

Over the years, the Commonwealth has evolved in size, shape and outlook from the compact family of nations of predominantly European stock that first constituted the association at the time of the enactment of the Statute of Westminster in 1931. Its present membership is made up of 31 sovereign states, which cover about one-quarter of the earth's land surface. They represent approximately 850 million people of many races, colours, creeds and languages. They include both economically-developed and developing countries, and governments that are committed to international power groupings as well as those that have no commitments. In its present form, the Commonwealth represents a unique and valuable association of nations for promoting consultation among its members and fostering practical co-operation.

Commonwealth members are: Britain; Canada; Australia, New Zealand; India (which joined in 1947); Pakistan (1947); Ceylon (1948); Ghana (1957); Malaya (1957)⁽¹⁾; Nigeria (1960); Cyprus (1961); Sierra Leone (1961); Tanganyika (1961)⁽²⁾; Jamaica (1962); Trinidad and Tobago (1962); Uganda (1962); Kenya (1963); Malawi (1964); Malta (1964); Zambia (1964); Gambia (1965); Singapore (1965); Guyana (1966); Botswana (1966); Lesotho (1966); Barbados (1966); Mauritius (1968); Swaziland (1968); Tonga (1970); Western Samoa (1970); and Fiji (1970). Nauru, which became fully independent in 1968, has "special" membership in the Commonwealth that entitles it to all the advantages of membership except attendance at the heads-of-government conferences. Through their association with Britain, which remains responsible for their foreign affairs and defence, the six West Indies Associated States (Antigua, Dominica, Grenada, St. Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla, St. Lucia and St. Vincent) also have an appropriate relation with the Commonwealth.

The year 1971 was an active one for the Commonwealth. It began with the prime ministers' conference in Singapore in January, which, among other things, adopted a declaration of principles defining Commonwealth aspirations and goals. Other Commonwealth meetings during the year concluded the fifth Commonwealth Education Conference, held in Canberra in February, the annual meeting of the Commonwealth finance ministers, held in Nassau in September, the seventeenth Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Conference, held in Kuala Lumpur in September, and the third Commonwealth Medical Conference, held in Mauritius in November. There were, in addition, a number of special or regional meetings such as the Commonwealth Law Conference, held in New Delhi in January, the Commonwealth Asian Pacific Regional Youth Conference, held in Kuala Lumpur in August, the Conference of Commonwealth Postal Administrators, held in London in October, and the meeting of the Commonwealth Telecommunications Council in Nairobi during the same month.

(1) When Singapore, Sarawak and Sabah joined the Federation in September 1963, Malaya became Malaysia; Singapore separated from Malaysia in August 1965 to become an independent republic.

(2) Early in 1964, Tanganyika and Zanzibar formed the United Republic of Tanzania.