



Statements and Speeches

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CANADA AND THE COMMONWEALTH

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As host of the Commonwealth Games, Edmonton is the focal-point for world attention and interest. I am pleased to take this opportunity to contribute some thoughts on the Commonwealth and Canada's role in it. As Secretary of State for External Affairs, I have a particular affection and respect for this unique association of friendly states from all parts of the world, who shared a common link with Britain in the past and who now meet as free and independent equals. I offer a special welcome to all participants in the Games and to the many distinguished visitors in attendance. I salute the city of Edmonton and all those who have played a part in the superb organization and planning for the Games. All of us who have worked with the Commonwealth believe in our hearts that, if some measure of its special qualities of friendship, equality and frankness — in a word, its spirit — could be carried over into international relations generally, we should have taken a long step forward towards world peace and stability. The Commonwealth Games in themselves are a unique example of that Commonwealth spirit.

What the Commonwealth means to Canada

It is no exaggeration to call the Commonwealth unique — in membership, in the informality and candour of its biennial heads-of-government meetings, and in the flexibility of its working procedures. Combining 37 independent countries of all races, creeds and levels of economic development, the Commonwealth embraces roughly one-quarter of the world's nations and about the same proportion of the world's population — and continues to grow as its associated states and dependencies achieve independence. It is, in fact, a microcosm of the world community, of significant size and importance, whose members voluntarily consult and co-operate together not only on Commonwealth problems but also as part of the cause of wider international co-operation and understanding. The Commonwealth is basically a consultative rather than a negotiating forum, and works by consensus; unlike the United Nations, there are no votes or vetoes, no ideological or geographical blocs. Membership is not automatic but has been a deliberate choice of Commonwealth states as they achieved independence. The flexibility of the Commonwealth is further exemplified by the fact that it now includes some 25 republics and kingdoms, all of which accept the Queen as the symbol of their free association. There is freedom to disagree; but, in a forum of long-standing friends and associates, disagreement can be without hostility, with tolerance and, above all, with a better understanding of the other point of view.

The most striking example of the Commonwealth in action is the biennial heads-of-government meeting, where prime ministers and presidents of member countries meet as friends and as such can talk frankly and freely to each other on global as well as Commonwealth issues. The atmosphere is informal and intimate; the results have been an astonishingly accurate reflection of major world problems and trends. The last
