



Statements and Speeches

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CANADA AND THE COMMONWEALTH

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As host of the Commonwealth Games, Edmonton is the focal-point for world attention and interest. I am pleased to take this opportunity to contribute some thoughts on the Commonwealth and Canada's role in it. As Secretary of State for External Affairs, I have a particular affection and respect for this unique association of friendly states from all parts of the world, who shared a common link with Britain in the past and who now meet as free and independent equals. I offer a special welcome to all participants in the Games and to the many distinguished visitors in attendance. I salute the city of Edmonton and all those who have played a part in the superb organization and planning for the Games. All of us who have worked with the Commonwealth believe in our hearts that, if some measure of its special qualities of friendship, equality and frankness — in a word, its spirit — could be carried over into international relations generally, we should have taken a long step forward towards world peace and stability. The Commonwealth Games in themselves are a unique example of that Commonwealth spirit.

What the Commonwealth means to Canada

It is no exaggeration to call the Commonwealth unique — in membership, in the informality and candour of its biennial heads-of-government meetings, and in the flexibility of its working procedures. Combining 37 independent countries of all races, creeds and levels of economic development, the Commonwealth embraces roughly one-quarter of the world's nations and about the same proportion of the world's population — and continues to grow as its associated states and dependencies achieve independence. It is, in fact, a microcosm of the world community, of significant size and importance, whose members voluntarily consult and co-operate together not only on Commonwealth problems but also as part of the cause of wider international co-operation and understanding. The Commonwealth is basically a consultative rather than a negotiating forum, and works by consensus; unlike the United Nations, there are no votes or vetoes, no ideological or geographical blocs. Membership is not automatic but has been a deliberate choice of Commonwealth states as they achieved independence. The flexibility of the Commonwealth is further exemplified by the fact that it now includes some 25 republics and kingdoms, all of which accept the Queen as the symbol of their free association. There is freedom to disagree; but, in a forum of long-standing friends and associates, disagreement can be without hostility, with tolerance and, above all, with a better understanding of the other point of view.

The most striking example of the Commonwealth in action is the biennial heads-of-government meeting, where prime ministers and presidents of member countries meet as friends and as such can talk frankly and freely to each other on global as well as Commonwealth issues. The atmosphere is informal and intimate; the results have been an astonishingly accurate reflection of major world problems and trends. The last

meeting was in London in June 1977, where heads of governments embodied their conclusions and decisions in an impressive communiqué. There was no mincing of words. The Commonwealth went on record as supporting the struggle in Zimbabwe and Namibia, condemning racist minority regimes in southern Africa, and South Africa for its aid to them; questions of sanctions as well as additional aid in the area were examined; heads of government recorded their concern and sympathy with the aspirations of the developing countries for an improved international economic order and agreed on measures to forward this objective; they reaffirmed their commitment to fundamental human rights for all mankind and agreed on the now famous Gleneagles Agreement against *apartheid* in sport. At the same time, they reviewed other major international issues such as the situation in the Middle East, Cyprus, Belize, the Indian Ocean area, law-of-the-sea matters and the increasingly-important role of regional arrangements in world affairs. The communiqué itself is an important document in international affairs. Even more important is the fact that these world leaders, representing such a cross-section of the world and its nations, could agree on such a wide range of issues and action, returning to their countries and regions fortified in the knowledge that each would work towards these goals with the support of his Commonwealth colleagues and in the knowledge that these goals are entirely consistent with national, regional and universal commitments and objectives.

Commonwealth membership grew rapidly in the 1960s from the small so-called "old Commonwealth" group to a larger "new Commonwealth" embracing the newly-independent Commonwealth states in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean, which, almost without exception, chose to remain in the Commonwealth. This was also the period of the forced withdrawal of South Africa over its unacceptable race policies. The heads-of-government meetings are, of course, still the main focus of Commonwealth activities but, with the growth in membership, heads of government recognized the need for more permanent staff arrangements, not only to support major conferences and continuing intergovernmental consultations but also to implement specific programs of functional co-operation and other agreed measures. As a result, the Commonwealth Secretariat was established in London in 1965, first under the leadership of the well-known Canadian diplomat Arnold Smith, and it is currently headed by our distinguished Secretary-General, Mr Shridath Ramphal, previously Foreign Minister of Guyana and a staunch believer in the potential of the Commonwealth.

The Secretariat is equipped to facilitate continuing political and economic consultations, and to implement a wide range of programs of functional co-operation — most notably, development aid, economic studies of mutual interest, science, health and welfare, education and youth. Commonwealth co-operation in development aid is long-established and is internationally regarded as a highly-successful program, providing development assistance over a wide range of projects for which assistance from the larger international development-assistance organizations may not be available. Being a relatively small group of countries, the Commonwealth can often supply the necessary experts and supporting finances required at a lower cost, and quicker, than other sources. In this process, of course, the availability of a common working language, common administrative, educational and legal traditions are enormously helpful.

As a result of these activities, the Commonwealth has become increasingly respected as a constructive and dynamic international organization, supporting the ideals, principles and programs of the United Nations, to which it is accredited officially as an observer and with which it maintains continuous contact both at the United Nations headquarters itself and the various Specialized Agencies. As Secretary-General Ramphal said recently during a Commonwealth conference on commodity-trading problems, "the Commonwealth cannot negotiate for the world, but it can help the world negotiate". This is an apt description of the Commonwealth and its current work on such vital problems as the situation in southern Africa, the world economic situation and the aspirations of the developing world, development assistance and related problems.

Canada's role

Canada remains strongly attached to the Commonwealth, not only through historical, cultural and linguistic ties but also from our conviction that its ideals and policies are consistent with our own. Through it, we retain the best of our links with Britain, and at the same time the Commonwealth represents those qualities of independence, global representation, mutual respect and co-operation that we believe are essential ingredients for the solution of international problems.

Canada and Canadian prime ministers have played a major role in supporting and developing the "new Commonwealth". Prime Minister Trudeau has taken a keen interest in maintaining the informality and breadth of Commonwealth heads-of-government discussions; he played a leading role in formulating the Gleneagles Agreement against *apartheid* in sport. Canadians work in senior positions at the Secretariat; Canadian experts have been requested and have participated in the preparation of virtually all the major Commonwealth special studies that have formed the basis of political and economic action. Canada has encouraged the establishment of co-operation between the Commonwealth and La Francophonie. Canadian private citizens, Parliamentarians, officials and government departments are active year-round in Commonwealth conferences and programs. Last but not least, Canada has shown its support by being one of the largest financial contributors to Commonwealth budgets.

Support for the Commonwealth and the positive role it can play in world problems remains a basic tenet of Canadian foreign policy. There is no area of international concern that does not touch one or another Commonwealth member, directly or indirectly. The Commonwealth is uniquely able to bridge wide diversities between governments and peoples, North and South, rich and poor. We want to preserve its unique qualities, to encourage active participation in it by its members at all levels, and to enhance its role, including that of its nongovernmental organizations, as an instrument for greater co-operation in the world community.

May I close this article by welcoming our visitors to the Commonwealth Games and wishing them a very enjoyable stay in Canada. Sports, in a special way, seem to encourage genuine, unaffected human contact and friendly competition in the pursuit of excellence. At this time Canada stands as the proud host of this exciting exhibition of athletes. We hope our visitors will remember Canada and the Commonwealth Games of 1978 in that way.

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