



Statements and Speeches

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THE COMMONWEALTH — AN ASSOCIATION UNSTRUCTURED AND UNFETTERED

Opening Statement to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, Ottawa, by the Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Pierre Elliott Trudeau, August 2, 1973.

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I hope that each one of you will find this gathering to be as valuable and as irreplaceable as I have found those Commonwealth meetings I have attended elsewhere. Since men and women first gained the gift of speech, they have been aware of the importance of wise counsel and of the value of communicating honestly and fully with their neighbours. Today, when the term neighbourhood has been extended by science to include every nation, wherever located, the need for communication has increased immensely. And today, when technology has deepened our awareness of a better life much more rapidly than we have been able to acquire it, the need to understand one another has become critical.

Within the Commonwealth we have the opportunity and the means for both communication and understanding. In this forum of discussion all Commonwealth members are equal. None is senior; none is superior. None is distinguished by economic self-sufficiency; none is possessed of all political virtue. In our discussions the next few days, I have no doubt that we shall be able to demonstrate to one another and to the world the advantages of our dissimilarity, the richness of our diversity, the excitement of our variety. We shall be able to do so because we are members of an association, not an institution. In this Commonwealth there is no structure to contain us; there are no fetters to chafe us. The Commonwealth is a reflection of its 32 members and of their desire to consult and co-operate with one another. There is no artificial adhesive. Nor is there any voting, any constitution, any flag, any headquarters. This association is neither regional in nature nor specialized in its interests. The Commonwealth is an organism, and this fact guarantees both its vitality and its flexibility.

At this meeting, several steps are being taken in an attempt to respond to the need for more effective communication. First, it is proposed that meeting procedures be less rigid and less formal than in recent years; second, the shorter agenda reflects the fact that many international issues are interrelated and are best examined in a broad context; third, the weekend arrangements promise two

days of private and unstructured conversation between heads of delegation. Through these means, I hope that the value of our unusual meetings will be increased even further, and that we shall be able to exploit to our advantage our diversity.

Diverse we may be, but that condition has not in the past been employed as an excuse for deviation from certain principles: there is no dissimilarity of views with respect to our regard for human equality and dignity; the economic disparity that exists among us only intensifies our resolve that it be diminished; our belief in the value of association and co-operation is genuine.

The word Commonwealth has been employed again and again by scholars, writers and statesmen over a period of several thousand years. The conception has varied widely in the minds of such persons as Plato, Locke and Oliver Cromwell, yet none of those conceptions has met so well the acid test of practical application and value as has the one that brings us together in Ottawa this week. To contemporary observers and, I am confident, to future historians, the word Commonwealth will be irrevocably associated with the desire of free men and women representing more than a quarter of the world population to gather, to discuss and to understand.

It is in that Commonwealth that we recognize this morning two new members, Bangladesh and Bahamas. To the Prime Ministers of those countries, and to those of our colleagues from other countries attending this meeting for the first time, I offer a warm welcome.

In the 30 months since we last gathered in Singapore under the distinguished chairmanship of Prime Minister Lee Kwan Yew, the world has undergone sweeping changes of considerable significance: The People's Republic of China has taken its place in the United Nations. The shock-waves of the United States August 1971 economic policies travelled around the globe, affecting most heavily the developed countries. Immensely important steps were taken by the United States and the Soviet Union, on the one hand, and by the United States and the People's Republic of China, on the other, to ease the tensions of the Cold War and to permit progress toward *détente* and friendly relations. As one consequence, the first round of the Strategic Arms Limitations Talks was successfully concluded; as another, the European Security Conference was launched earlier this summer. The European Economic Community expanded from six members to nine, one of the additions being Britain. A tragic series of events on the Indian subcontinent resulted in the severing of the two wings of Pakistan and the emergence of a new state, Bangladesh. That severance was followed by the withdrawal of Pakistan from the Commonwealth. The scale of hostilities in

Indochina has decreased considerably, and American involvement in Viet-Nam has ceased completely. The Organization of African Unity celebrated the tenth anniversary of its founding and, in doing so, chose as its new Chairman our colleague, General Gowon. The Commonwealth nations in the Caribbean have taken an historic giant step toward closer co-operation.

During the same period, however, a number of the disturbing situations that faced us at Singapore have shown no signs of change: The Middle East remains as potentially explosive as before. The tensions created by the rigid policies of the racist regimes in Southern Africa have, if anything, heightened. The spectre of long-term food and commodity shortages continues as crops have suffered from damaging weather patterns. The economic gap separating the have and the have-not countries has not diminished appreciably, notwithstanding the admonitions of the third UNCTAD Conference.

If one is able to draw some broad lesson from this period of two and a half years, it may be that it is found in the abundant evidence that diplomatic initiatives, properly prepared and sincerely pursued, are capable of producing successful outcomes. The world is closer to peace today than it was in January 1971, and it is so because sufficient numbers of world leaders have come to recognize that force and aggression carried on in the name of government are incapable of solving any problems. Arbitrary policies that consciously deny dignity and freedom to any group of people are evil, and they are no less so for being clothed in elaborate wrappings of *la raison d'état*.

None of us in the Commonwealth is so powerful or so self-sufficient that he is able to act independently of the opinion or the assistance of others. None of us disregards the value of consultation and co-operation. We are able in these gatherings of heads of government, and, by extension, in those other groupings to which we belong, to ensure that we understand one another's problems and one another's aspirations.

That, to me, is the significance of our association. I am not, at this meeting, in search of a new role for the Commonwealth, or indeed any role. The Commonwealth is for many of us our window on the world. Over the years, its importance will deepen largely because it has no specific role, but emphasizes instead the value of the human relationship.

The nature of our meeting does not lend itself to the resolution of any crisis, or to the solution of any major problem. By looking to

the future, however, we should be able to identify those issues which, if left unattended, could develop into crisis proportions.

Men and women have been unwise and short-sighted in their occupation of this planet. Through greed or ignorance or indifference, or a combination of all three, the human race finds itself increasingly out of balance and out of harmony with the habitat on which it depends for survival. We are poisoning our atmosphere and our oceans at an alarming rate; we are exploiting our resources as if they were inexhaustible; we are coping ineffectively with the task of providing food and shelter to millions; we remain incapable of occupying the earth peacefully with one another, or of sharing equitably the means required by every individual to permit him to lead a life of dignity. The resolution of these long-standing problems is beyond our means in the next week.

Nevertheless, I am confident that, through wise consultations and actions now, those problems can be better understood and circumscribed, the future can be made more wholesome and more attractive for the inhabitants of all our countries. I consider the worth of our meeting to be found in the opportunity it provides for that kind of consultation.