

Meeting of Commonwealth Heads of Government
November 23-30, 1983
New Delhi, India

Background Notes

This year's meeting of the Commonwealth Heads of Government will be the twenty-third such occasion since the meetings began in 1944. In earlier years, from 1911 to 1937, Imperial Conferences of Prime Ministers and other Ministers of Britain and the Dominions were held periodically to discuss matters of common concern. This year's meeting in New Delhi will be the first held in India and Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, as host, will act as Chairman.

The Heads of Government Meeting is the most important of the several levels of Commonwealth Conferences. It was last convened in Melbourne, Australia in 1981. Unlike most international conferences, the meetings of Commonwealth leaders are private and confidential gatherings for an informal exchange of views. They are not intended as negotiating sessions and unanimity is not necessarily a primary objective of these gatherings; 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.

In 1966, there were two Heads of Government Meetings. The earlier of these, held in Lagos, Nigeria, was the first to be held in a Commonwealth capital other than London, and the first to be devoted to a single subject (Zimbabwe/Rhodesia).

The Commonwealth Secretariat organizes Heads of Government Meetings in close cooperation with host governments. By the Singapore meeting of 1971, because of the growing size of the Commonwealth, the facilities and in some respects the procedures had little resemblance to those of the first meeting in 1944.