



# **The Commonwealth after Malta: the progress of renewal and reform**

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Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge**

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## Introductions

Speakers: **James Mayall** (Fellow, Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge)  
**Stuart Mole** (Chair, The Round Table)

After welcoming everyone to Sidney Sussex College, **James Mayall** said that he thought that the meeting was well timed. One of the features of the new, globalised and interconnected world, seemed to have been an exponential increase in parochialism. Not having gone to Malta himself, he had hoped to keep abreast of what was happening through the UK media – but apart from the Queen visiting where she had once lived, he had seen virtually no coverage of the Commonwealth summit in the mainstream UK media. He therefore hoped to get from this meeting a clearer picture of the key issues and outcomes.

The meeting also came at a time when there was great uncertainty about global politics. The tectonic plates which had held international society together since 1945 were shifting, and no-one could be sure what the landscape would look like in five, ten or fifteen years' time. In this context the Commonwealth needed to play to its strengths in navigating the treacherous waters of global politics. It could not afford grandstanding and gesture politics. Its greatest strength was its combination of continuity and flexibility. It was not a functional necessity but an accidental association of states – albeit a happy accident. It was perhaps the task of meetings such as this to consider if and how an organisation like the Commonwealth could help to bring some coherence into an international system which increasingly looked broken, chaotic and unjust.

In 1943, in Harvard Square, while receiving an honorary degree from Harvard University, Winston Churchill had made an extraordinary statement. As his American hosts might well have remembered, the previous year he had robustly declared that he had not become Prime Minister in order to preside over the liquidation of the British empire. But at Harvard, he said, 'the empires of the future are the empires of the mind'. He was of course making a bid to secure a new world order led by the UK and the US; and he believed deeply in values which he thought to be quintessentially British. But by identifying that a commitment to sovereignty alone would be insufficient to underpin a new international order, he had put his finger on a key point.

**Stuart Mole** said that he also hoped that the meeting would throw some light on the Malta summit, but also look at some of the longer-term issues facing the Commonwealth, and how it fitted in in global politics.

Many people had spoken before the Malta summit of it being a make-or-break summit: a last chance to prevent the Commonwealth sliding into deserved oblivion. Even four years back, few people would have said that. At the time, and at the Perth summit, there had been a buzz around Commonwealth reform and the report of the Eminent Persons Group, and great expectations of what might flow. But then in 2013 came the disastrous Colombo summit – hosted by a country which was still in post-conflict recovery, with a government and a leader accused of being complicit in serious human rights abuses – and which would for the next two years represent the Commonwealth as chair-in-office. Quite how this preventable own goal was allowed to happen was not clear. But the result was that barely

half the Heads attended, the summit was largely devoid of content, and the reputation of the Commonwealth was severely tarnished.

It was perhaps no wonder, then, that there were so many hopes and expectations of Malta – and so many markers set down beforehand. Would it see a better attendance of Heads? Would the retreat – the really dynamic part of the summit – be a genuine meeting of minds or just another intergovernmental conference? Would there be genuine outputs? And would there be distinctive Commonwealth contributions to global issues? The jury was still out on some of those questions, but there was no doubt about Malta's own commitment to making the summit and the Commonwealth a success; and there was a palpably more positive mood around the Commonwealth than there had been at and after the Colombo summit. The Commonwealth had come up with some interesting new initiatives. It had issued an important document on climate change. There was a good deal of excitement and interest around the choice of Patricia Scotland as the next Secretary-General – though, after a bruising and divisive election from which she had emerged as only narrowly the winner, it was clear that she would have a lot of fences to mend. The decision to hold the next summit in the UK rather than Vanuatu provided a lot of opportunities but also dangers.

Looking further into the future, would the current more positive mood around the Commonwealth translate into a new and better reality for it? Where were its strengths and weaknesses, and how could and should it play to its strengths? Where, indeed, did it fit into the current global architecture, and how did it compare with other international organisations? And what could it contribute to trade and the day-to-day lives of its citizens? These were just some of the questions to which he hoped the meeting might give tentative answers.

**Session 1: “The Malta CHOGM – new beginnings?”**

Chair: **Terry Barringer** (Assistant Editor, *The Round Table*)

Speakers: **Nishana Jayawickrama** (CHOGM Deputy Conference Secretary)

**Kishva Ambigapathy** (Chair, Commonwealth Youth Council)

**Milena Bacalja Perianes** (Delegate, Commonwealth Women’s Forum)

**Terry Barringer** opened the session by saying that she had come away from the Malta summit feeling hopeful about the Commonwealth. There was an extraordinary vitality to some of the meetings, including the innovative first women’s forum. She hoped that the three speakers would convey some of that vitality.

Addressing the theme of the session, **Nishana Jayawickrama** said that all Commonwealth summits were potentially new beginnings, and a chance to press the ‘refresh’ button. This was especially the case in Malta, where a young and reform-minded host Prime Minister, Joseph Muscat, had given the summit additional forward momentum.

The Malta summit was firmly anchored in international realities, with the agenda dominated by such issues as religious extremism, migration, climate change (especially with the upcoming Paris climate change conference), the 2030 agenda on sustainable development, and international trade (especially with the upcoming tenth WTO ministerial conference in Nairobi). The summit also sat in a Commonwealth context of ongoing renewal. The 2005 summit, also in Malta, had perhaps been characterised by engagement with civil society; the 2007 summit in Uganda by the *Civil Paths to Peace* report; the 2009 summit in Trinidad and Tobago by climate change; the 2011 summit in Australia by reform and the Eminent Persons Group report; and the 2013 summit in Sri Lanka by pressure on the political and economic values of the Commonwealth. The 2015 Malta summit addressed all these issues, and sat in a Commonwealth context in part informed by them.

There were a number of features of the Malta summit which were perhaps worth remarking on. The decision of the Maltese hosts (supported by the Secretary-General) to restrict decision-making to participants of at least senior cabinet rank certainly enhanced the quality of the discussions. The shortening of the retreat also seemed to work well, since on previous occasions there had been a gradual drifting away of Heads on the second day of the retreat. The space for engagement with civil society was enhanced, including by an expanded and better structured round table with foreign ministers. There was of course the first ever women’s forum, with strong backing from Malta. Again at the initiative of the Maltese hosts, there was a short leaders’ statement from the retreat as well as the official communiqué, and the latter had included the outcome statements from the various preceding fora. Finally, there was the decision to hold the next summit at the beginning of the year, when the international agenda was less crowded.

The Malta summit also saw some substantial outcomes. There was of course the selection of the next Secretary-General, on a wide-ranging agenda focusing on empowerment and protection of rights. There was also the decision to institute a high-level review of governance and Commonwealth reform. Although work on this would not begin until the new Secretary-General took office, it was possible to identify a number of key issues which

it would address, including the importance and means of consensus decision-making (for the second time in a row, statements from the summit were issued with one country recording its reservations); the process for electing the Secretary-General; the level and distribution of funding of the Commonwealth Secretariat; the future of the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation; and the relationship between the official institutions and the wider Commonwealth family.

The Malta summit had seen the adoption of an ambitious leaders' statement on climate change, which was taken to Paris by the Maltese Prime Minister and which fed importantly into the global debate, especially with its references to the disproportionate burden on lesser developed countries. The Commonwealth had also reached important agreements on finance for climate change action, and recognised the useful work of the Commonwealth Youth Climate Change Network. There was the new small states hub, designed to help small states build resilience. Interestingly, Heads had also agreed a new unit on countering violent extremism, initially for five years with funding from the UK and possibly others, which would draw on the Commonwealth's existing work on *Civil Paths to Peace* and on the soft power side of countering extremism. There was some discussion of migration, in light of the outcomes of the Valletta EU-AU summit earlier in November; Commonwealth countries expressed concern to facilitate temporary migration between Commonwealth countries, particularly for education. There was also a renewal of CMAG.

There were 21 new Commonwealth leaders since the previous summit, which on the one hand meant there was reduced continuity, but on the other was a healthy sign of democratic renewal around the Commonwealth. One Head who was particularly welcomed was Maithripala Sirisena of Sri Lanka, who reaffirmed that Sri Lanka had re-joined the Commonwealth community in spirit as well as practice and stood by its Commonwealth commitments. Another was the dynamic and telegenic new Prime Minister of Canada, Justin Trudeau.

If the Malta summit did not mark a 'new beginning', it certainly marked a refreshing of the Commonwealth as it continued to adapt to changing circumstances. With a new Secretary-General and an ambitious chair-in-office, the omens for its continued revitalisation looked good.

**Kishva Ambigapathy**, who had been asked to speak about the Commonwealth Youth Forum, explained a little of the background to his own position. The 2013 Sri Lanka summit had agreed to institute a new Commonwealth Youth Council, with nine members, as an umbrella organisation of national youth councils. The first council was elected in Sri Lanka, with Ahmed Adamu from Nigeria taking the chair. Kishva Ambigapathy, a Chevening scholar at Durham University, from Malaysia, had been elected the second chair, at Malta.

The Commonwealth Youth Forum, held from 21 to 25 November in St Paul's Bay, attracted over 200 young people from 46 Commonwealth countries, as well as observers from outside the Commonwealth. The participants discussed a wide range of issues, grouped under four main pillars, economic, social, environmental, and political.

There was an especially interesting set of presentations and discussions on climate change, with many speakers expressing concern for the vulnerabilities of small states, and the need for immediate action, given that consequences not expected for another ten years were already apparent now. The forum issued an ambitious statement urging Heads of Government to commit themselves to a goal of deriving 100% of energy from renewable sources within a measurable time.

Among a range of other issues, the forum also held extensive discussions of violent extremism and how to counteract it. As several speakers pointed out, it was primarily young people who were drawn into extremism, and the voices of youth were therefore especially important in identifying problems and building resilience.

The mainstreaming of youth issues in the Commonwealth was symbolised by the very useful meeting with foreign ministers, who put on record their appreciation of the value of the meeting, and the breakfast with Heads of Government before the retreat. In both sets of meetings, leaders acknowledged that young people were the agents for delivering change. The purpose of the Commonwealth Youth Council was to carry forward the momentum of the youth fora, to provide a greater role for young people in contributing to key issues, and to build synergies with other parts of the Commonwealth family.

**Milena Bacalja Perianes** had been asked to speak in particular about the first Commonwealth Women's Forum. She began by saying that in the last twenty years there had been a great leap forward on gender issues, and a widespread recognition of the importance of raising women's voices on the whole range of social and political issues, which had perhaps been a little belatedly recognised by the setting-up of the first ever Commonwealth Women's Forum (opened by Malta's second woman president, Marie Louise Coleiro Preca). The Malta forum recognised this with its wide-ranging agenda, which was a far cry from the 'babies, bodies and boys' niche which had sometimes plagued early perceptions of women's issues.

It was difficult to pick out highlights from a forum which contained so many interesting discussions, but Milena Bacalja Perianes noted three in particular: Joanna Maycock from the European Women's Lobby spoke passionately about the current political scene, and how the women's movement should aim not just to put women in positions of power but to transform political processes; Felicity Daly of the Kaleidoscope Trust spoke eloquently on LGBT issues; and Khadija Gbla spoke very powerfully on the horrific impact of female genital mutilation on its victims.

The forum also saw some interesting discussions on feminism and gender issues more broadly taken; she particularly remembered an eloquent speech in one break-out session on gender and youth leadership, in which a young man argued forcefully for rebranding the forum as a gender forum. The issue of men's participation in the forum was clearly uncomfortable for some, especially older, female participants, and tended to highlight generational differences in the perception of gender issues (with some women insisting that men had plenty of other spaces in which to talk, while others recognised that changing men's perceptions was crucial). The need for intergenerational dialogue needed to be a core priority in future Women's Fora.

In other ways, also, the forum explored some of the differences in perception on women's issues – and did not simply focus on what women around the world had in common. This made for a much more nuanced and ultimately productive discussion.

Milena Bacalja Perianes also spoke about the youth forum, and highlighted the great achievement of gender representation on the new Commonwealth Youth Council, with four of the nine elected new representatives being women, even though only 9 of 47 candidates were women. But she was struck by the under-representation of young women in the other fora, covering civil society and (especially) business, and also by the lack of integration or even co-ordination between the four preliminary fora (youth, women, civil society, and business). If she had a recommendation for the next summit, it would be that these various fora need to work together more closely, and also work to impact collectively on the 'official' summit.

The women's forum could be credited in part with the emphasis in the leaders' communiqué on the importance of women's education and empowerment, but it was yet to be seen how this would be addressed in practice. There was, as so often, a fine line between tokenism and real influence. The forum certainly made the case that it was impossible to discuss any political or social issues without also discussing women's rights. The selection of Patricia Scotland as next Commonwealth Secretary-General was a hopeful sign that this case might be taken seriously.

- Arif Zaman, Executive Director of the Commonwealth Businesswomen's Network, who attended both the women's forum and the business forum, supported Milena Bacalja Perianes's point about the under-representation of women in other fora. In Sri Lanka, some 18% of participants in the business forum were women, but at Malta this dropped to around 5 or 6%. He also agreed that the women's forum had been a useful innovation and was very wide-ranging, though he felt this was to an extent counterproductive since it lost focus in terms of outcomes, and the communiqué was disappointing with no mention of trade, women's economic empowerment or procurement on which there had been discussion at the Forum and significant progress since the 2011 Perth Commonwealth summit. On the broad question of men's involvement – and speaking as a male facilitator of a women's network – he said he thought it important that men should be involved in driving forward gender equality, and one measure of the success of future women's fora might even be how many men were willing to participate.
- A number of participants asked why it was that the Commonwealth continued to use the acronym CHOGM for the Commonwealth summits, which many felt was 'insiderish' and baffling to those unversed in Commonwealth jargon. Nishana Jayawickrama said that an attempt had been made to persuade Heads to move over to a new terminology, but some were reluctant to do so, and such a change would have to happen by consensus.
- Some participants said that although they welcomed the selection of Patricia Scotland as next Secretary-General, it seemed a little anomalous that she would not be taking over until April 2016, and that in the meantime there was a danger of a sort of interregnum, when momentum would be lost. However, Nishana

Jayawickrama said that she was sure Patricia Scotland would be hitting the ground running. She had already been given a tablet by the current Secretary-General, containing a lot of what she needed to know about the Commonwealth Secretariat. She would also be holding a large number of meetings prior to taking over.

- Several participants wondered whether – perhaps because of the high turnover in leaders and also in staff at the Commonwealth Secretariat, with consequences for the existence of a strong institutional memory – the Commonwealth was sometimes in danger of re-inventing the wheel. For instance, the high-level review on governance would be revisiting many of the same issues that had already been looked at by the review of 1999-2002 and indeed the Eminent Persons Group in 2009-11. Similarly, while it was important for the Commonwealth to engage with the problem of violent extremism, it already had a very useful starting point, in the form of the report of the group on ‘Respect and Understanding’ chaired by Amartya Sen, *Civil Paths to Peace*.
- It was also noted that several important reports which had been commissioned by the Commonwealth Secretariat seemed to have sunk without trace.
- Nishana Jayawickrama pointed out that there were in fact quite a lot of questions which the high-level review group would need to look at, including funding and decision-making structures, the process for selecting the Secretary-General, and the governance arrangements of other Commonwealth institutions. She also commended the *Civil Paths to Peace* report as a very thoughtful and thought-provoking document but said that it contained very few recommendations as such and was difficult to translate into concrete measures. This point was backed up by another participant, who described the report as an approach not an agenda.
- The hope was expressed that the new unit for countering extremism would not merely duplicate the work of other bodies; there needed to be a genuinely Commonwealth contribution on this.
- Several participants picked up on Milena Bacalja Perianes’s point about the disconnect between the various different fora. This was a real problem for people who wanted to pick and choose between different sessions in more than one forum. It was suggested that things had worked better in Perth in 2011, when the people’s forum and the youth forum had held some joint sessions. It was also hoped that in 2018 the various fora would be physically closer to each other.
- The interest shown by the people’s, youth, and business fora in issues relating to the ‘blue economy’ was highlighted by one participant. While this showed that a particular issue could cut across the different fora, it also reinforced the point about duplication and lack of coordination.
- It was noted that the final communiqué mentioned the possibility of a fifth forum in future, on education. However, one participant argued forcefully that if Commonwealth summits were to work properly, Heads needed as few distractions as possible. Why, then, could the women’s forum not be run parallel to the meeting of women’s ministers, the youth forum parallel to the meeting of youth ministers, and so on – when their voices would be more likely to be heard? The civil society forum could perhaps take place in alternate, non-summit, years. That way it would be better placed actually to influence the outcomes of the summit.

**Session 2: *'The Commonwealth and other international organisations: a force for global good?'***

Chair: **Alexandra Jones** (former Director, SPED, Commonwealth Secretariat)

Speakers: **Steve Cutts** (UN Assistant Secretary-General)

**Mélanie Torrent** (Senior Lecturer, Université Paris Diderot)

**Amitav Banerji** (former Director, PAD, Commonwealth Secretariat)

In opening the session, **Alexandra Jones** said that the topic of the Commonwealth and other international organisations – both how it compared to other organisations and how it interacted with them – was something that had perhaps not had enough of an airing at previous Round Table conferences. The panel contained a great deal of experience and expertise, and she hoped what the three speakers had to say would help set the Commonwealth in context.

After emphasising that he spoke in a personal capacity, and not on behalf of the United Nations, **Steve Cutts** said that he thought the session a timely one. There was no doubt that multilateralism – and the framework for international governance – was more important than it had ever been. The most pressing economic and political issues facing the world – whether climate change, terrorism, financial instability, migration, or energy needs – could not be dealt with by national governments or regional organisations acting in isolation. And in so many ways, and despite all of its manifest flaws, 2015 was actually a very good year for the multilateral governance system. It was a year that proved that, at the age of seventy and racked with a bureaucracy seemingly designed for institutional inertia, the United Nations could still deliver: from a Security Council Resolution (finally) on Syria to the seventeen SDGs; from major internal management reform to the recent climate change agreement in Paris. Other parts of the international governance framework had also delivered significant progress, even in seemingly intractable areas like trade and tax avoidance by multinational corporations.

Yet everyone was aware of the countervailing political forces. It was a sad fact that at times of economic uncertainty, especially when combined with a large dose of political cynicism among the electorate, fear and mistrust led to an increased attraction to reactionary and nationalistic policies, as witnessed by the rise of the Tea Party – and now Donald Trump – in the United States, the appeal of UKIP in the UK, the rise of the Front National in France, and the increased uncertainty surrounding the UK's place in the European Union.

While he was himself an unapologetic internationalist, Steve Cutts accepted the legitimacy of many of the criticisms of international organisations and the ways in which they had operated in the past. There were real problems about mandate sprawl, and too much duplication and even competition among organisations, all being funded by the same taxpayers. There were real problems around the governance and accountability of many of these bodies. Their structures of governance were often either hopelessly outdated, or simply unfit for purpose. They were often given insufficient attention by ministers and senior officials back in national governments, often leaving them in the hands of self-serving middle-ranking diplomats. Against this background, and the inability of so many of these organisations – including the Commonwealth – to demonstrate adequately the positive

impact they were making, the pressures being placed on their budgets and the demand to prove results was understandable and frankly to be welcomed (no matter how uncomfortable this might be for international civil servants).

All that said, Steve Cutts was concerned about the new mandate to review the 'transparency, accountability and efficiency' of the Commonwealth's governance structures and processes. Frankly, this was an area where the Commonwealth worked well. Unlike some other intergovernmental organisations, the Commonwealth was not paralysed by micro-management from its governing bodies, nor did it waste huge resources feeding governing bodies that contributed little to positive results. So this mandate needed to be handled with care, and under the direct oversight of the new Secretary-General, to ensure that she wasn't lumbered with a stifling governance structure, but was instead allowed to get on with the job of reforming the Commonwealth, and be held accountable accordingly.

Overall, in the modern world it was vital that all intergovernmental organisations and networks should demonstrate their worth and added value – whether the huge universal organisations with their diverse mandates, like the UN and its various funds, programmes, and agencies, or the niche players like the WTO or the OECD.

This brought him again to the Commonwealth. Steve Cutts was aware that he was talking to a group that comprised possibly the strongest devotees of this association, and who passionately believed in its intrinsic value, but he was sure that many would agree that over recent years the Commonwealth had somewhat lost its way. With a very small Secretariat, and severe budgetary constraints, it had simply tried to do too much, jumping on every passing issue, and attempting to deliver meaningful technical assistance across a huge number of countries and different policy areas, without the wherewithal to do so in any meaningful way.

Hence, the first challenge for the Commonwealth Secretariat was to face up seriously to the task of rigorously defining its role, which needed to be based on its comparative advantage and its demonstrable ability to deliver credible and attributable results. This required the courage and the leadership to overcome resistance to discarding many of the things it may have done in the past in order to serve a renewed focus on its true strengths.

This focus should build on the undoubted strength the Commonwealth has as a political association. This required reaching across the whole network of Commonwealth civil society organisations to leverage its connections and capacities. It placed the 'good offices' role (writ large of course) at the heart of its work. This didn't mean abandoning the advice and assistance given to individual countries who were perpetrating democratic misdeeds or failing to live up to their human rights obligations (that work of the Secretary-General and CMAG remained vital), but it did require an approach that placed the Commonwealth at the heart of helping to resolve international challenges. By virtue of its membership and consensual approaches, the Commonwealth was perhaps uniquely placed to help overcome divisions between the so-called like-minded countries and the G77 and China on global issues, whether climate change, international terrorism, or migration. This wasn't an approach that required sizeable budgets to deliver programmes, but it did require a realignment of the Secretariat and its leadership to leverage its convening powers to ensure

that members recognised the benefits that this association could bring, to their mutual advantage.

Leadership was, of course, key. Steve Cutts shared the excitement surrounding the incoming Secretary-General, Patricia Scotland, the first woman to hold the post. He hoped that she would not see her success in attaining the position as a 'prize' but rather as a mandate for action. Her accession represented an opportunity for renewal and, he hoped, a return to the time when successive Commonwealth Secretaries-General dared to aspire to make the association 'roar like a lion', while being rationed to a budget that would have 'starved a mouse'. He was delighted that she was determined to start her tenure by taking on a truly Commonwealth political issue – that of decriminalising homosexuality. This would, of course, be no easy task and she would need to be modest in her short-term ambitions, even though such criminalisation was at odds with the Commonwealth Charter approved by all member states less than four years previously. But in taking this issue on, Baroness Scotland would have an opportunity to cut her teeth as a leader talking to leaders, and hopefully would demonstrate the formidable powers of persuasion that the Commonwealth needed if it were to reverse its decline into irrelevance.

Steve Cutts also hoped that the new Secretary-General would heed the calls to ensure that the Commonwealth played a more meaningful role in supporting other inter-governmental processes in forging consensus on major global challenges. The Commonwealth's small states office in New York, while bringing benefits of location to the government missions hosted there, was woefully under-utilised. This office, located just a couple of streets away from the UN headquarters, ought to be a hub for political engagement in overcoming national divisions on major issues. Just one new post in the office, with a mandate to focus on political co-ordination for the Commonwealth in the context of the UN, could make a huge difference.

But all intergovernmental organisations were also under pressure to reform their management and systems, and it was essential that the new Secretary-General should rise to this challenge too. The Secretariat and the Commonwealth Foundation had in the recent past suffered from internal divisions, strife, and indeed a certain amount of malpractice. When Steve Cutts joined the Secretariat in 2008, he was warned about the 'entitlement culture' that prevailed, and the poisonous relations that existed between certain groups of staff. While he was there, he witnessed this first-hand (and indeed on occasion personally suffered from it), but the leadership simply didn't have the stomach to address the problems and root out the corrupt and the poisonous. This had to change: too many good staff had left, driven out by these problems.

The process of modernisation that had been initiated in the Commonwealth Secretariat now needed to be completed. The staff rules and policies needed not only to be clarified, but then applied equally to all colleagues, without favouritism. Management needed to be strengthened. The blame culture perpetuated in many areas had to disappear, so that the talent within the Secretariat felt empowered to be innovative and not fearful of making honest mistakes. And the Secretariat needed to grow up, and become a fully-fledged international organisation, with full recognition by the host government (which was promised back in 2012). A chair-in-office could be a useful political ally, but should never be

seen again as a surrogate leader in lieu of a strong Secretary-General. Mature organisations were not reliant upon a ‘roulette wheel’ of fortune that could throw up a chair-in-office of any disposition or commitment.

As an Englishman in New York, it seemed appropriate to end with a quotation from the baseball player, Yogi Berra, who passed away in 2015. With another new Secretary-General bringing hope of renewal to the Commonwealth, after so many false dawns in the past, he hoped that this time ‘the future ain’t what it used to be’.

**Mélanie Torrent**, who had been asked particularly to speak about La Francophonie, began by saying that although she was herself French, and taught at a French university, it was her interest in the history and politics of the Commonwealth which had led her to an interest in La Francophonie, and not vice versa – something that perhaps reflected more generally the relatively lower profile of the French-speaking organisation until quite recently.

Looking at the intergovernmental La Francophonie of the last thirty to forty years, rather than at the initial non-governmental groups of Francophone writers and journalists, it was tempting to ask when it had not been in some sort of crisis. It was also striking to notice the extent to which the Commonwealth had served as a model for French-speaking leaders. Indeed, the first Agency for Cultural and Technical Cooperation, formed in 1970, followed from the calls of Senegal’s leader, Leopold Sédar Senghor, for a “Commonwealth à la française”, which would bolster the international influence of former colonies and strengthen relations with French-speaking countries other than France, with a particular emphasis on development, including language and education.

Contrary to popular perceptions on both sides of La Manche, La Francophonie was not in fact a French initiative. It owed its creation in 1970 mainly to the efforts of Léopold Sédar Senghor of Senegal, Habib Bourguiba of Tunisia, Hamani Diori of Niger, and Prince Norodom Sihanouk of Cambodia, who were anxious to promote co-operation between French-speaking countries across the world. In this respect the Commonwealth was very consciously one of their models. At various other points in its history, too, La Francophonie took its cue from the Commonwealth: for instance, in 1986 Heads of Government meetings were introduced, and in 1997 a Secretary-General was elected for the first time, within the restructured Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF). From 2000 at Bamako, democratic values and respect for human rights became criteria for membership, with a form of suspension available, modelled again on that in the Commonwealth.

Certainly, the Commonwealth model was adapted, rather than adopted. First, the promotion of the French language remained a priority. By 2004 the organisation had prioritized four main ‘missions’ (the last three of which could equally be those of the Commonwealth): promoting the French language, and cultural and linguistic diversity; promoting peace, democracy, and human rights; supporting education, training, and scientific research; and expanding co-operation for sustainable development. Moreover, La Francophonie tended to rely on majority voting rather than consensus and it had different tiers of membership.

This, however, had not made cooperation impossible. In fact, the Commonwealth had been a key partner for the Francophonie, particularly since several states were now joint members. Full members of both La Francophonie and the Commonwealth counted Cameroon, Canada, Dominica, Mauritius, Rwanda, St Lucia, the Seychelles, and Vanuatu; Cyprus and Ghana were associated states; and Mozambique held observer status in La Francophonie. There were increasingly regular meetings between ministers, senior officials, and the Secretaries-General of the two organisations, and co-operation on a range of reports and statements. The most impactful initiatives centred on the promotion of development, and the interests of small states, with the establishment of joint offices in Geneva and New York. OIF-Commonwealth cooperation had also produced good results in the area of local government.

But both organisations also now faced a number of similar crises. First, both suffered from an image deficit, in part the result of their most important work either being of the ‘good offices’ sort (and therefore kept out of the limelight) or in terms of low-level and media-overlooked technical co-operation. Secondly, both faced issues of structural and budgetary reform. The structure of La Francophonie in particular remained confused and confusing, with many disconnects between objectives and the means to fulfil them. Thirdly, both organisations suffered from tensions over definitions of democracy and the rule of law, and from hesitations in responding to clear violations of human rights. In the case of the OIF, this was compounded by a reduction in the length of election observer missions, except in open crises, and in the marginalisation of parliamentarians in the process. This was particularly regrettable, as the Francophonie had also taken some innovative actions in democracy- and peace-building, including new approaches to linguistic training for peacekeepers. Finally, both still faced the remnants of the imperial and colonial past, and struggled to escape being tainted as little more than post-imperial relics. Back in 1986, the first Francophonie summit was overcast by the shadow of the political and business networks of the “*Françafrique*” which remain strong.

The response of La Francophonie had tended to be to deflect such criticisms by encouraging an extension of membership beyond the former colonial territories of France. Beyond the need to comply with the OIF values of democracy, development and human rights, the main criterion for entry was still an interest in the French language, which did not have to be an official language (such an interest could amount to no more than the fact that it was taught in schools). Not only did this lead to a dilution of membership (the three tiers of membership in effect reflecting essentially the degree of usage of the French language, not levels of democracy, promotion of human rights and of development), it also led to a problem of overstretch, and of diversity making agreement more difficult. While use of the English language was never a formal criterion for Commonwealth membership, nor a stated objective of the Commonwealth, it was clear that use of the English language was one of the ‘glues’ holding the Commonwealth together.

Overall, La Francophonie seemed to have fared best when it followed a bottom-up approach to achieve realistic objectives focused on technical expertise and the promotion of equality in cultural diversity in its broadest sense. This meant primarily when it functioned through professional bodies and ministerial meetings. But in recent years, La Francophonie had also been able to use its influence to good effect in other multilateral contexts. For the

last twenty years, La Francophonie had kept a permanent office in Brussels; it also had a strong presence in the EU through the large number of central and eastern European countries which joined in the 1990s and early 2000s, either as observers or as full members. Some argued that this was yet another channel for French influence but it was certainly much more than that. It was a key connection, through multiple joint memberships, between the OIF, the Secretariat of African, Caribbean and Pacific States, the EU, and their related bodies. As such, it had challenged the definition and exportation of EU norms, and been able to push strongly on the EU for more equal trade, the promotion of cultural diversity, and means to facilitate dialogue between nations across linguistic divides. It had also had a positive impact on the diversification of OIF and EU cultural exchanges, in higher education for instance.

In this context, the expertise of the Commonwealth in development programmes, or the roles of India and South Africa in multilateral trade and diplomacy, suggested that a more tangible Commonwealth presence would also be extremely beneficial to how the EU tackled questions of international migration, security and development. This was not to argue for yet another layer of administration, or another strain on the Commonwealth's limited budget, but to suggest a means of strengthening some areas of best practice, in the wider framework of a necessary institutional review. La Francophonie's strong presence in Brussels clearly also had beneficial impacts for the organisation itself. This was perhaps one area where La Francophonie led the Commonwealth, or where the Commonwealth could learn from La Francophonie.

Perhaps with the election of a woman Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, to match the election in 2014 of former Canadian Governor-General Michaëlle Jean as Secretary-General of La Francophonie, the scope for co-operation between the two organisations would become wider still. In 2005, Cyprus, the UK and Malta expressed joint concerns when new EU regulations threatened the sugar growers of the Commonwealth. Regardless of the United Kingdom's final decision on EU membership, greater Commonwealth involvement with the OIF in Brussels, as in Geneva and New York, made sense in current discussions over global challenges – and would perhaps serve discussions over the EU's own need for reform and, more generally, the renewal of international organisations.

**Amitav Banerji** began by recalling how, two years previously, he had spoken at the last Round Table 'post-CHOGM' meeting as Conference Secretary for the Colombo summit, and had said how much he envied everyone else for being able to speak without inhibition. It was a great feeling now to have membership of the 'total licence' club himself – he could dispense with diplomacy, perhaps even politeness! But he would, of course, express views that were entirely personal.

The title of the session was about whether international organisations, including the Commonwealth, were a 'force for global good'. There were perhaps three generally accepted axioms about international organisations, by which he meant inter-governmental organisations. First, they were necessary features of the international architecture. It was difficult to think of international relations being conducted without them. Secondly, they were undeniably beneficial on the whole and added value: a lot of good had come from them, especially over the decades since the United Nations was established. Not least

among the achievements was the avoidance of another world war. But there was plenty also to show in the fields of human rights, international law, women's development, trade, and very recently the environment, to mention but a few areas. Thirdly, however, they were not a panacea for the world's ills. And here they exposed the basic reality that international organisations were, at the end of the day, a sum total of the parts that constituted them, i.e. the nation states. That was why several issues had remained intractable, often with devastating consequences. The issue of Palestine was a prominent case in point.

Amitav Banerji believed unequivocally that the case for multilateralism was still as strong as it ever was, probably even more so. While there had not been a third world war, the graph of conflict across the globe had turned the wrong way once again. As Jean-Marie Guéhenno recently pointed out in an article in *Foreign Policy*, 'for twenty years after the end of the Cold War, deadly conflict was in decline. Fewer wars were killing fewer people the world over. Five years ago, however, that positive trend went into reverse, and each year has seen more conflict, more victims, and more people displaced. 2016 is unlikely to bring an improvement from the woes of 2015: it is war – not peace – that has momentum'. East-West rivalry was also back, both direct and by proxy. Who would have thought that NATO would seek to reinvent and fortify itself in Newport in September 2014? Further, violent extremism was showing its most ugly face and the mix of extremist ideology and politics was more toxic than ever before. The Shia-Sunni confrontation developing in west Asia and the Gulf was adding a new level of complexity and concern. The combination of extremism and migration was testing liberal societies the world over and strengthening the hands of xenophobes and those who sought to build new walls. Finally, the seemingly inexorable advance of the tide of democracy had stalled and was perhaps even being reversed in some places. There were more and more instances of separation of powers being undermined – of powerful executives trying to control the legislature, or the judiciary, or both, and of term limits being challenged. These were just some of the challenges the world faced. There were others. Suffice to say that none could be confronted without effective international organisations and the show of political will that must go hand in hand with multilateral commitments.

Turning to the Commonwealth, the first question to ask was, 'what is the Commonwealth good at'? One great strength of the Commonwealth was its diversity, which translated into 'representativity'. It was not a regional organisation. It was not a special interest group. It was global in terms of both geography and national priorities. It had large and small members, developed and developing, strong and weak, island and landlocked. That strength was reinforced by its consensus-based operating procedure. The minority did not have to suffer the tyranny of the majority. And consensus did not simply mean the lowest common denominator position. Witness the major policy development efforts of the Commonwealth and the impact they had had on shaping global policy – the Langkawi Declaration on the Environment, the Codes of Practice for the Recruitment of Health Workers and Teachers, the Small States Vulnerability Index, and the Youth Development Index were all cases in point.

One of the less acknowledged features of the Commonwealth was its informality. One of the first things that struck Amitav Banerji when he came to work at Marlborough House, having earlier seen the UN, SAARC, and ASEAN in action, was how much more at ease

everyone felt in Commonwealth meetings, how often delegates were called by their first names instead of 'the distinguished representative of X', how rare Notes Verbales were. Commonwealth protocol was far more relaxed than the straitjacketed formality that applied elsewhere. This made for easier dialogue and consensus.

The Commonwealth was arguably better at promoting good governance than its peers. The fact that the Commonwealth was a trailblazer in establishing its core political values, and in inventing a mechanism to oversee their implementation, or at least to deter derogation from them, was evidence of this. The Ibrahim Index also provided eloquent testimony of how Commonwealth countries had fared in consolidating democracy and good governance.

For small states, the Commonwealth was the best possible organisation they could belong to. It enabled their leaders to sit at the table on equal terms with much larger players. It helped to spotlight their vulnerabilities and concerns and to magnify their voices.

The Commonwealth had some excellent examples of managing ethnic and religious diversity, from which the world could learn much. It was very much to be applauded that the seminal work of the Commission on Respect and Understanding, led by Amartya Sen, was to be pulled out of mothballs and put into practice. But the discussion earlier had revealed some of the challenges that stood in the way, not least the fact that the *Civil Paths to Peace* report did not have concrete recommendations.

The Commonwealth was the only international organisation that had a dedicated youth programme, which was of particular importance when more than 65% of the populations of developing countries was below the age of 30. It also had a more extensive and elaborate network of civil society organisations than any other international organisation, that supplemented and complemented inter-governmental collaboration in a most valuable way.

So much for the plus points. But there was also a flip side. The Commonwealth was not always a model of amicable consensus building. Amitav Banerji could not speak about Malta, where things seemed to have gone fairly smoothly, but in his 24-plus years with the Commonwealth Secretariat he had been witness to many bruising battles that ended in deep discord and disagreement. This seemed to have markedly increased in recent years, especially since the Perth CHOGM of 2011. The North-South polarisation in the Commonwealth had become sharper than ever before, with the large donors pressing for a rights-based agenda and the developing members resisting what they perceived to be attempts at downgrading the development agenda.

It was all very well for small states to treat the Commonwealth as special, but the organisation would never fire on all cylinders if the larger developing countries did not take it seriously enough, including putting more resources into its coffers. There were too many examples of half-hearted commitment, and of the Commonwealth being treated as a peripheral partner. And while diversity was indeed the hallmark of several member states, forces of extremism and intolerance had been gaining ground as well of late within Commonwealth countries. The Commonwealth certainly could offer lessons to others, but it should not fail to put its own house in order. Even in the Commonwealth, there were signs of the much vaunted advances in democracy, rule of law and human rights stalling. There

were growing examples of respect for core values not advancing, or even being placed in reverse gear. Separation of powers was among the victims. While there were stringent tests for aspiring members, some existing members would find it difficult to make the grade if they were applying for admission afresh. In the area of human rights, the issue of LGBT seemed to be heading for a mighty confrontation between two camps if not handled with care.

Amitav Banerji believed the Commonwealth was at a seminal moment, when it needed to work to its strengths but also to address some of the challenges he had outlined; and he stressed the word ‘some’, as there were others he had not cited. On balance, his answer to the question posed by the title of the session was positive: international organisations were definitely a force for global good, and the Commonwealth specifically remained a force for global good. But there was much to do to make it work to its full potential, and he re-emphasised what he had said at the beginning – that international organisations were the sum total of their parts – and that their effectiveness was a function of the commitment and political will of their constituent member states.

Of course, the new Secretary-General designate, Patricia Scotland, had an important role to play. She had her work cut out for her, with a difficult inheritance. She certainly had the stature, the gravitas, the political experience, the enthusiasm and commitment, and she had made her intentions clear. She critically needed the unstinting support and goodwill of all sections of the Commonwealth if she was to make a success of the role.

- On the question of consensus-building, it was noted that in 2015 as in 2013, one country had reserved its position in the final communiqué, in this case India over climate change. This was doubly worrying – both as indicating a failure of consensus building within the Commonwealth on this particular issue but also more widely because the specific ground on which India chose to reserve its position was that it did not want to go into the Paris climate change talks already committed – i.e., it disputed the very principle of the Commonwealth as a consensus-builder.
- It was also suggested that engaging India would be one of the hardest but most important tasks for the incoming Secretary-General. It was thought ironic that, under an Indian Secretary-General, India seemed to have become even more detached than ever from the Commonwealth, to judge by such measures as attendance at summits; and doubly so, given India’s important role in making the modern Commonwealth.
- It was pointed out that ten or even five years previously, no-one would have suggested that the Commonwealth was behind La Francophonie, but this was a point of view increasingly heard. Was this because of failings in the Commonwealth, or was it because La Francophonie could count on much greater support from France than could the Commonwealth from the UK? There seemed, at both political and official levels in the UK, to be a deep-seated disdain for the Commonwealth. France was also much better at obtaining EU funding for La Francophonie; the UK seemed uninterested in doing the same for the Commonwealth.
- Some participants thought that the Commonwealth could learn from the Francophonie model of tiers of membership, particularly in relation to the non-independent overseas territories, and perhaps to some aspirant member countries.

However, it was emphasised that the tiers were essentially related to use of the French language, and their impact difficult to assess. Whether they were an element to emulate was unclear.

- There was some discussion of the emphasis on the French language in La Francophonie; mostly this was thought to be a negative element, and the result of a fear of globalisation and the loss of the position once occupied by French as a 'lingua franca'. On the other hand, it was pointed out that La Francophonie now made more of an issue of multilingualism in general than protection of the French language in particular. It was also pointed out that in some areas, La Francophonie had engaged in important new initiatives, such as Reffop, the Francophone peacekeeping network of training and expertise.
- Two different points of view were put on Patricia Scotland's stated aim of making LGBT issues a test of her leadership: on the one hand she was to be congratulated for taking up a key human rights issue (which in fact in many countries was a legacy from colonial times), but on the other it was thought unwise to stake too much on such a difficult and hugely sensitive issue if she wanted to make progress in other areas and did not want her term of office to start off with a high-profile failure.
- A number of participants thought the Commonwealth could be doing a lot more to interact with other international organisations, particularly the UN. It was pointed out that the Commonwealth had observer status at the UN but its seat was very rarely filled. There was a small states office in New York but it was run by a facilities manager not a diplomat. Even one policy officer in New York would be able to make a lot of difference. Similarly, the Commonwealth might seek observer status in certain regional organisations where it had a large presence. However, it was also pointed out that the Commonwealth cut across the established UN groupings, and that member states were very unlikely to subscribe to the idea of a Commonwealth official claiming to speak on their behalfs – though this did not detract from the point that the Commonwealth could be working more closely to forge consensus among its member states at the UN.
- There was some discussion of how the UK referendum on membership of the EU might affect its relations with other Commonwealth members. One participant argued forcefully that if the UK remained within the EU, it would gradually lose its independent power of action; but others argued that the UK was more valuable to other members of the Commonwealth if it remained within the EU. Yet others thought UK-Commonwealth relations would not be affected one way or the other by the outcome of the referendum.

### **Session 3: "The Malta CHOGM and After"**

Chair: **Sir Peter Marshall** (former Deputy Secretary-General,  
Commonwealth Secretariat)

Speaker: **HE Kamalesh Sharma** (Commonwealth Secretary-General)

Introducing the session, **Sir Peter Marshall** said that it was clear from the conference so far that participants agreed that the Commonwealth was a good thing and that it should continue – but exactly how was a matter of uncertainty. Perhaps no-one was better placed to answer that question than HE Kamalesh Sharma, who had devoted eight years of his life to the Commonwealth, as its fifth Secretary-General. Kamalesh Sharma would be laying down that burden on 1 April and no doubt there would be plenty of encomia. But it was fitting that the Heads at Malta had in their communiqué ‘expressed their warm appreciation to the outgoing Secretary-General’, ‘commended his contributions to fostering a Commonwealth that is a strong and respected voice in the world; enlarging its networks, including through the “Commonwealth Connects” collaboration platform; and sustaining its global relevance and profile’, and ‘paid tribute to his commitment to improving the lives of all peoples of the Commonwealth’.

Addressing the overall theme of the conference, ‘The Commonwealth after Malta: the progress of renewal and reform’, **HE Kamalesh Sharma** said that at Malta there had been real progress in Commonwealth reform, helped by the skilful and committed chairmanship of the Maltese Prime Minister, Joseph Muscat. The retreat had been cut back to one day, enabling a more focused discussion, without the Heads drifting off on the second day leaving a lot of loose ends, as had frequently been the case in the past. The retreat itself had also been restricted to Heads and very senior cabinet members – thus avoiding the situation at Colombo, when several countries had been represented by officials. The communiqué was about half the size of the previous one, and was all the better for that; no longer was it a sort of Christmas tree on which to hang grandiloquent but in practical terms inconsequential statements. At Malta, for the first time Heads also issued their own statement, arising from what they had actually discussed. There had been a great deal more space created for civil society, including a very successful session with foreign ministers. The people’s, youth and business fora had for the first time been joined by a women’s forum, a very promising innovation. And again as a new departure, the documents from the different fora had all been included as part of the official documentation from the meeting.

The Secretary-General had heard some criticism of the way CMAG operated, and suggestions that its role was no longer clear. He thought such criticisms misguided. CMAG was an evolving institution, and had several successes to its credit. After the Perth reforms, the Secretary-General believed that CMAG did in fact have a clear role, in ensuring fair elections and a level playing field for the media and opposition. But it was not appropriate for CMAG to intervene as soon as anyone made any criticism of any Commonwealth government; its role was not to put people in the dock all the time in an adversarial fashion but to facilitate a return to good governance, in association with the Secretary-General’s own good offices. The synergy between these two aspects of Commonwealth endeavour was working very well, and had been welcomed by Heads.

The reform and renewal of the Secretariat itself was now virtually complete, with a new strategic plan and a new staff structure, oriented towards impact. The Secretariat was also financially sound, and the auditors had not been able to find any problems in that regard. It was particularly gratifying that the Secretariat was ranked number one out of 28 international organisations in the Internal Justice Systems of International Organisations Legitimacy Index, produced by the International Administrative Law Centre of Excellence; the previous year it had ranked number six, and the year before even lower. This was recognition that in terms of staff relationships the Commonwealth Secretariat was now a model for others to follow. The Secretariat was also a global leader in gender representation, with women accounting for more than 50% of senior staff.

There was no doubt that the Commonwealth was now a highly relevant, contemporary and digitalised organisation, fit for purpose in the world of the early twenty-first century. It existed round the world and round the clock. The huge Commonwealth Connects platform was enabling all sorts of synergies to be made. The Commonwealth was a world leader in electoral management and in election standards, creating a no-go zone for military coups; and what was unacceptable in the Commonwealth was becoming recognised as unacceptable in other fora. To this core strength could be added other networks – including, after Malta, climate change networks, and anti-radicalisation networks.

‘Adding global value’ had been the theme of the Malta Commonwealth summit – and at Malta the Heads ensured that this is precisely what the Commonwealth did. As a microcosm of the whole world, the Commonwealth could get things done. Its values of inclusivity, fairness, transparency, and the indivisibility of global society ensured that it was a great global good. On debt, for instance, it was the Commonwealth which watched out for the smaller players, and its emphasis on resilience and vulnerability was now accepted globally and picked up by other international organisations including the UN, the IMF and the World Bank. No state should be allowed to be in a state of freefall. But it was the Commonwealth which had transformed the language of global debate, and its leadership had been acknowledged by other organisations. On climate change, the Commonwealth was the only other international organisation cited by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon as a pace-setter. Other organisations had perhaps been too keen to work with the big boys; it was the Commonwealth which not only highlighted the ethical dimension of the problem – with small states facing the worst problems despite their having contributed virtually nothing to their causes – but generating genuinely innovative solutions, such as multilateral debt swaps for climate action, and access to finance for climate change.

On climate change as elsewhere, ‘adding global value’ was not just a fine phrase but an accurate description of what the Commonwealth did. Just as the Trinidad and Tobago Commonwealth summit had contributed very significantly to the outcome of the Copenhagen climate change conference which almost immediately followed it, so the Malta Commonwealth summit had been an important precursor to the Paris climate change conference. In this the Commonwealth was responding to the needs of its members, particularly small states. There was no other international organisation in the same league as the Commonwealth as a champion of small states; and what the Commonwealth came up with were practical ideas, not homilies. The Commonwealth stood tall, saw far, and held

toolkits in its hands – not least, now, the Small States Centre of Excellence which was launched at the Malta summit.

The Commonwealth was also a global leader in engaging with non-governmental sectors. At Malta there had been four parallel non-governmental fora – for youth, civil society, business, and now also women. This was a reflection of the partnership in the wider Commonwealth family. These fora had been made much more interactive in their engagements with the intergovernmental Commonwealth, with several opportunities for face-to-face meetings, and their communiqués now made part of the official documentation. This was also reflected in the ongoing work of the Secretariat, which now included two whole-time people to work with civil society, one with the accredited organisations and another with outside partners. The Commonwealth's work with young people was a particularly promising area, with such initiatives as the pioneering Youth Development Index, and the Youth Climate Change Network.

Another of the outcomes of the Malta summit was agreement on a high-level review group on governance arrangements, which was very much welcomed by the Secretary-General. Although the Secretariat was in a process of constant renewal and reform, there were a number of key issues which needed to be addressed – such as the financing of the Secretariat and the other intergovernmental Commonwealth organisations, and the future of the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation in particular, which did excellent work but was now in an unsustainable financial situation. The Secretariat needed to be a highly professional and streamlined organisation to make the impact it needed to make. But of course this was only part of the story, and without the support of the governments themselves little could be achieved. Undoubtedly more could be done by the governments – such as including a paragraph on the Commonwealth whenever there were bilateral meetings between two Commonwealth governments.

One tell-tale sign of the success of the Commonwealth was the number of countries outside it who wanted to get in; currently there were at least eight or nine countries which were either exploring or seriously considering exploring membership. They did so because they saw the Commonwealth as a quality organisation which added global value. Another indication of the credibility of the organisation was the number of member-states queueing up to host Commonwealth summits.

Above all, the Commonwealth needed to be a global force for good in empowering and safeguarding its citizens, and a voice for those who continued to be side-lined in international dialogues. The Commonwealth could and should not shy away from the condition of the most vulnerable citizens in the Commonwealth family. That was why issues such as LGBT rights, child and early forced marriage, and FGM were now firmly on the Commonwealth agenda. But the Commonwealth did not work by grandstanding on these or other issues. The Commonwealth's biggest asset was trust, and the fact that members states knew that the Secretariat was working with them to solve problems. On several of these issues, indeed, grandstanding would be counter-productive. Much better was to work patiently with governments to ensure consistency between their domestic laws and their constitutional and international obligations, and the values enshrined in the Commonwealth Charter, to which all subscribed.

**Session 4: “Intra-Commonwealth trade and investment: Is there a Commonwealth advantage?”**

Chair: **Dame Veronica Sutherland** (former Deputy Secretary-General, Commonwealth Secretariat)

Speakers: **Baroness Smith of Newnham** (Director, European Centre at POLIS, Cambridge University)

**Mohammad Razzaque** (Head, International Trade Policy Section, Commonwealth Secretariat)

**James Carver MEP** (Commonwealth Spokesman, UKIP)

**Dame Veronica Sutherland** opened the session by saying that she was pleased the Round Table had decided to devote a session to economic matters. Trade, finance and development, and especially debt relief, were areas where the Commonwealth had many achievements to its name, though sadly these had not often enough been adequately highlighted and publicised; indeed if there was one piece of advice she would like to give Patricia Scotland as incoming Secretary-General, it was that the Commonwealth urgently needed to improve its profile and media strategy. One focus for the session would be the excellent recent Commonwealth Secretariat document, ‘The Commonwealth in the Unfolding Global Trade Landscape’, whose principal researcher, Mohammad Razzaque, was one of the panellists. It was clear that the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation was dying a slow death and was no longer the force that it once was; but what the Commonwealth did in the areas of trade and finance would be of increasing significance. Sadly, many of the problems she herself had been dealing with at the Commonwealth Secretariat fifteen years previously – such as commodity reliance, and inadequate infrastructures – were still major obstacles to the realisation of some countries’ potentials.

**Mohammad Razzaque** said that the report, ‘The Commonwealth in the Unfolding Global Trade Landscape’, was based on a large amount of research, and had been launched in Malta, to coincide with the Commonwealth summit. Although it covered a wide area, its primary focus was on intra-Commonwealth trade and investment.

It was important to remember that the Commonwealth was itself not a trading club, and could not offer preferential advantages between member states. Indeed most Commonwealth countries were members of more than one trading club – of which some 600 or more had been notified to the WTO. Further, most Commonwealth countries were involved in trading clubs which included non-Commonwealth countries. The challenge for the authors of the report was to find out whether membership of the Commonwealth had any impact on trade and investment patterns.

The 53 Commonwealth members’ exports of goods and services totalled around \$3.4 trillion in 2013, which represented around 14.8% of total global exports (down from around 16.8% in 2000, the decline being due to the rapid rise of large non-Commonwealth trading powers, notably China). But within that total, trade between Commonwealth members had expanded, and the relative significance of intra-Commonwealth trade was growing: from some \$133 billion (13% of total Commonwealth trade) in 1995 to \$592 billion (18% of total Commonwealth trade) in 2013, expected to surpass \$1 trillion by 2020. While the vast

majority of this was accounted for by a small handful of countries (the UK, Canada, Australia, India), it was important to emphasise that intra-Commonwealth trade was not just important to those countries. The Commonwealth included 31 small states by currently accepted definitions, and in fact small states tended to rely more not less on intra-Commonwealth trade. In ten such states, more than 50% of trade was intra-Commonwealth. These figures were all the more impressive given the rise of China: in 2000, only four or five Commonwealth countries did more than 5% of their trade with China, but by 2013 this figure had risen to 39. Intra-Commonwealth foreign direct investment flows had also increased remarkably, from around \$10 billion in 2002 to around \$80.5 billion in 2011. Indeed, intra-Commonwealth FDI accounted for around a quarter of total FDI inflows into Commonwealth countries. Intra-Commonwealth remittances were estimated to have totalled around \$45 billion in 2014, representing some 30% of all remittances received by Commonwealth countries.

To what extent was this evidence of a 'Commonwealth effect'? As already stated, the Commonwealth was not itself a trading bloc, its members were parts of other trading blocs, and every Commonwealth country was open to trade with every other country, Commonwealth or non-Commonwealth. Moreover, the Commonwealth was geographically diverse, and in many cases Commonwealth countries were considered by many not natural trading partners. Yet the 'gravity model' suggested that Commonwealth members traded some 25% more (including goods and services) with other Commonwealth members than had they not been Commonwealth members, and generated some 10% more FDI flows. Approached from a different angle, the report's researchers had calculated that trading costs were around 19% lower when both trading partners were members of the Commonwealth, and consistently so over the period studied (1995-2011).

Would these trends continue into the future? The econometric analysis carried out for the report suggested they would, and that by 2030 intra-Commonwealth trade had the potential to reach \$2.75 trillion under the most plausible scenario (\$1.85 trillion under the most pessimistic scenario, and £3.85 trillion under the most optimistic).

Since the Commonwealth was unlikely to become a trading bloc as such, other means would have to be found to facilitate and promote intra-Commonwealth trade. The report looked at various possibilities. For instance, improving trade logistics (i.e. efficiency of the customs clearance process; quality of trade and transport-related infrastructure; ease of arranging competitively priced shipments; competence and quality of logistics services; ability to track and trace consignments; and timeliness of shipments) would have an immediate effect. If every Commonwealth country had trade logistics on a level with South Africa's, there would be immediate GDP gains of around \$177 billion, and the creation of 24 million jobs. If every Commonwealth country improved to be on a par with the UK and Singapore, there would be an estimated GDP gain of \$500 billion. Other ways in which intra-Commonwealth trade could be promoted included making use of the scope for tariff rationalisation and tackling non-tariff barriers; promoting deeper integration within existing regional mechanisms including utilising opportunities for developing regional supply chains in certain sectors; exploiting the potential of diasporas; and making use of the Commonwealth as a platform for establishing and strengthening contacts between traders and investors.

In conclusion, then, although the Commonwealth was not and was never likely to be a trading bloc as such, there was clear evidence of a 'Commonwealth effect' in trade and investment, tremendous opportunities for increasing intra-Commonwealth trade and investment both absolutely and as a relative share, and a number of policies which Commonwealth members could adopt in order to promote such an objective.

**Baroness Smith of Newnham** said that the research which Mohammad Razzaque had outlined was extremely impressive, and there was clearly scope for a further strengthening of Commonwealth ties in trade and investment. Given that the Commonwealth was not, as he had made clear, a trading bloc and its members came together for completely different reasons, this was perhaps a happy add-on. But it was perhaps also important to dig further into the detail of the report, which made clear that the 'Commonwealth effect' was differentially advantageous for different countries; and that within the Commonwealth there was also an important element of regionalism. The research suggested, for instance, that a distinction needed to be made between goods and services. The UK was very much a service-based economy. Germany traded far more with India in goods than the UK did; on the other hand, there were much more significant investment flows between the UK and India.

In opening the conference, James Mayall had referred to the tendency in the UK to parochialism. Sadly, the average UK voter tended to hear very little about the Commonwealth, unless in some connection with the Queen. But there was one exception, which was that in the context of the debate on the UK's membership of the EU, some advocates of the UK leaving the EU tried to argue that by leaving the UK would somehow be able to do more trade with the Commonwealth, or that the Commonwealth might provide some sort of alternative trading bloc. Leaving to one side the question of whether other Commonwealth countries would be willing to change their own trading arrangements to suit the UK, the evidence in the Commonwealth Secretariat report suggested that the 'Commonwealth effect' operated independently of trading bloc arrangements. There was in fact no choice between the Commonwealth and the EU, because there was no need for a choice. Malta and Cyprus certainly didn't see the Commonwealth and the EU as alternatives.

Baroness Smith said that she herself was all in favour of making the UK a more open economy. For instance, the UK was only doing harm to itself by making it so difficult for international students to obtain visas; they would simply go elsewhere. This was an issue that was frequently raised in other countries, especially India, and it was a constant headache for university administrators. Unfortunately, the rise of parochialism and nationalism in UK politics meant that people tended to forget the advantages of migration, and how much higher education as a sector (or, for that matter, tourism) contributed to the UK economy.

Membership of the Commonwealth brought the UK, as it did other members, a number of advantages. Perhaps above all, the Commonwealth was a beacon of hope for the world, embodying important principles of democracy and respect for human rights. It also clearly bestowed advantages in trade and investment, because of the shared language, similar legal systems, and so on. But membership of the Commonwealth was not only compatible with membership of regional organisations, it was enhanced by it.

**James Carver** began by saying that he was a member of UKIP not because he was a Little Englander or a nationalist but because he was an internationalist. He would accept that there was not a choice between the Commonwealth and the EU if he thought that membership of the EU did not constrain the UK's trading opportunities, but he was convinced that the opposite was the case – i.e., that membership of the EU severely diminished the UK's ability to fulfil its full trade potential. Like others in his party, he was a strong advocate of the Commonwealth. With 15% of the world's trade and 25% of the world's population, united by a shared language, history, and legal frameworks, the Commonwealth not only had a truly global reach, it also (as Mohammad Razzaque's presentation had made clear) had the potential to contribute a lot more than it did to the trade, investment and economic growth of its member states and peoples.

The world's fastest rising economies were all outside Europe, many of them in the Commonwealth. The future prosperity of the UK depended on it connecting and interacting with these economies, not the sluggish and relatively declining economies of continental Europe. This was the opposite of what everyone had been told forty years previously, when the UK joined the 'Common Market'. Then, UK voters were told that the UK's global role had ended, and that its future lay in Europe. The wheel of fortune had in fact turned full circle. All the best estimates suggested that the EU share of GDP was set to shrink, while that of the Commonwealth was set to grow. By remaining in the EU, the UK was depriving itself of the opportunity to share in this growth. While it was true that the Commonwealth was not and was not likely to become a trading bloc as the WTO defined them, trade barriers had decreased significantly over the previous few decades, and trade flows were taking different shapes. For the UK especially, service and knowledge products were crucial; and these found a readier home in the like-minded countries of the Commonwealth than in the countries of the EU. Despite the obstacles created by UK membership of the EU, some of the biggest leaps in UK exports had been to Commonwealth countries.

It was the genius of the Commonwealth that it was not just some arrangement between governments. If anything, it meant more as an association of peoples, operating at the level of businesses and civil society organisations and linkages. It was a huge potential asset for the UK, not only for trade but for peace, stability, and equitable and sustainable development. The Commonwealth Secretariat report made clear that it was a catalyst for wealth creation without the need for unwieldy and constraining political superstructures. The UK and the other countries of the Commonwealth benefited materially from their association, and its flexibility was a refreshing alternative to an over-regulated and rigid EU. Its huge geographical spread and deep interconnections made it an organisation for the twenty-first century, not a perverse throwback. Just as it held deep potential in the political sphere, in defusing misunderstandings, creating dialogue, and promoting tolerance and understanding in place of extremism, so it was ideally suited to help the UK and other member states meet the economic challenges of a globalised world. It was in fact a common market of friends. To return to the issue raised by Baroness Smith, he agreed that the Commonwealth and Europe did not have to be alternatives; it was not a question of 'either/or' but of 'also'. But the UK had so far put too many of its eggs in the European basket, and the demands of EU membership were exclusive and for an economy like the

UK's particularly damaging. The UK's relationship with Europe needed to be re-negotiated if its full potential within the Commonwealth was to be realised.

- One of the participants remarked that one of the most interesting aspects of the Commonwealth Secretariat report was that the growth of trade in services within the Commonwealth was much more rapid than the growth of trade in goods; on the one hand this could suggest that here was a huge untapped market, but on the other trade in services may be far less resilient.
- It was pointed out that although the world was naturally fixated on the growth of the 'BRICS' countries, especially China, there were several countries within the Commonwealth which had experienced sustained high levels of growth, such as Bangladesh or Mozambique.
- There was some discussion of previous attempts to quantify the 'Commonwealth advantage', which early in the life of the Commonwealth Business Council had been touted as being as much as 21 or 22%, but in other studies was reckoned as 15% or less. However, Mohammad Razzaque emphasised that the figures in the Commonwealth Secretariat report were for the first time the result of empirical analysis and not guesswork.
- One of the participants expressed the hope that the report would not simply get buried in Marlborough House, as had seemed to happen to many important reports in the past. Mohammad Razzaque responded that a wide programme of outreach had been planned, and a large number of governments were already receiving technical assistance on trade issues.
- Questioned on how a UK exit from the EU would alter the UK's ability to negotiate on issues of global trade, James Carver pointed out that the UK now only had observer status at the WTO, since in negotiations it was represented by the EU trade commissioner. However, Baroness Smith countered by saying that it was not clear what access the UK would have to European markets were it to pull out of the EU; nor was it clear what arrangements the UK might be able to come to with those countries which had free trade agreements with the EU. Other participants suggested that remaining in the EU would not prevent the UK from trying to maximise its trade with other countries, including Commonwealth countries.
- On the question of free movement of people, several participants agreed with Baroness Smith that the UK's current policies were damaging to its relations with other Commonwealth countries. Jim Carver also agreed, saying that it seemed unfair and anomalous that someone from a Commonwealth country should face such barriers when people from the EU could come and go freely.
- Some participants suggested it would be interesting to find out what other Commonwealth countries thought would be the consequences of a UK exit from the EU.
- Asked to explain what he thought accounted for the 'Commonwealth advantage', Mohammad Razzaque pointed to shared language and similar legal systems as the main factors.
- One of the participants expressed some scepticism as to the report's findings, suggesting that much of the intra-Commonwealth trade could just be a reflection of trade between neighbours, since Commonwealth countries tended to be positioned in clusters. Much more convincing would be, for instance, analysis of a recent

entrant to the Commonwealth, to see if its trade patterns changed as a result of membership. However, Mohammad Razzaque said that the analysis had taken into consideration such factors as proximity and membership of regional trading blocs, and he was therefore confident that the findings stood up. As regards tracking a recent entrant, in fact this had been done with Rwanda, and it was found that Rwanda received a significantly higher proportion of FDI from Commonwealth countries after joining than before. The report had also found that a higher proportion of intra-Commonwealth FDI invariably resulted in an increase in intra-Commonwealth trade.

- Asked about the distribution of intra-Commonwealth trade between developed and developing countries, Mohammad Razzaque noted that the share accounted for by developing countries was on the increase. For instance, between 2000 and 2013, looking at 18 Commonwealth African countries, the share of total intra-Commonwealth trade that went to the UK had declined from 40% to 18%, with the share going to other African countries increasing correspondingly.
- Challenged by one participant as to how, with such internationalist views, he could be sitting in the European Parliament as part of a group which included such racists and nationalists as the 'True Finns' and the Lega Nord, James Carver pointed out that in fact the True Finns sat with the UK Conservative Party and the Lega Nord with France's Front National.

### ***Session 5: “Beyond Malta: Re-vitalising the Commonwealth”***

Chair: **Patsy Robertson** (Chair, Commonwealth Association)  
Speakers: **James Robbins** (Diplomatic Correspondent, BBC)  
**Carl Wright** (Secretary-General, Commonwealth Local Government Forum)  
**Arif Zaman** (Executive Director, Commonwealth Businesswomen’s Network)

**Patsy Robertson** opened the session by saying that there was a widespread feeling that there was something wrong with the public persona of the Commonwealth. It did a lot of excellent work, but no-one seemed to know about it. Of course, the Commonwealth Secretariat and other institutions had suffered a great deal from budget and staff cuts (the former flagship Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation even more than the other institutions), but this was not the only reason why the Commonwealth’s media presence was so poor. There was a lot of hope invested in the Secretary-General-elect. It was clear that she would have the support of Commonwealth civil society organisations – but also that she would need it to turn things round. She would also need the support of Heads themselves. Although there were some hopeful signs and Joseph Muscat’s chairing of the Malta summit had won a lot of plaudits, it had to be said that Commonwealth summits were no longer the engines of the Commonwealth in the way they used to be. Too few Heads now attended, in part because they could no longer guarantee that they would be talking to their own peers: they wanted to talk to other Heads, not officials. It had also to be said that there were no Commonwealth ‘stars’ amongst the Heads, like there used to be. It was clear, therefore, that re-vitalising the Commonwealth would be an uphill task.

Emphasising that he was speaking in a personal capacity and not as a representative of the BBC, **James Robbins** began by saying that he always called the Heads of Government Meetings ‘summits’, and found the ‘CHOGM’ acronym alienating and elitist. He was glad that this was now becoming accepted even if not yet official usage.

The first Commonwealth summit that he attended was in Harare in 1991. Those were heady days. The Commonwealth was on a roll, its greatest achievement – its role in the ending of apartheid – already apparent. Nelson Mandela was an honoured guest, and the icing on the cake was the adoption of the Harare principles, which would set the Commonwealth in the vanguard of other international organisations when it came to human rights and good governance. Since then, however, it had been a rather bumpy road for the Commonwealth. There had been some real achievements, not least the formation of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG), and the suspension of countries on the grounds of bad governance. There had also been the adoption of the Commonwealth Charter; a considerable number of soft power achievements; and a steady, incremental growth in civil society groups and in interaction between the official and unofficial organisations.

In his opening remarks, James Mayall had suggested that the media were in part to blame for the Commonwealth’s poor image, and had accused them of parochialism in their coverage of the association. Up to a point, he was correct. To take the BBC, there hadn’t been a huge coverage of the Malta summit, and what there was perhaps focused more on the Queen and not on the actual substance of the summit. There was some coverage of the Commonwealth’s stance on climate change – albeit on BBC World rather than the domestic

service. (Indeed, no-one really expected President Hollande to come to Malta so soon after the Paris terror attacks, and this could be seen as a tremendous recognition of the importance of the Commonwealth and its track record in this area.) But the hard reality of the trade was that reporters and their editors were constantly having to ask, 'what's the story?', and 'why should listeners care?'. And by these tests, much that went on at Malta simply failed to register. Indeed, it was natural that the UK media should be more interested in President Hollande's extraordinary intervention in UK politics – urging the House of Commons to support air strikes in Syria – than in what he had to say about the Commonwealth.

If some of the criticism of the media was fair, it had also to be said that there was a serious case against the Commonwealth itself – of irrelevance compounded by wilful negligence. The Colombo summit of 2013 had been an absolute (and self-inflicted) disaster for the Commonwealth, and called into question its very existence; a clearer negation of its supposed principles than was to be found in Sri Lanka at that time could hardly be imagined, and the Commonwealth was tarnished by its failure to recognise that. Of course the Commonwealth survived, helped partly by the boycotts, absenteeism, and criticism by some of those who did attend. In the end it was probably the people of Sri Lanka who dug the Commonwealth out of its grave, by voting out Mahinda Rajapaksa.

Malta did a lot to aid the Commonwealth's recovery. Well prepared and ably led by Joseph Muscat, the summit had some real achievements: the first women's forum, greater interaction with civil society and youth, important statements on climate change, radicalisation, and the problems of small states; increasing firmness on human rights issues including LGBT rights; and of course the selection of a new Secretary-General with an agenda for renewal and revitalisation (impressively set out in her article for the *Round Table*). Moreover, it had to be said that other international organisations sometimes fell far shorter of their own standards, which in most cases were set lower anyway.

So perhaps the verdict on the Commonwealth should be softened. Clearly it was guilty of past misdeeds, but it had shown exemplary conduct in Malta, and had promised to behave well in future, particularly under a dynamic new Secretary-General. On this point, it was clear that there was a real need for leadership, and Patricia Scotland would need to pursue the reform agenda with the same energy and vigour that she had put into winning the Secretary-Generalship. But those who knew the Commonwealth would recognise that she could not get very far without support from the member states themselves.

Particular attention would have to be paid to the Commonwealth's media strategy. It had a very positive story to tell at Malta, but somehow that got lost, what with the inadequate press briefings (often scattered over Malta with very little notice), poor timings (much of the briefing came too late to feed into stories about the Paris climate change summit), and a lack of clear narrative. Other aspects of the summit needed re-thinking: for instance, large parts of the opening ceremony were tedious and a waste of everyone's time; and the engagement with civil society and youth needed to go much deeper. But there were many positive signs – new leadership, a dynamic chair-in-office, and the prospect of the next summit taking place in the UK, which would be very keen to make it a success. All said, the future for the Commonwealth looked a lot more promising than in the recent past.

**Carl Wright** was emphatic that the Malta summit had started the process of Commonwealth re-vitalisation. Two years previously, as James Robbins had made clear, the Commonwealth was in crisis, and rightly accused of showing disrespect for its own principles. The atmosphere in Malta was very different. There was a very engaged chair, Joseph Muscat; the selection of a dynamic new Secretary-General; very successful pre-summit youth, women's, business, and civil society fora, their submissions being appended to the final communiqué for the first time; a much deeper engagement with the associated organisations and accredited civil society organisations (including a very successful consultation with foreign ministers); and a whole host of important and substantial new initiatives, including the new Commonwealth Finance Access hub to be based in Mauritius, the Commonwealth Trade Finance Facility, and the Commonwealth Small States Centre of Excellence, to be based in Malta.

From the point of view of the Commonwealth's associated and civil society organisations, a number of things were also worth underlining from the various declarations emanating from Malta. The leaders' statement very helpfully recognised the role of civil society in describing the Commonwealth as 'an association of governments and peoples'. The climate change statement also recognised the valuable role of 'stakeholders' other than governments (and the Commonwealth position on climate change did have some significant impact at the Paris summit, especially by dragging India along). Finally the CHOGM communiqué itself also recognised the role of a broad network of bodies in promoting Commonwealth policies and values, such as in relation to the SDGs. At Malta there was also the very important decision that the incoming Secretary-General would convene a high-level review group to address questions of efficiency, transparency and oversight – and within the wider Commonwealth family, not just the Secretariat itself.

Back in 2014, Carl Wright wrote a *Round Table* article on the need for Commonwealth reform, which identified five 'R's as key to the process: 'reform', 'regroup', 'refocus', 'resources', and 'reach out'. It was perhaps worth revisiting each of those points in light of the Malta summit.

On 'reform', some important progress had been initiated, with the selection of a new Secretary-General, an efficient and proactive chair-in-office, and a more structured summit, though much would depend on the proposed review of Commonwealth governance, which the new Secretary-General would no doubt wish to drive forward. On 'regroup', there was a significant recognition of the respective roles of the intergovernmental, associated, and civil society organisations, for example through the consultation with foreign ministers, and agreement on the need for greater collaboration in pursuing Commonwealth goals. On 'refocus', a serious attempt was made to focus on core political and economic issues such as combating extremism, and promoting human rights, action for climate change, the 2030 agenda for sustainable development, trade, and support for small states, although inevitably other issues crept into the final outcome statements. This focus would now need strengthening, including by having a proper division of labour among the intergovernmental, associated, and civil society organisations, according to their respective areas of competence. 'Resources' was in many ways the elephant in the room, given the serious shrinkage that had taken place in Secretariat and especially CFTC funds. It was

therefore encouraging that in his post-summit address to the House of Commons, UK Prime Minister David Cameron made some significant funding pledges for Commonwealth co-operation. This was an issue, however, which needed to be addressed holistically in the context of the total resources being made available to all Commonwealth organisations, not only the intergovernmental ones, and there was a strong case for more member states allocating funds directly to the associated and civil society organisations, as well as for more partnership and collaboration between intergovernmental, associated, and civil society organisations. Finally 'reach out' to non-Commonwealth members, including the eight or nine countries knocking on the door and especially the idea of potential associate membership status for dependent territories and others, was not specifically addressed at Malta. Indeed, a case could be made that enforcement of the criteria of existing membership had not been vigorously enough pursued by CMAG, notably in those Commonwealth countries which failed to observe basic democratic rules set out in the Commonwealth Charter.

On balance, as a result of the Malta summit the Commonwealth was back on the road to recovery and to being revitalised – though a lot more still needed to be done. It could perhaps be awarded 5 or 6 out of 10 – by no means perfect but a great deal better than even a few months previously, let alone in the wake of the Colombo summit. There were clearly considerable challenges for the incoming Secretary-General, not least to reach out to those countries which didn't vote for her. Nor should the global environment in which the Commonwealth and other multilateral organisations operated be ignored, with significant economic and financial uncertainties, the Middle East crisis and the related challenges of extremism and migration, and with the rise of populist, nationalist and racist politics. All told, however, Carl Wright remained optimistic that the Commonwealth post-Malta, led jointly by Patricia Scotland and Joseph Muscat, was in with a real chance to return to its old roles as an incubator of innovation and a facilitator and honest broker, especially if it harnessed the rich and diverse skills and commitment of all the Commonwealth organisations.

Drawing on his own experience working with the Commonwealth Businesswomen's Network and the former Commonwealth Business Council, and his involvement on a voluntary basis with other Commonwealth organisations, **Arif Zaman** identified a number of key areas which he felt were important to the revitalisation of the Commonwealth: sharpening its economic message and mechanisms, increasing its profile and presence, leveraging the Commonwealth 'family' of associated and civil society organisations, prioritising and mainstreaming impact across key cross-cutting areas, e.g. women's economic empowerment, and addressing the funding issues.

Arif Zaman was particularly heartened by the selection of Patricia Scotland as next Commonwealth Secretary-General. Like others he had been impressed by her article in the *Round Table*, which showed a clear grasp of the issues before the Commonwealth, and whose message she had extended in Malta, particularly at the hustings (which were themselves an important and noteworthy innovation). She would have the advantage of working with a talented group of individuals at the Secretariat, though much work needed to be done in terms of infusing energy and enthusiasm into the Secretariat's work, and rebuilding trust. Some useful steps towards reform had already been taken, such as the

welcome appointment of new personnel in the Secretary-General's office to liaise with wider civil society. Interestingly, Patricia Scotland had already given much thought to collaboration, and had written the foreword to a report from the Institute for Collaborative Working.

Carl Wright had identified five 'R's as crucial in the re-vitalisation of the Commonwealth. Arif Zaman suggested that if the Commonwealth was to make a major impact on people's lives it would also need to focus on three 'T's: 'trade', 'talent', and 'training'. The academic community was sometimes guilty of focusing on a narrow range of markets, but it was clear the Commonwealth needed to focus on Africa and south Asia as well as the larger emerging markets. The Commonwealth Enterprise and Investment Council and other bodies had generated increasingly convincing evidence for a 'Commonwealth effect' in trade. More needed to be done to give this traction.

Improving the Commonwealth's profile and presence would be a crucial task for the incoming Secretary-General. As several people had said, the Commonwealth did a lot of good work which simply slipped under the radar. More needed to be done to trumpet its achievements and build the Commonwealth 'brand'. It wasn't at all clear that the Secretariat had a media strategy, or a social media strategy. Perhaps there was need for a virtual Commonwealth Institute or virtual Royal Commonwealth Society, replicating their achievements in the halcyon days when they were hubs for talks and the mobilisation and dissemination of knowledge and mutual learning.

As Carl Wright had emphasised, there was still a way to go in terms of leveraging the power of the Commonwealth 'family' of associated and accredited organisations, which could have a multiplier effect on the work of the intergovernmental organisations. There was also a need for greater collaboration and the ending of duplication of activities among the associated and accredited organisations themselves. An excellent example of such collaboration was the way the Royal Commonwealth Society provided media facilities for the smaller organisations at Malta.

Prioritising and mainstreaming key Commonwealth impacts would also be important in the way the Commonwealth was perceived. Such issues as gender equality, women's economic empowerment, and youth empowerment, needed to be promoted in everything the Commonwealth did.

Finally, in terms of funding, there was clearly a need for more and more broadly-based contributions from the member states, but perhaps also a need to look at alternative means of financing, such as Islamic finance, crowdfunding, or collaboration with the private sector on specific initiatives.

In conclusion, Arif Zaman was optimistic that the Malta summit had given the process of revitalising the Commonwealth some significant momentum. With a dynamic and far-sighted new Secretary-General and an able and committed chair-in-office, the prospects for the next two years looked good. There was no lack of ideas for taking the Commonwealth forward; now it seemed that some of the other elements needed were falling into place.

- In the discussion which followed, several people talked about the issue of leadership, and there was general satisfaction that Patricia Scotland would be taking over as Secretary-General – though again some questioned why there should be such a long wait between election and the handover.
- On the question of the chair-in-office, again many welcomed Joseph Muscat as a dynamic and committed chair, but it was pointed out that the position tended to be quite a lottery, and had usually been filled by much less dynamic or committed leaders. It was suggested by one participant that the position tended to detract from the leadership role of the Secretary-General, though another participant thought the chair had a political clout which the Secretary-General didn't.
- Again on the point of leadership – or at least headship – it was noted that Prince Charles had been a lot more visible in Malta and had, for instance, made some important interventions on the 'blue economy', and that this might make the eventual succession to the Headship of the Commonwealth a much less contentious issue than it would have been, say, ten years previously. However, others reacted with some alarm to the thought of his becoming Head of the Commonwealth by default.
- Several participants expressed reservations about the high-level group on Commonwealth governance. In principle reform was always to be welcomed, but in practice calls for transparency and oversight by national governments tended to result in micro-management and a loss of efficiency. It was also suggested that reviews almost invariably entailed suggestions of cuts, and that some key functions of the Secretariat were already pared to the bone.
- On the question of media coverage, it was suggested that there was an element of chicken and egg: was it the perception of lack of relevance and performance which led to actual lack of relevance and performance, or vice versa? This was difficult to answer, but it was certainly true that the Commonwealth had in the recent past not been a media-friendly organisation. It was also true that most media organisations were cutting back on their coverage of international meetings, and tended to see them through the prisms of national perspectives.
- Some participants commended the live-casting of Commonwealth meetings such as the youth forum, though it was recognised that this was not a substitute for a coherent and effective media strategy.
- It was also pointed out that the Commonwealth Secretariat was without a Director of Communications for some nine months, perhaps an indication of the priority given to media strategy.
- Other participants thought that the media organisations were to an extent pursuing their own agendas, which were increasingly shallow and parochial.
- There was some support for the idea of a 'virtual' Commonwealth Institute – though not run by the Secretariat, which was incapable of thinking in those terms.
- A number of participants agreed with Carl Wright's point about more effective collaboration between the intergovernmental, associated, and accredited organisations; in a number of areas civil society organisations had a lot more knowledge and expertise than the intergovernmental organisations.

## Conclusions

Chair: **Rita Payne** (President, Commonwealth Journalists Association)

Speakers: **Stuart Mole** (Chair, The Round Table)

**Mark Robinson** (Hon Treasurer, The Round Table)

**Rita Payne** said that there was undoubtedly a buzz and sense of optimism around the Commonwealth, in stark contrast to the situation two years previously. That was in part because the Commonwealth could hardly have sunk lower than it did at Sri Lanka. But there were other causes for optimism, not least the selection of a dynamic, committed, engaged and skilful new Secretary-General.

**Stuart Mole** began his summing-up by saying he regretted that Patricia Scotland had not been able to take part in the meeting, though of course he fully understood why; he hoped that Commonwealth organisations would be able to have early meetings with her when she took over. She would find a lot of support for her mission to re-vitalise the Commonwealth from among other parts of the Commonwealth 'family'.

As Rita Payne had said, and indeed as others had said earlier in the meeting, it was clear that the Commonwealth was in a very different place to where it had been two years previously, in the wake of the Sri Lanka summit, which all but the most blinkered recognised had been a disastrous own goal for the Commonwealth. Since then a lot of people had worked very hard to get changes underway, and the atmosphere at Malta had been very different – though, again as had been pointed out, some aspects of the meetings there, and in particular the dispersal of venues and poor Commonwealth Secretariat media operation, left a lot to be desired.

It was difficult and perhaps invidious to summarise so many different contributions over the previous two days, but Stuart Mole thought it was worth highlighting some of them. One idea which had perhaps not been aired enough was Michael Frendo's idea for a commission (not commissioner) for the rule of law, human rights and democracy, to deal with those intermediate areas of concern where the heavy hand of CMAG was probably not appropriate; the idea of a commission was perhaps more acceptable than the Eminent Persons Group's idea of a commissioner, and would avoid the potential for clashes or duplication as between a commissioner and the Secretary-General. Another idea worth pursuing was more effective collaboration with la Francophonie in the area of coordination and training in anti-extremism, as well as drawing on the valuable work already done by Amartya Sen and others on 'civil paths to peace'. A point which several participants had made was the need for better coordination between the different types of Commonwealth organisation, including better integration of the various fora, and of those fora with the officials' and Heads of Governments' meetings at the Commonwealth summits.

Among other points worth highlighting were the need to revisit the small states office and observer status at the UN, an arrangement which had clearly not had its full potential realised. Given the interest of many Commonwealth organisations in what was discussed in New York, perhaps these facilities should be opened up also to the associated and accredited Commonwealth organisations. On a different topic, Stuart Mole was struck by

the discussion on trade, and especially by Mohammad Razzaque's findings about the 'Commonwealth advantage' in trade. As several participants had remarked, the Commonwealth needed to make a difference to the lives of its citizens if it was to flourish, and trade and investment was one obvious area. There had also been a lot of discussion about other elements of Commonwealth re-vitalisation, and although there were mixed views on the need for another high-level review, this could perhaps help to answer one of the central questions that had emerged, of how better to ensure that the knowledge, expertise and enthusiasm of the non-official bodies could be harnessed to the Commonwealth's advantage. Finally, a very strong theme that had emerged at various points was the crying need for the Secretariat to do much better in terms of its media operations.

All in all, Stuart Mole thought that the meeting had been a valuable one, and he hoped that it would be followed up; there was certainly something to be said for a meeting to review the situation one year on from Malta, to avoid the kind of situation where there was a great buzz around the Commonwealth summit and then very little for the next two years.

**Mark Robinson** said that it was not too early to start looking forward to the next Commonwealth summit. The Malta meetings had showed the important role that a dynamic chair could play. If the UK Prime Minister was to play a similar role in two years' time, some of the spadework needed to be done soon. The Commonwealth had been a relatively low priority for recent UK governments, and they needed to be made aware (or at least reminded) regularly of the enormous potential of the association. Also important, though perhaps more difficult, would be to re-engage India with the Commonwealth, and to harness the apparent enthusiasm of Justin Trudeau and other young and potentially influential Commonwealth leaders. The Commonwealth also needed desperately to raise its profile in the multilateral world. Much had been made of its convening power, but a lot more needed to be done to turn that into a reality. Clearly there was a lot of work for Patricia Scotland to do when she assumed office as the next Secretary-General, but there were already great expectations that her leadership would mark a turning point for the better.

- It was pointed out that the Commonwealth made much of its record on human rights; at the same time, media freedom was increasingly under attack in many Commonwealth countries (India and Pakistan being among the worst offenders) and the Commonwealth continued to include countries like Brunei. If the Commonwealth's declarations were to mean anything, the next Secretary-General would have to be much more outspoken on human rights abuses than the current one was.
- The same was also said to be true of the Commonwealth's commitment to empowerment. Many of the world's poorest people lived in the Commonwealth, and few of the benefits of globalisation went to them. If the Commonwealth could not be seen to be making material differences to the lives of its poorest peoples, it would be failing in its moral duty.

## Speakers and chairs

**Kishva Ambigapathy** is the newly-elected Chairperson of the Commonwealth Youth Council. He is also a UK Government (Chevening) Scholar pursuing an MSc in Global Politics at Durham University. After graduating from Universiti Sains Malaysia with degree in engineering, he worked as a design engineer for Malaysia's first Mass Rapid Transit before becoming an audit associate at Ernst & Young Malaysia. He is also a prominent youth leader, leading Malaysia's coalition-ruling party's Young Professionals Bureau.

**Milena Bacalja Perianes** is a Cambridge Australia Scholar at the University of Cambridge studying for an MPhil in Multi-disciplinary Gender Studies. She is a development practitioner working as a Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights Officer for Simavi, a Dutch based INGO. Previously, she has worked for the International AIDS Society organising AIDS 2014, and with UNAIDS in Cambodia and Mongolia. She is a founding and executive member of the Commonwealth Youth Gender Equality Network, working to ensure the inclusion of youth voices on gender equality issues within the Commonwealth.

**Amitav Banerji** is Projects Director of the Global Leadership Foundation. He was Director of the Political Division of the Commonwealth Secretariat from January 2009 to May 2015, and served as Conference Secretary for the 2009, 2011 and 2013 CHOGMs, having earlier been Deputy Conference Secretary for five CHOGMs between 1991 and 1999. A career diplomat from India, he was private secretary to the Indian Foreign Minister from 1979 to 1982, and served in Spain, Pakistan and Malaysia, and at the UN in New York. He joined the Commonwealth Secretariat in 1990 as an Assistant Director in the Political Affairs Division. He was Director and Head of the Secretary-General's Office from June 2000 to December 2008. He is a member of the editorial board of *The Round Table*.

**Terry Barringer** is Assistant Editor of *The Round Table* and has been involved with Commonwealth matters since 1980. She was custodian of the Royal Commonwealth Society collections, first in London and then at Cambridge University Library. Since 2000 she has worked as an independent scholar on a variety of editorial, bibliographical and research projects. She has published on the British Colonial Service and on the modern missionary movement. She is a Senior Member of Wolfson College, Cambridge.

**James Carver** has been an MEP for the West Midlands since May 2014, and UKIP Commonwealth Spokesman since March 2015. Formerly a solicitor's clerk, he has since 1991 run his family umbrella-making business. He joined UKIP in 1996 and since then has stood as a candidate in local, national and European elections on several occasions. He is an active fundraiser for the Scleroderma Society, and a prominent campaigner for Roma, Gypsy and Traveller rights. He is an active Member of the European Parliament, and its Foreign Affairs Committee.

**Steve Cutts** has been Assistant Secretary-General for the Office of Central Support Services at the United Nations since 2013. He had served in a number of senior positions in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), including as Director and Head of Office of the Secretary-General, before being appointed the Executive Director of the Africa Initiative at INSEAD Business School. He joined the Commonwealth Secretariat in 2008, initially as Director of the Strategic Planning and Evaluation Division. From 2010 to 2013 he was Assistant Secretary-General for Corporate Affairs at the Commonwealth Secretariat, and led an extensive reform programme of the Secretariat's management and internal control policies and procedures.

**Nishana Jayawickrama** joined the Commonwealth Secretariat in 2001 and has been Head of the Asia/Europe Section, Political Division, since 2010, in which capacity she has worked extensively on advancing Commonwealth political engagement on issues of concern. Her other main responsibilities include the roles of Deputy Conference Secretary for CHOGMs, CMAG meetings and Commonwealth Foreign Affairs Ministers' meetings. During her time at the Secretariat, she has worked on six Commonwealth summits. She holds degrees from the University of Oxford and SOAS, and a postgraduate diploma in law from the College of Law, London.

**Alexandra (Sandy) Jones** is a member of the *Round Table's* editorial board, and has served in senior positions with both the principal intergovernmental organisations of the Commonwealth (as Director of Strategy Planning and Evaluation, Commonwealth Secretariat, 2002-8, and Deputy Director, Commonwealth

Foundation, 1990-4). Other roles she has held include: Chief Executive of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, and of the Chartered Institute of Linguists; Senior Governance Adviser to the UNDP in Indonesia; and Governance Director of Amnesty International and of the Quality Care Commission.

**Sir Peter Marshall KCMG, CVO**, joined HM Foreign Service in 1949. He served in Washington, Baghdad, Bangkok, Geneva, and Paris, and as UK Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the UN in Geneva before joining the Commonwealth Secretariat as Deputy Secretary-General (Economic) from 1983 to 1988. He was Chairman of the Royal Commonwealth Society (1988-92) and of the Joint Commonwealth Societies Council (1993-2003) and has been involved in many other Commonwealth organisations. He has published several books on diplomacy, and is a regular contributor to *The Round Table*.

**Prof James Mayall** is Emeritus Sir Patrick Sheehy Professor of International Relations at the University of Cambridge, and an Emeritus Fellow of Sidney Sussex College, of which he was Vice-Master in 2003-4. Prior to taking up the Sheehy chair in 1998 he was Professor of International Relations at the London School of Economics. He has published many books on the Commonwealth, the United Nations, and international relations more generally. He has been a member of the editorial board of *The Round Table* since 1996.

**Stuart Mole** has been Chairman of The Round Table since 2011. Originally a college lecturer, he served as parliamentary press officer and later Head of the Office of the leader of the Liberal Party (David Steel). He then joined the Commonwealth Secretariat where he was Special Assistant to the Secretary-General (1984-90) then Director of the Secretary-General's Office (1990-2000). From 2000 to 2009 he was Director-General of the Royal Commonwealth Society. He is a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies.

**Rita Payne** is a freelance journalist and media adviser, and President of the Commonwealth Journalists Association. She worked for nearly thirty years at the BBC until her retirement in 2008. Her last position at the BBC was Asia Editor, BBC World News (TV), with responsibility for three news programmes a day. She was nominated for the BBC Global Reith Awards 2009 and Asian Woman of Achievement Awards 2006. Amongst her other positions, she is editorial adviser for *Asian Affairs* magazine and The Democracy Forum, an executive board member of the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, Vice-President of Uniting for Peace, and a member of the editorial board of *The Round Table*.

**James Robbins** has been Diplomatic Correspondent of the BBC since 1998. He joined the BBC as a graduate trainee in 1977 and served as a reporter from Belfast from 1979 to 1983, Southern Africa Correspondent from 1987 to 1992, and Europe Correspondent from 1993 to 1997. He has reported on CHOGMs for the BBC since 1991 and regularly reports on other international news stories. He is a member of the editorial board of *The Round Table*.

**Patsy Robertson** grew up in Jamaica and came to the UK in the late 1950s. She joined the staff of the newly formed Commonwealth Secretariat in 1965 as its press officer and was Director of Information and Official Spokesperson for the Commonwealth from 1983 to 1994. She worked as a senior Media Advisor for the Fourth World Conference on Women and Beijing +5 and with UNICEF on the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children in 1991-2. She is Chair of Widows' Rights International as well as the Commonwealth Association, and is a trustee of several charities.

**Dr Mohammad Razzaque** is Head of the International Trade Policy Section at the Commonwealth Secretariat. He has written extensively on trade and development issues and is the lead author of the *Commonwealth Trade Review*, which was launched during the Malta CHOGM. He also edits *Commonwealth Trade Hot Topics*, which communicates technical trade policy issues to a wider readership. As a Commonwealth scholar (from Bangladesh) he did his DPhil at the University of Sussex and was an Associate Professor of Economics at Dhaka University.

**Mark Robinson** worked early in his career for the UN and Commonwealth Secretaries-General. He became an MP twice, serving as a Minister in the Wales Office and as PPS to the Minister of Overseas Development and the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs. Since leaving Parliament, he has been Executive Director of the Commonwealth Press Union, Executive Chair of the Council for Education in the Commonwealth, Chair (UK) of the Commonwealth Consortium for Education, and a Trustee of the Commonwealth Human Ecology Council. He has been Hon Treasurer of The Round Table since 2010.

**HE Kamallesh Sharma** has been Commonwealth Secretary-General since 2008. He joined the Indian Foreign Service in 1965. He was India's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the UN in Geneva (1988-90) and New York (1997-2002), the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative to East Timor (2002-4), and India's High Commissioner in the UK (2004-8). He is Chancellor Emeritus of Queen's University, Belfast. He was spokesperson for developing countries in the Uruguay Round of multilateral trade negotiations, and chaired the Working Group on Financing for Development which led to the Monterrey Consensus adopted in 2002. He was closely involved in the process which led to the formulation and adoption of the Millennium Development Goals.

**Julie Smith, Baroness Smith of Newnham**, has been a Liberal Democrat member of the House of Lords since 2014. She has also been a Fellow in Politics at Robinson College, Cambridge, since 1997, and Director of the European Centre in the Department of Politics and International Studies at the University of Cambridge since 2013. From 1999 to 2003 she was also Head of the European Programme at the RIIA (Chatham House). She has published a number of books on European politics and the European Parliament.

**Dame Veronica Sutherland DBE, CMG**, was Deputy Secretary-General (Economic and Social Affairs) at the Commonwealth Secretariat from 1999 to 2001, and President of Lucy Cavendish College, Cambridge, from 2001 to 2008. She joined the UK Diplomatic Service in 1965, and her early postings included New Delhi and UNESCO. She was Ambassador to Côte d'Ivoire from 1987 to 1990 and to the Republic of Ireland from 1995 to 1999.

**Dr Mélanie Torrent** is Senior Lecturer in British History and Civilisation at Paris Diderot University and co-ordinator of several seminar and research programmes in British studies in France. She is also a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London. She has published extensively on British decolonisation, particularly in Africa, and on Franco-British relations vis-à-vis Cameroon in the postwar era. She is a member of the editorial board of *The Round Table*.

**Carl Wright** has been Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Local Government Forum since its foundation in 1994. He was previously founding Director of the Commonwealth Trade Union Council (1980-8) before working for the Commonwealth Secretariat as an Assistant Director (1988-94), with particular responsibility for Commonwealth programmes in southern Africa. He has served on numerous Commonwealth, UN, EU and OECD committees, and Commonwealth election observer missions. He is also a member of the editorial board of *The Round Table*.

**Arif Zaman FRSA** is Executive Director of the Commonwealth Businesswomen's Network, a lead strategic partner of the Commonwealth Enterprise and Investment Council and one of the co-organisers of the first CHOGM Women's Forum. He is also CEO of Riscaire, providing training and advisory services on governance and reputational risk in partnership with leading firms in related areas in the UK, Dubai and Pakistan. Previously he was Advisor to the Commonwealth Business Council for South Asia, Corporate Governance and Women in Business (2005-14), and before that spent sixteen years at British Airways, latterly as Global Market and Industry Analyst (1996-2005). He was Associate Director, Mosaic, HRH Prince of Wales Charities (2005-10), focused on mentoring and leadership development in the Muslim community.

## Participants

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*Dr Gordon Johnson	former President, Wolfson College
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Bill Kirkman	Fellow, Wolfson College
Leah Marchuk	Second Secretary, Canadian High Commission
*Sir Peter Marshall KCMG, CVO	former Commonwealth Deputy Secretary-General
*Dr Alex May	Hon Secretary, The Round Table
*Prof James Mayall FBA	Fellow, Sidney Sussex College
*Prof Derek McDougall	Professorial Fellow, University of Melbourne
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