
**Meeting of Commonwealth Heads of Government, London, England,
June 8 - 15, 1977 -- Background Notes**

Commonwealth Heads of Government will meet this year in London, England from June 8 to 15, the twentieth such occasion since the practice of these biennial meetings began in 1944. In earlier years, from 1911 to 1937, Imperial Conferences of the Prime Ministers and other Ministers of Britain and the Dominions were held periodically to discuss matters of common concern. Coincidentally, this year's meeting will take place during the Silver Jubilee of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth's accession as Head of the Commonwealth. Prime Minister James Callaghan, as host will act as Chairman.

The Heads of Government Meeting is the senior of several levels of Commonwealth conferences. It was last convened in Kingston, Jamaica in 1975. Unlike most international conferences, the meetings of Commonwealth leaders are private and confidential gatherings for an informal exchange of views. Unanimity is not necessarily a primary objective but where decisions are reached they are on the basis of consensus.

Details of the proceedings of Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings are not published but it has generally been the practice for a Communiqué to be issued at the close of each meeting summarizing its results.

There were two Heads of Government Meetings in 1966. The earlier of these, at Lagos, was the first to be held in a Commonwealth capital other than London and the first devoted to a single subject (Rhodesia). There were no meetings in 1967 or 1968.

The Commonwealth Secretariat organizes Heads of Government Meetings in close cooperation with host governments. By 1971, because of the growing size of the Commonwealth - there are now 36 independent member countries - the facilities and in some respects the procedures bore little resemblance to those of the first meeting in 1944.

In recognition that the increasing size of the Commonwealth presented a challenge to the prized and highly useful informality of discussions and desirous of containing and reversing the trend towards rigidity of procedure experienced in other international gatherings, Commonwealth Heads of Government recommended at their meeting in Singapore in 1971 that Senior Officials examine ways and means of restoring greater intimacy and informality to future meetings. These officials, most of whom were Cabinet Secretaries or the