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Ottawa, Canada.



Ottawa meeting of Commonwealth Heads of Government

From August 2 to 10 the leaders of 32 countries, whose populations comprise a quarter of the world's population, met in Ottawa for the first Commonwealth Meeting of Heads of Government ever held in Canada. All Commonwealth countries were represented, five by their Presidents or Heads of State, 18 by their Prime Ministers, three by their Vice-Presidents and six by senior Ministers.

Precise timing and tight security marked the opening of the nine-day conference. Among the first to be greeted by Prime Minister Trudeau, the host, was Britain's Prime Minister, Edward Heath. One of the newcomers to the organization is Bangladesh, whose Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman expressed the hope that "greater understanding would flow from the meeting".

The Malaysian delegation, led by Abdul Rasak, left hurriedly for home on August 3, their sudden departure prompted by the death in Kuala Lumpur of the Deputy Prime Minister. Prime Minister Trudeau told delegates that the meeting would not solve

any problems but might help to prevent crises. He described the Commonwealth as a "window on the world", and predicted that its importance would deepen, largely because the Commonwealth had no specific role, relying instead on human relationships.

On the second day delegates unanimously approved a statement calling for an end to all nuclear tests. The declaration gave "unfailing support" by all Commonwealth countries to the partial test-ban treaty signed ten years ago. Asked if he was satisfied with the outcome of this question, New Zealand's Prime Minister Norman Kirk, who had been pressing for strong condemnation of nuclear tests stated: "In view of the fact that it was a unanimously supported statement, there is very considerable satisfaction that we've had the co-operation and the support of our colleagues at the conference. I think there's a misunderstanding in that there seems to be an impression that what New Zealand has been doing in respect to nuclear tests is anti-France. It is anti-nuclear tests...."

Meetings continued until late Friday afternoon, August 3, when heads of delegation and their wives travelled to Mont Tremblant, Quebec, to spend the weekend as guests of the Prime Minister and Mrs. Trudeau. Secretary of State for External Affairs Mitchell Sharp invited Ministers who were members of delegations, and their wives, to join him for the weekend, also at Mont Tremblant. The sessions resumed August 6.

On August 7, the Commonwealth leaders talked about trade and monetary problems and the pros and cons of foreign investment. The less wealthy nations said they would rather have trade than aid and they urged the adoption of more unselfish forms of assistance. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Trudeau's office announced that Canada would adopt a new basis for its contribution to the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Development, which will be related to the amount of contributions from developing nations of the Commonwealth.

The Queen received Heads of Delegation in audience at Government House during the opening days of the meeting. On August 2 Her Majesty was hostess at a state dinner for heads of delegation and their wives at Government House.

On August 7 the Prime Minister was host at a gala evening at the National Arts Centre for a performance by Les Feux Follets.

The Prime Minister and the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Secretariat Mr. Arnold Smith, each gave receptions for heads of delegation and media representatives during the meetings.

Final communique

The following excerpts are from a communique issued at the close of the meeting on August 10:

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"In a frank and informal review of world trends Heads of Government examined changing power relationships and their political and economic consequences with particular reference to