



The Commonwealth of Peoples

Beyond the official organization is the very active "unofficial" Commonwealth of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). It links societies and thousands of individuals in a vast international network of professional, service, cultural and sports organizations. These form the real lifeblood of the Commonwealth and give it the grassroots base that helps to ensure its continuing vitality. There are some 200 NGOs associated with the Commonwealth, including the Commonwealth Association of Architects, of Museums, of Statisticians, of Journalists, the Commonwealth Engineers Council, the Commonwealth Legal Bureau, and so on, covering virtually every field of human endeavour. Two of the most prominent are the Association of Commonwealth Universities and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, which promotes links vital to Commonwealth cohesion. The Commonwealth Foundation, established at the 1965 CHOGM, and supported financially by Commonwealth governments, has the specific mandate to promote the role of NGOs as full partners in the delivery of Commonwealth programs and in the promotion of Commonwealth values. The Foundation also encourages and supports these professional and other associations with bursaries and grants.

The Commonwealth Games, held every four years, and the Commonwealth Arts and Cultural Festival, which takes place in conjunction with the Games, demonstrate the spirit of Commonwealth friendship and multiracialism in a way easily understood by the public. (Edmonton initiated the arts festival concept when it hosted the Games in 1978.)

Canada is the host of the next Games, which will take place in Victoria, British Columbia, in August 1994.

The Queen's Role

When India chose to remain in the Commonwealth after becoming an independent republic in 1949, it was agreed that the British monarch should be "the symbol of the free association of [Commonwealth] member nations and as such Head of the Commonwealth," regardless of whether a member country retained the British monarch as its head of state. Queen Elizabeth II is the Queen of Canada and monarch of 16 other "realms" among the 50 Commonwealth member countries, and Head of the Commonwealth for all. She is present at all Summits, but does not attend meetings. She customarily pays an official visit to the host country in advance of the opening of the CHOGM and, after government leaders arrive, she entertains them at dinner and receives them individually. The Queen takes a close interest in Commonwealth affairs and has travelled widely within the Commonwealth.