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## THE COMMONWEALTH

As self-government and independence were gradually assumed by the colonies within the British Empire, similarities of language, habits, institutional traditions and working methods convinced many national representatives of the great value of maintaining some form of association in place of the old Empire. The fruit of that decision is the modern Commonwealth. The Commonwealth (or Commonwealth of Nations) is a voluntary association of 33 independent states from six continents and five oceans.<sup>(1)</sup> Bahamas is the most recent member (July 10, 1973). One of them, Nauru, is a special member which participates fully except for heads of government meetings. It embraces a marvellous diversity of races, languages, religions and cultures and is a unique association where leaders in various fields may on a level of informality and intimacy convene to exchange views on a multitude of questions and attempt to determine what may be usefully done together. In a world which seems in danger of splitting into antagonistic groups based on common interests such as religion, ideology, race, region or economic level of development, the Commonwealth association possesses the unusual ability of being able to transcend interest groups and so bring a global perspective to bear on matters of concern to all members.

The principles of the association were most eloquently expressed in the Commonwealth Declaration, issued at the Meeting of Commonwealth Heads of Government in Singapore in 1971.<sup>(2)</sup> This statement of common principles affirmed Commonwealth members' belief in: the United Nations and its efforts to promote international peace and order; the liberty of the individual and each citizen's inalienable right to participate in framing the society in which he may live; the principles of human dignity and equality and the iniquities of colonial domination and racial oppression; the need for the progressive removal of disparities in wealth existing between different sections of mankind; and the value of the Commonwealth as a most useful means to promote international co-operation. In pursuing these principles the members of the Commonwealth believe that they can provide a constructive example of the multinational approach, something vital to peace and progress in the modern world.

(1) A list of members appears in Appendix A.

(2) The text of the Declaration appears as Appendix C.

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