

How a democratic Commonwealth evolved

1949: The London Declaration: The birth of the modern Commonwealth – as India is allowed to become a Republic and stay in, enabling the Commonwealth to grow as decolonisation proceeded.

1957: Ghana becomes the first African member to join the Commonwealth on gaining Independence.

1961: South Africa leaves the Commonwealth, withdrawing its application to remain a member on becoming a Republic before it is refused.

1971: The Singapore Declaration, the first set of Commonwealth principles focus mainly on anti-racism, following ferocious rows between Britain and other members over South African policy.

1977: Idi Amin threatens to attend the CHOGM, but Nigeria leads opposition to Britain's bid to suspend Uganda. Amin finally stays at home and **human rights** are mentioned for the first time in a Commonwealth communiqué. The Gambia's proposal to create a Commonwealth Human Rights Commission is rejected.

1989: Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI), a non-governmental organisation, is created by the Commonwealth associations of lawyers, journalists, trade unions and parliamentarians. Its work influences the Harare Declaration and it is later described by the Secretary-General as "the conscience of the Commonwealth".

1991: Harare Declaration commits Commonwealth governments to democracy, fundamental human rights, equality for women, the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary and just and honest government.

1994: President Nelson Mandela brings democratic South Africa back into the Commonwealth.

1995: Millbrook Action Plan creates Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) to police "serious and persistent violations of the Harare Declaration". Nigeria is suspended and the Commonwealth leads international pressure against Abacha. Only Captain Jammeh of Gambia, who led the 1994 military coup ending unbroken record of multi-party elections since 1965, opposes Nigeria's suspension. **CMAG monitors the Gambia's return to civilian government in 1996.**

1997 Sierra Leone is suspended following a military coup, and deposed President Kabbah is invited to CHOGM as a special guest of host Premier Blair. A 1998 CMAG mission followed the restoration of the elected government, and Commonwealth countries helped facilitate the 1999 Peace agreement.

1999: Nigeria returns to full membership following the election of President Obasanjo.

1999: Pakistan suspended following military coup; Commonwealth mission led by Canadian Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy visits Pakistan.