, like a number of other important things in this world, is not easily defined. The best description was given by heads of government in their 1971 Declaration: "The Commonwealth of Nations is a voluntary association of independent sovereign states, each responsible for its own policies, consulting and co-operating in the common interests of their peoples and in the promotion of international understanding and world peace."

It is clear from this that the Commonwealth is not some kind of exclusive Anglo-Saxon Empire Club. Some people have seen the Commonwealth as an association of the leaders of successful movements for national liberation; others consider it the product of a friendly devolution of authority within the British Empire. Whatever their opinion on these matters of origin, all members are united in the belief that the real meaning of the Commonwealth association lies in its activity and not its definition.