

The "Spirit of Ottawa" – Informality as a Means Towards Progress

In 1973, Canada was host to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting and, in preparation, emphasized the need for these meetings to remain frank and informal, avoiding rigid agenda and set speeches. The Ottawa meeting strongly supported this approach and endorsed the conference guidelines which became known as "the spirit of Ottawa".

At the Ottawa meeting, the Canadian Prime Minister, Pierre Trudeau, said that perhaps the greatest strength of the Commonwealth is the opportunity for its leaders to sit down together as equals and discuss informally the problems affecting the millions they represent, and "... all the other advantages of the Commonwealth relationship — the exchange of people, the trade patterns, the economic assistance and co-operation schemes, the informality of diplomatic representation — these all assume their tone from the frank and free dealing at the Heads of Government Meetings".

