



Reference Papers

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(Revised November 1974)

THE COMMONWEALTH (1)

As the colonies within the British Empire assumed self-government and independence, similarities of language, habits, institutional traditions and working methods convinced many national leaders of the value of maintaining some form of association in its place. The fruit of that belief is the modern Commonwealth. The Commonwealth (or Commonwealth of Nations, as it is also called) is a voluntary association of 33 independent countries from six continents and five oceans. . . . Grenada is the most recent member to join the association (February 7, 1974). One other country, Nauru, an independent republic, is a special member, which may take part in functional meetings and activities but does not participate in heads of government meetings.

The Commonwealth, which embraces a rich variety of races, languages, religions and cultures, is a unique association in which leaders in various fields may, on a level of informality and intimacy, meet to exchange views on a multitude of questions and attempt to determine what may be usefully done together. In a world that seems in danger of splitting into antagonistic groups based on sectoral interests such as ideology, race, region, economic level of development or religion, the Commonwealth is able to transcend these, and so bring a global perspective to bear on matters of concern to all members.

The principles of the association were most clearly expressed in the Commonwealth Declaration, issued at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Singapore in January 1971(2). This statement of common principles affirmed the belief of Commonwealth members 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 creating the society in which he may live; the evil nature of racial prejudice and discrimination; the principles of human dignity, equality and the iniquity of colonial domination; the need for the progressive removal of disparities in wealth between different sections of mankind; and the value of the Commonwealth as a 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, which is vital to peace

(1) Under revision. Will be available in November, 1976.
(2) The text of the Declaration appears as Appendix D.