

Every two years, leaders of the member countries get together for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM). The purpose of the meeting is to review the state of Commonwealth cooperation, to consult on the state of world affairs, and to decide on important issues that the Commonwealth will act on.

The most recent CHOGM, held in Harare, Zimbabwe, October 16-22, 1991, produced the "Harare Declaration" which reaffirmed their commitment to the Declaration of Commonwealth Principles and outlined the goals of the Commonwealth for the 1990s and beyond.

Two CHOGMs have been held in Canada: at Ottawa in 1973 and at Vancouver in 1987.

Private institutions are also part of the Commonwealth. These are non-governmental organizations and associations which play an important role at the grass-roots level. There are some 200 of them operating in Canada and elsewhere in the Commonwealth. They link societies and thousands of individuals in a vast international network of professional, service, educational, cultural and sport organizations.

Why is the Commonwealth important to Canada?

Together with the Francophonie and the Organization of American States, the Commonwealth continues to be one of Canada's most important windows on the world. It gives Canada an international constituency and influence it would not otherwise have. It creates a privileged "family" relationship with governments of 49 other countries - a third of the United Nations' membership.

The Commonwealth is an important instrument for our diplomacy in support of Canadian positions, and for building North-South consensus on issues such as democratization, respect for human rights and women's equality, the fight against apartheid in South Africa, protection of the environment, third-world debt, non-proliferation of nuclear arms, arms control, etc..

The Commonwealth allows Canada to better understand the concerns of other countries and learn about other cultures, traditions and lifestyles. This helps Canada to better target its assistance to those countries who need it most.

The Commonwealth is a forum in which Canada can contribute to the promotion of fundamental values such as democracy, respect for human rights, women's equality and peace.

The Government of Canada invests approximately \$40 million each year in Commonwealth programs.

The Government of Canada offers scholarships, as part of the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan, to students from Commonwealth countries to allow them to pursue advanced programs in other Commonwealth countries.

DECLARATION OF COMMONWEALTH PRINCIPLES

The Commonwealth has no constitution but it does have formal principles. These principles were adopted by Heads of Government when meeting in Singapore in 1971 and unanimously reaffirmed at their last meeting in Harare. The Declaration of Commonwealth Principles, sets out four common principles:

- the pursuit of international peace and order through the United Nations;
- the promotion of representative institutions and guarantees for personal freedom under the law;
- the recognition of racial equality and the need to combat racial discrimination and racial oppression; and
- dedication to lessening the disparities of wealth existing between different sections of humanity.