

The Commonwealth is a unique institution. Its members share a common language and a common historical experience. The Commonwealth includes no superpowers. It is not an arena of cold-war politics. It is not intended to pursue one specific goal, or to resolve one specific problem. It cannot be viewed purely in terms of developmental assistance, or of a donor-user equation. It draws its strength from the ideas and ideals inherent in British political traditions and from their humanist values, of which the Commonwealth countries are legatees. Infusing the Commonwealth are the attitudes of a community created by a common historical experience, from which so many of the habits, institutions, and values of Commonwealth countries continue to be built.

The common values held by members transcend racial, religious, cultural and geographic perimeters. They ease relationship and understanding. They bind members spanning all continents and stages of development, and embracing all races, in a mutual acknowledgement of equality. They condition Commonwealth activity. They permit free and frank discussion in Commonwealth assemblies unequalled elsewhere. These common values find expression in the Declaration of Commonwealth Principles adopted by Heads of Government at their Meeting in Singapore in 1971: human dignity and equality, individual participation in framing the national society, a more equitable international society, the freest possible flow of international trade on fair and equitable terms, and a multinational approach to peace and progress.

These values, held in common by members, endow the Commonwealth with the flexibility needed to respond to challenges as they occur. This adaptability was shown in the Commonwealth's adjustment to a sixfold increase in membership in the post-war period, and in establishing the Commonwealth Secretariat in 1965 to implement decisions, and to facilitate communication and co-operation. It is evident in the orientation of Commonwealth activity towards the concerns of newly independent members, and the increasing stress on functional co-operation responsive to the needs of all members. From it has sprung a distinct Commonwealth mentality, predicated on a willingness to collaborate on a basis of equality. The anglocentric order has disappeared, and with it the hierarchical structure which had characterized the association. This has been replaced by a lateral pattern of relations. It is working well, and to the benefit of all members, including Britain.