

and to diplomatic representation in foreign countries. The altered relation was registered by a communiqué from the Imperial Conference of 1926. Drawing upon the recommendations of the *Balfour Report*, the communiqué defined Britain and the Dominions as "autonomous Communities within the British Empire, equal in status, in no way subordinate one to another in any aspect of their domestic or external affairs, though united by a common allegiance to the Crown, and freely associated as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations". The Statute of Westminster of 1931 gave legal effect to the substance of the decisions reached in 1926 and established the legislative equality of the Dominion parliaments with the British Parliament.

The decisions of the Imperial Conference of 1926 also gave rise to another significant development in the character of relations between and among the Dominions. Since before the First World War, the Dominions had maintained high commissioners in London to present the views of their governments to the British authorities.<sup>(4)</sup> When the 1926 Conference decided that the governor-general in each of the Dominions would no longer be representative of the British Government but rather the King, these high commissioners became the intermediaries not only between the Dominion governments and Britain but also between the associates themselves. Accordingly, the most significant aspect of this role, which makes it different from that of an ambassador, is that high commissioners are accredited to heads of government rather than to heads of state. This practice has been maintained despite the decision of many Commonwealth countries not to retain the British monarch as their common head of state. Most Commonwealth countries have exchanged high commissioners between one another as well as with Britain.

In part as a result of developments in the Second World War, the movement toward independence in the then colonial areas of South and Southeast Asia became irresistible. On August 15, 1947, the Indian subcontinent was divided to create the two sovereign countries of India and Pakistan. A year later Ceylon (since 1972 Sri Lanka) achieved complete independence.

An important step in the evolution of the modern Commonwealth was taken soon after the birth of these countries. When the Government of India decided to become a republic yet remain within the Commonwealth, a common allegiance to the Crown was no longer a suitable criterion for membership in the association. The communiqué of the April 1949 prime ministers' meeting expressed a freshly-determined role for the British monarch within the Commonwealth -- that of a symbol of the free association of its independent member

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(4) Canada appointed the first high commissioner to London in 1880.