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CANADA OBSERVES COMMONWEALTH DAY

MARCH 12, 1990

On Monday, March 12 Canada and 48 other nations will observe Commonwealth Day for the fourteenth consecutive year. Commonwealth Day, established at the suggestion of Canada, aims to focus public attention on this unique organization, especially among young people.

Marking the occasion, the Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Right Honourable Joe Clark, stated, "The Commonwealth is more than just an assemblage of states. It is a unique bridge between peoples of diverse races and beliefs. The Commonwealth allows Canada to express its national character while making a substantive contribution to resolving critical global problems."

The past year has seen the Commonwealth mark its 40th anniversary and celebrate the return of Pakistan to the fold as a full member. "With our ties of a common language and a shared history and yet respect for our differences, I am confident the Commonwealth will continue to flourish during its fifth decade of existence and beyond," said Mr. Clark.

The Commonwealth promotes co-operation in many fields. Through activities such as the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation, the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan and the Commonwealth Youth Programme, constructive ties between officials, academics, technical experts and average citizens among all the member states have developed. Canada is among the strongest supporters of Commonwealth programs and this year will contribute over \$40 million.

The Commonwealth also provides a unique forum for international dialogue on a variety of global economic, political and scientific questions. Heads of Government meet formally every two years to discuss agendas ranging from the elimination of apartheid to economic development to the preservation of the global environment. Between these meetings, ongoing committees of ministers, such as foreign affairs and sports ministers, deal with specific matters.

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1990 will witness a number of such special Commonwealth meetings. In May, the Commonwealth Foreign Ministers Committee on Southern Africa, under the chairmanship of Minister Clark, will convene in Nigeria to discuss recent progress in efforts to end apartheid in South Africa.

On March 15-16, as agreed in Kuala Lumpur last October, high-level officials from member states will meet to begin talks on "The Future of the Commonwealth". These discussions are preparatory to an upcoming meeting on this topic which will be attended by Commonwealth Heads of Government later this year.

Another important Commonwealth event will be held in Ottawa this coming October, when the Commonwealth Committee of Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs will meet to examine the impact of structural adjustment policies on women. Canada is a leading member of the Expert Group studying the problem. Stated Mr. Clark, "Canadians have a responsibility to ensure that women everywhere can lead full, productive lives in the face of change. Our Commonwealth participation provides us with a unique avenue for encouraging efforts to promote women's rights."