



DEBATE PACK

CDP-0052 (2020) | 6 March 2020

The Commonwealth in 2020

Main Chamber
Monday 9 March 2020
General debate

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1. Background

The modern Commonwealth was established in April 1949 with the signing of the [London Declaration](#).

There are now 54 countries in the Commonwealth, with a combined population of 2.4 billion. More than 60 per cent of that population is aged 29 or under.

The combined GDP of Commonwealth countries was estimated at \$10.4 trillion in 2017 and is predicted to reach \$13 trillion in 2020. Half of the top 20 global emerging cities are in Commonwealth countries.

Yet, many small and developing Commonwealth countries are also among those with the lowest ecological footprint worldwide. 32 Commonwealth countries are classed as 'small states', which are especially vulnerable to things like climate change or developmental challenges.

Commonwealth Day, which is an annual celebration of the Commonwealth of nations, is held on the second Monday in March every year. This year it will fall on 9 March and will be marked by a multicultural, multi-faith service in Westminster Abbey.

Every two years the leaders of Commonwealth nations also come together to discuss issues affecting the Commonwealth and to shape Commonwealth policies and priorities. All members have an equal say, regardless of their size or wealth, which ensures that even the smallest countries have a voice. The next Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting is due to take place in Rwanda in June 2020 (CHOGM20).

The theme for Commonwealth Day, CHOGM20, and for the work of the Commonwealth more generally in 2020, is 'Delivering a Common Future: Connecting, Innovating, Transforming'. The theme was chosen because the governments and people within the diverse family of Commonwealth nations "connect at many levels through extensive and deep-rooted networks of friendship and goodwill". At CHOGM20 leaders will discuss how to deliver the [recommendations of CHOGM 2018](#), which was on the theme 'Towards a Common Future'.

2. Affirmation by Commonwealth Foreign Ministers, July 2019

[Affirmation by Foreign Ministers of the Commonwealth on its 70th anniversary](#)

London, 10 July 2019

Seventy years ago, the Heads of Government of Commonwealth nations made a bold and far-sighted commitment to an innovative vision for what could be achieved through international connection and collaboration building on the values of continuing development, democracy and the rule of law. They declared that, as free and equal members of the Commonwealth of Nations, the countries they represented would remain partners, freely co-operating in the pursuit of peace, liberty and progress.

The Commonwealth of Nations then comprised eight members; it now encompasses fifty-three countries: over a quarter of the membership of the United Nations, and nearly a third of the population of the world. Through seven decades of economic growth and social and political development, many more nations are realising their potential. The Commonwealth has a proud history of acting to strengthen good governance and the rule of law, to protect and promote democratic principles and human rights, to promote peace and security and to strengthen democratic institutions. As they have done so, deeper understanding of our interdependence has also grown, and of the value of mutual support and encouragement towards upholding, and making progress based upon, the shared values and principles which are now brought together in the Commonwealth Charter.

The wide geographical spread and rich diversity of culture and endowment represented by our member countries, and by the people who live in them, combine to make the Commonwealth of Nations particularly well positioned to lead by example in seizing the opportunities of the 21st century, and to tackle the increasingly urgent challenges which confront us now or lie ahead. Commonwealth collaboration shines as a beacon for multilateralism.

Our member nations can collectively provide leadership within the wider global community towards bright new horizons of hope in a world that is fairer, more prosperous, more sustainable and more secure. We do so by offering new thinking, by devising innovative approaches and by making contributions to sustainable development, gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, inclusive economic growth, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and the health, happiness and harmony of our people, and the protection of democracy, particularly by building peace and security through the reinforcement of the rules-based international order, and respect and understanding that transcends boundaries of cultural, religious or any other identity. We are particularly mindful of the role of the Commonwealth as an advocate for the needs of smaller and more vulnerable states, and for the inclusion of people and communities that are marginalised.

Through her personal example, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II as Head of the Commonwealth, has offered gentle encouragement and been an inspiration to generations of Commonwealth citizens. Her Majesty has shown unwavering faithfulness to the high ideals which enable the Commonwealth to flourish. This will be carried forward when, in the fullness of time and as agreed by our Heads of Government, HRH Prince Charles, Prince of Wales, becomes Head of the Commonwealth.

We - representatives of the Governments of Antigua & Barbuda, Australia, The Bahamas, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belize, Botswana, Brunei Darussalam, Cameroon, Canada, Cyprus, Dominica, eSwatini, Fiji, Ghana, Grenada, Guyana, India, Jamaica, Kenya, Kiribati, Lesotho, Malaysia, Malta, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Nauru, New Zealand, Nigeria, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Rwanda, Samoa, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, South Africa, St Kitts & Nevis, Saint Lucia, St Vincent & The Grenadines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Tonga, Trinidad & Tobago, Tuvalu, Uganda, The Gambia, the United Kingdom, the United Republic of Tanzania, Vanuatu and Zambia, together with the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, reaffirm our dedication to the core values and principles of the Commonwealth as declared in our Charter.

We commit with renewed confidence and determination to work towards deepening the impact that the connected Commonwealth brings to our world. In doing so, we affirm our core principles of consensus and common action, mutual respect, inclusiveness, transparency, accountability, legitimacy, and responsiveness. Working together with common purpose, our determination is to build a better and brighter world for the good of all our people.

3. Press articles

The following is a selection of press and media articles relevant to this debate.

Please note: the Library is not responsible for either the views or accuracy of external content.

[The Commonwealth of Nations: Brexit and the Future of 'Global Britain'](#)

Council of Foreign Relations
James McBride
5 March 2020

[UK fronts Kenya's Amina in Commonwealth top job](#)

The East African
Aggrey Mutambo
22 February 2020

[UK, Australia & NZ 'punishing' Commonwealth Secretariat](#)

BBC News Online
James Landale
19 February 2020

[Zimbabwe seeks Malaysia's support to rejoin the Commonwealth](#)

New Straits Times
Sibusiso Moyo (Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Trade for the Republic of Zimbabwe)
16 February 2020

[The Commonwealth will sink into insignificance without cold, hard cash](#)

Sydney Morning Herald
Geoffrey Robertson QC
15 February 2020

[Lady Scotland rallies African nations against her 'racist' critics](#)

The Times
Catherine Philp
15 February 2020

[Use-by date on the Commonwealth looks to be up](#)

Sydney Morning Herald
Editorial
14 February 2020

[Baroness Scotland: UK suspends funding to Commonwealth Secretariat](#)

BBC News Online
James Landale
12 February 2020

4. Press releases

[Commonwealth theme for 2020 announced](#)

The Commonwealth

22 January 2020

The theme for the 2020 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), for Commonwealth Day and for the work of the Commonwealth more generally is

Delivering a Common Future: Connecting, Innovating, Transforming

This theme was chosen because the governments and people of our diverse family of 54 Commonwealth countries connect at many levels through extensive and deep-rooted networks of friendship and goodwill.

Together, the countries and people of the Commonwealth tackle climate change and its impacts. We work to find sustainable ways of using the natural resources of our planet, its land and ocean, so that our environment is protected.

Together, we work to build peace and harmony through social and democratic development.

Together, we encourage inclusive economic empowerment and fair trade so that all people, particularly women, young people and those in marginalised communities can share the fruits of progress and prosperity.

Together, we are delivering a common future by connecting, innovating and transforming our societies.

[UK and Commonwealth will champion free trade in face of growing global challenges](#)

Department for International Trade

9 October 2019

The UK will discuss with its Commonwealth partners the importance of promoting an open, fair and inclusive global rules-based system with the World Trade Organization (WTO) at its heart and underline the importance of fighting protectionism.

International Trade Secretary, Liz Truss has today addressed Commonwealth Ministers and High Commissioners at a reception to mark the start of the annual Commonwealth Trade Ministers Meeting.

Speaking at the reception in London, Ms Truss said:

We face a challenging global outlook in which protectionist tendencies are increasingly on the rise. But we can and must seize the opportunity Brexit presents to take advantage of new partnerships with some of our oldest allies across the Commonwealth.

The world is ready to sign free trade deals with Britain. Other countries want our voice at the WTO table, they want to work with our people and have better links with our industries.

Together, the 53 member states of the Commonwealth have the unique ability to be able to lead the defence of free trade, working together to shape new policies and approaches, showing the world a route to prosperity that lies through partnership, not protectionism.

The Commonwealth is one of the UK's largest trading partners and our trading relationship was worth over £100 billion in the twelve months to March 2019.

The UK currently trades with the majority of Commonwealth members on preferential terms, providing UK businesses with easy access to some of the world's largest markets.

The 53 member states in the Commonwealth boast a combined population of over 2.4 billion people and intra-Commonwealth trade is projected to reach \$700 billion by next year.

Thursday's meeting will be chaired by the UK and discussion will focus on strengthening multilateral trade, fighting protectionism, as well as the need to make trade more inclusive and sustainable, by engaging women and youth at all levels.

Ms Truss also announced an additional £2.5 million of funding for the Commonwealth Standards Network (CSN). The CSN works to increase use of international standards across the Commonwealth, in order to promote inclusive intra-Commonwealth trade. The additional funding will help the CSN continue its valuable work to break down non-tariff barriers to trade and support institutions and exporters in developing countries to use standards, so they can access new markets and attract investment.

International Development Secretary, Alok Sharma said:

UK aid is vital in reducing barriers to trade and investment across the Commonwealth.

Our work is helping developing countries to adopt international standards, attract inward investment that will see them become economically self-sustaining and, ultimately, our trading partners of the future.

The UK has also signed a new trade continuity agreement with the Southern African Customs Union and Mozambique (SACUM). This trade continuity agreement will see British businesses and consumers benefitting from continued trade with SACUM after the UK leaves the European Union.

The agreement will help to further strengthen the trading relationship between the UK and SACUM nations, which was worth £9.7 billion last year.

[Celebrating the 70th anniversary of the Commonwealth: speech by Melanie Hopkins](#)

Foreign and Commonwealth Office
9 October 2019

The British High Commissioner to Fiji spoke of the special strength of the Commonwealth that lies in the combination of diversity and shared inheritance.

Bula Vinaka. 2019 marks a significant milestone – the Commonwealth’s 70th anniversary. It’s great to see such a diverse group of people in the room tonight, from honourable parliamentarians, national representatives and colleagues from non-governmental organisations to young leaders, here to take part in this dialogue to prepare them for the challenge of shaping a better world for the next generation.

The Commonwealth began as a family of 8 states who signed the London Declaration in 1949. In the intervening years the Commonwealth has grown to 53 member states, which is more than a quarter of UN member states. 2.4 billion people live in Commonwealth countries, which is a third of the world’s population. The Commonwealth makes up one-fifth of global trade, with the combined GDP of Commonwealth nations set to reach US\$13trillion in 2020. The potential is huge.

The ties that bind us in this region are deep-rooted and stretch back many years. A large number of countries in this region are members of the Commonwealth, including as Australia, Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and of course Fiji.

The special strength of the Commonwealth lies in the combination of diversity and shared inheritance in language, culture and the rule of law; bound together by the shared history and tradition; by respect for all states.

As the current Chair-in-Office, the United Kingdom is working with all member states to ensure the Commonwealth realise its potential. But what does it mean to be a Commonwealth member if you are from a Pacific country? The Commonwealth promotes shared values and inclusivity, helps harness talent, strengthens norms, amplifies the voices of small states, and helps tackle the big global challenges of the day such as extremism and climate change.

The UK wants to play an active role in this connected Commonwealth. At the Heads of Government meeting last year, the then Foreign Secretary, now our Prime Minister Boris Johnson, announced that the UK would be opening 9 new diplomatic missions in Commonwealth countries, thereby increasing the number of British High Commissions around the world from 38 to 47. Three of those new missions are in the Pacific: in Tonga, Vanuatu and Samoa, thereby doubling our diplomatic presence in the region. We have also doubled the number of diplomatic staff at the High Commission in Suva and welcomed a new regional development counselor.

As I noted at the start of this workshop, this evening event is part of the programme for the UK-funded Young Leaders Dialogue, which provides a platform where young people can acquire and share knowledge, engage in dialogue with respective national leaders, and foster networks for progressive development. It is funded through the Pacific Commonwealth Equality Project, which aims to increase the capacity of Pacific Island Countries to drive inclusive and equitable social change through good governance, respect for human rights, and fairer opportunities for politically, socially and economically marginalised communities. 60% of the population of the Commonwealth is aged under 30 so it is vital we engage with youth – they are the inspiration and driving force for the type of world we want for the next generation and beyond.

The Commonwealth and its members are also active in tackling what might be the defining issue of our time and that is the threat of climate change. As Commonwealth nations, we recognise that we live on a shared planet with finite, common resources that must be managed for the benefit of all. The Commonwealth Blue Charter is encouraging sustainable development and protection of the ocean, along with initiatives such as the Commonwealth Marine Economy Programme, and the Commonwealth Clean Oceans Alliance. The UK is proud to be at the heart of these initiatives and we look forward to COP25 in Chile and beyond that to COP26 in Glasgow, key opportunities for us to drive global ambition.

[UK celebrates Commonwealth 70th anniversary: Lord Ahmad's statement](#)

**Foreign and Commonwealth Office
12 July 2019**

Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon has issued a statement following a meeting to celebrate the Commonwealth's 70th anniversary.

Lord Ahmad said:

Seventy years ago, the Commonwealth of Nations had 8 members. These countries were united in their desire to work together in pursuit of peace, freedom and progress. Since then, the Commonwealth's membership has grown to 53 countries, encompassing nearly a third of the world's population.

To celebrate the Commonwealth's 70th anniversary, I am delighted that all 53 member states agreed an affirmation of the Commonwealth, reaffirming their commitment to the core values and principles of the Commonwealth Charter, celebrating the successes of the last 7 decades, and looking forward to ambitious achievements in the future.

As well as celebrating the Commonwealth's 70th anniversary, at the 19th meeting of Commonwealth Foreign Affairs Ministers at Marlborough House on 10 July, we reviewed progress made since last year's Heads of Government Meeting in London, made progress towards governance reform, and looked ahead to next year's meeting in Rwanda.

The Commonwealth plays a unique role in the world, and we will continue to work within it towards a more secure, prosperous, fair and sustainable future.

Commonwealth Day 2019: PM message
Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing St
11 March 2019

Today, on Commonwealth Day, I am proud to celebrate the United Kingdom's part in this diverse family of nations. It is fitting that in the group's 70th year our theme is 'A Connected Commonwealth'. In an increasingly interlinked world, the bonds between Commonwealth citizens, organisations and governments provide a uniquely valuable network for international co-operation.

At the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in London last year, my fellow leaders and I agreed concrete steps to achieve a fairer, more secure, more prosperous and more sustainable future for the group's 2.4 billion people. As Chair-in-Office, the UK is now working with the whole Commonwealth to deliver those commitments.

Over the past year, our leadership of the new Commonwealth Clean Oceans Alliance with Vanuatu has encouraged 24 member countries to commit to specific actions to tackle marine plastic pollution. And over 2,300 women-owned businesses have signed up to the UK-funded Commonwealth 'She Trades' programme, boosting female entrepreneurship.

The collective determination to deliver the Commonwealth's vision for a common future has never been stronger. I continue to firmly and wholeheartedly believe in the good that this family of nations can do.

5. PQs

[Commonwealth: LGBT People](#)

25 Feb 2020 | 1207

Asked by: Emily Thornberry

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what diplomatic steps he is taking to tackle the abuse of LGBT+ rights in Commonwealth countries.

Answering member: Nigel Adams | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

We continue to raise the importance of countering discrimination within the Commonwealth, including on grounds of gender identity or sexual orientation. Working through the UN Human Rights Council, the Council of Europe, the Commonwealth and other multilateral fora, we regularly raise concerns about countries that do not comply with their human rights obligations and promote non-discrimination against LGBT people. The UK was one of the founding members of the Equal Rights Coalition (ERC) a grouping of 42 like-minded countries working together with civil society to address violence and discrimination against LGBT individuals, and the ongoing criminalisation of same sex conduct in 70 countries.

The UK took over the role of ERC co-chair in June 2019, in partnership with Argentina and will host an international conference on LGBT rights in London on 27-29 May. The conference will address the issues of violence, discrimination and ongoing criminalisation and will set out how the ERC proposes to address those issues with the launch of a new ERC Strategy.

In her speech to the Commonwealth Forums in April 2018, the former Prime Minister set out the UK's readiness to support any member state wanting to reform outdated legislation that makes discrimination on the grounds of gender identity or sexual orientation possible and stressed the importance of our common value of equality, a value that is clearly stated in the Commonwealth Charter. As part of that offer the UK announced a £5.6m programme working with civil society organisations to support those countries seeking to reform outdated discriminatory legislation affecting women, girls and LGBT individuals.

[Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting](#)

21 Feb 2020 | HL1490

Asked by: Lord Luce | Party: Crossbench

To ask Her Majesty's Government what progress has been made on the implementation of the decisions taken in London in April 2018 by the Commonwealth Heads of Government.

**Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon
| Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

Over the past two years, the UK - as Chair-in-Office - has worked closely with our Commonwealth partners to drive collective delivery of the

commitments agreed at the 2018 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. The work is supported by over £500 million of projects to support the Commonwealth in achieving these goals, which are already delivering benefits for member states. For example, over 3,000 women-owned businesses have now received training from the Commonwealth SheTrades project, supporting inclusive economic growth and prosperity. 31 Member States have committed to take action on marine plastic pollution as part of the Commonwealth Clean Ocean Alliance. Also, the Pacific Nationally Determined Contribution Hub was officially opened by the Prime Minister of Fiji last week, helping Pacific Island Countries tackle climate change. The Government will publish a detailed update on the UK's period as Chair-in-Office in the coming months.

Commonwealth: Foreign Relations

04 Feb 2020 | HL553

Asked by: Lord Browne of Belmont

Her Majesty's Government what plans they have, if any, to build closer social and economic ties between the UK and other Commonwealth countries, in particular Canada, Australia and New Zealand, after Brexit.

Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon

| Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

The UK is committed to working with the three pillars of the Commonwealth – the Secretariat, its member states, and its civil society organisations and networks - to build closer social and economic ties. We were particularly pleased to host Commonwealth partners, including Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, at the sixth Commonwealth Trade Ministers' Meeting in London last October. The meeting reaffirmed our shared commitment to deepening trade and investment ties across the Commonwealth, including through our plans for Free Trade Agreements following our departure from the EU. Canada, Australia and New Zealand are close and natural partners based on our shared history and values. These are invaluable relationships for the UK, which are further strengthened through our Commonwealth cooperation.

Commonwealth: Decriminalising Homosexuality

23 Jul 2019 | 799 cc665-8

Asked by: Lord Lexden

To ask Her Majesty's Government what progress has been made in decriminalising homosexuality in Commonwealth countries since the Prime Minister became the Commonwealth Chair-in-Office.

Answering Member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

My Lords, at last year's Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, the Prime Minister announced a £5.6 million programme to assist member states seeking to reform legislation which discriminates on the grounds of sex, gender identity or sexual orientation. Several countries have expressed interest in this offer and the UK is supporting them

while respecting their request for sensitivity. Three countries—Trinidad and Tobago, India and Botswana—have made progress on decriminalisation.

Asked by: Lord Lexden

My Lords, that is indeed good news. In the years ahead, will it not be important to remember the Prime Minister's statement in 2018 that the British Government have a special responsibility to help Commonwealth countries get rid of anti-gay laws? While there has been recent progress, as my noble friend said, in India last year and Botswana this year, should we also not remember the many countries where there is terrible oppression? An example is Uganda where violently homophobic debates occupying nearly 50 days of parliamentary time have taken place since 2014 which is designed to buttress and strengthen cruel anti-gay laws.

Answering Member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon

My Lords, I agree with my noble friend's comments, and I am sure he will agree with me that my right honourable friend the Prime Minister has prioritised this issue not just at the Commonwealth summit but subsequently. I am sure the House will join me in thanking her for the important progress we have seen on this important human rights issue. My noble friend is right to draw attention to parts of the Commonwealth where suppression and persecution of the LGBT community is very much in evidence. We continue to work bilaterally to raise these issues of concern. I have had various discussions with the noble Lord, Lord Collins, on this issue, and his idea of having champion countries in different parts of the world is something I am pursuing with colleagues at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. I look forward to working with Members of your Lordships' House in further strengthening our work in this area.

Asked by: Lord Morgan

My Lords, is not one of the reasons for this very harsh treatment of this community in Commonwealth countries the attitude of the churches, which in a country such as Uganda are very reactionary? The representatives of the churches in this House are civilised and enlightened people. Could one perhaps request them to use their influence in this direction?

Answering Member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon

I am also the Prime Minister's envoy on freedom of religion or belief. Religion or faith is for all of humanity and, whatever faith it may be, it teaches not just tolerance but understanding and respect for the rights of others. I talked of working with your Lordships' House, which includes the Spiritual Benches. I know that the Church of England is playing a very important role in promoting understanding and respect for all people across the Commonwealth, including the LGBT community.

Asked by: Lord Scriven

My Lords, the Commonwealth charter was signed by all members in 2013. It states that all parties are committed to non-discrimination, although it does not specifically mention sexual orientation. No CHOGM communication has mentioned LGBT rights since then, and it is doubtful

whether they are going to be on the Rwanda CHOGM agenda. What will the Government do to raise this issue and make sure it is covered?

Answering Member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon

The noble Lord is right: it was not in the last communiqué or the one before that, and it is unlikely to be in the Kigali one because, as he will know, the Commonwealth takes decisions and issues communiqués with unanimity and consensus across all 53 member states. However, as my right honourable friend the Prime Minister illustrated during the plenary session of the London Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, there are opportunities specifically to raise these issues, and we will certainly explore opportunities to do the same in Kigali.

Asked by: Viscount Waverley

My Lords, are the Government aware that the Government of the Maldives are keen to apply for fast-tracked readmittance to the Commonwealth? Given that their engagement on issues is helpful and that there are many other positive reasons, are the Government minded to support their application, ideally to be in place before the CHOGM 2020?

Answering Member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon

We of course welcome the application from the Maldives, and I have met the Maldives Foreign Minister. Their application is being processed and we all hope that it will be finalised in time for Kigali 2020.

Asked by: Lord Black of Brentwood

My Lords, does my noble friend agree that there is a devastating link between criminalisation and the spread of HIV? A survey of Caribbean countries revealed starkly that rates of HIV infection among MSM are four times higher in those that criminalise homosexuality than in those that do not. It is a damning statistic. Does my noble friend agree that decriminalisation is therefore not just a moral but a public health and safety imperative?

Answering Member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon

I totally agree with my noble friend.

Asked by: Lord Collins of Highbury

My Lords, the noble Lord kindly mentioned the need for other voices from other countries, but there is also a very strong economic case for diversity and inclusion. Certainly, many global companies have adopted very positive policies on inclusion and diversity. Can he tell us what the FCO is doing to raise this issue with other departments, particularly those responsible for trade, to ensure that trade envoys and others make a positive case for diversity and inclusion so that we encourage investment and a change in the law?

Answering Member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon

I assure the noble Lord that I regularly raise every element of human rights in my interactions with Ministers in other departments, particularly those with a trade focus. As we leave the European Union, we are looking at the importance of retaining a strong voice on human rights in future trade agreements, and I will continue to make that case across government.

Asked by: Baroness Corston

My Lords, does the Minister agree that one difficulty here is the inheritance of Empire? When I chaired the Joint Committee on Human Rights, we went to Delhi to talk to the commission on equality and human rights there and we mentioned the legislation on gay rights. The answer was emphatic: "We got this legislation from you, and we're grateful".

Answering Member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon

The noble Baroness is right to raise that. I think that the legislation has been tested recently, and we should welcome the review of the courts. Regarding the legacy of the old British Empire, particularly where India is concerned, speaking as the son of Indian parents who now represents the British Government, I think that we have laid that one to rest.

[Commonwealth: English Language](#)**17 Jul 2019 | 911995****Asked by: Andrew Rosindell**

What steps he is taking to improve English literacy throughout the Commonwealth.

Answering member: Harriett Baldwin | Department: Department for International Development

DFID is tackling the learning crisis by supporting children to learn the basics of literacy, including in Commonwealth countries.

We are investing in English language learning, for example through our new skills hub, which includes Kenya, South Africa and Nigeria.

We also work directly to boost the quality of teaching in English, for example through the Girls' Education Challenge.

[Commonwealth: Overseas Aid](#)**04 Jul 2019 | HL16556****Asked by: Lord Mendelsohn**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what proportion of the funding they announced to support the actions agreed at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 2018 will be provided by the Department for International Development; and how much of that spending had already been committed before the 2018 meeting.

Answering member: Baroness Sugg | Department: Department for International Development

At the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in 2018, Leaders agreed a series of commitments aimed at supporting a future which is fairer, more prosperous, more sustainable, and more secure. The UK Government announced funding of approximately £526.7 million for programmes and projects to support delivery of these ambitious commitments. The Department for International Development is responsible for providing nearly £400 million of this funding, none of which had been committed prior to the meeting in April 2018.

Commonwealth Secretariat: Reform

04 Jul 2019 | HL16555

Asked by: Lord Mendelsohn

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the progress made in reforming the Commonwealth Secretariat.

Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon

| Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

At CHOGM 2015, Heads of Government mandated the Secretary-General to convene a high-level group (HLG) to review the full governance arrangements of the Commonwealth Secretariat to ensure that its governance is streamlined and integrated in order to improve oversight, efficiency and transparency. This mandate was reiterated by Heads at CHOGM 2018, who asked Foreign Ministers to make decisions in response to the HLG's findings. Reform and strengthening of the Commonwealth Secretariat is a priority for our period as Commonwealth Chair-in-Office. We have worked with member states and the Commonwealth Secretariat to support the fulfilment of the mandate set by Heads.

An HLG, convened by the Secretary-General, first met shortly before CHOGM 2018. Since then, the HLG has submitted two reports. The first - covering roles and responsibilities, funding, and arrangements for the appointment of Secretaries-General - was submitted in early September 2018, and discussed by Foreign Ministers when they met in the margins of the UN General Assembly in New York. At that meeting, Foreign Ministers instructed the Commonwealth Secretariat Board of Governors (of which the UK Commonwealth Envoy is a member) to agree recommendations in the light of that report by 30 November 2018. The Board fulfilled that instruction, unanimously agreeing a set of recommendations through a thorough, transparent and inclusive process. At the end of December 2019, the HLG produced a second report, focused on the Secretariat's collaboration with accredited Commonwealth organisations and other partners. Through a further thorough, transparent and inclusive process the Board of Governors unanimously agreed a set of recommendations in response to that second HLG report.

The Foreign Secretary, as current Chair of Commonwealth Foreign Ministers, has recommended that they adopt the recommendations. A few of them have some outstanding questions. We hope that those can be resolved, and the recommendations adopted, soon. Once implemented, they will make a significant difference to the effective governance and operation of the Commonwealth Secretariat and its collaboration with member states and Commonwealth organisations.

[Climate Change: Commonwealth](#)

01 Jul 2019 | 268493

Asked by: Laura Smith

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what steps he has taken to encourage members of the Commonwealth to share the same goals in tackling anthropogenic climate change and global warming.

Answering member: Chris Skidmore | Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy

Climate change has long been of concern to the Commonwealth and the majority of member states continue to advocate for ambitious action on climate change today. Small and vulnerable states – which account for almost 60% of the Commonwealth – face an existential threat from climate change and associated natural disasters.

This concern has been reflected in Commonwealth statements as early as the Langkawi Declaration on the Environment in 1989. Under UK chairmanship at the 2018 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, leaders reaffirmed their commitments under the Paris Agreement. We would expect the Commonwealth to play a major role in ensuring that a UK-hosted COP26 would be a success.

The Government is now using its diplomatic network to support mitigation and adaptation across the Commonwealth. For example:

In Asia, Malaysia has confirmed its interest in partnering with the UK to develop an emissions calculator. The calculator is an open source energy and emissions tool developed by the UK to allow countries to explore and develop strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

In Africa, the UK has provided £500,000 to support the Commonwealth's Climate Finance Access Hub based in Mauritius. The Hub will help small and vulnerable countries access international sources of finance to support adaptation and mitigation.

In the Caribbean, the UK is helping four countries – Belize, Grenada, Jamaica, and St Lucia – to prepare detailed disaster risk profiles to aid efforts to increase their resilience to natural disaster. This work builds on existing support from the World Bank and is expected to be extended across the region over the next year.

In the Pacific, the UK has pledged £1.2 million to support the establishment in Fiji of a Regional Nationally Determined Contribution Hub. The centre has been established in partnership with Australia, Germany and New Zealand, to help Pacific Island Countries implement national climate change policies and frameworks in response to the 2015 Paris Agreement.

Commonwealth

13 Mar 2019 | 796 cc1016-8

Asked by: Lord Chidgey

To ask Her Majesty's Government what progress they have made on building a fairer Commonwealth since the Written Ministerial Statement by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on 14 January (HCWS1247).

Answering member: Baroness Goldie

My Lords, the Government continue to work with Commonwealth partners to build a fairer future for our citizens. Highlights include, first, the platform for girls' education, co-chaired by the Foreign Secretary, which published its first report in January, examining the state of girls' education. Secondly, over 30 highly qualified women peacebuilders have joined the UK-funded women mediators initiative. Just this week, my noble friend Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon hosted a reception for Commonwealth Ministers in New York to drive forward the women, peace and security agenda.

Asked by: Lord Chidgey

I thank the Minister for her reply. I commend the Government for their endeavours as chair-in-office of the Commonwealth as we approach the Rwanda CHOGM. The £500 million allocated to the project set out in the ministerial Statement is significant including, as it does, a promise of £212 million to deliver 12 years of quality education to girls across nine Commonwealth countries.

However, we need assurances that these funds are being spent wisely and effectively. What monitoring and oversight procedures, and what management structures, are in place to ensure that the funds expended are targeted effectively and provide a sustainable investment over the longer term? Where does accountability lie?

Answering member: Baroness Goldie

I thank the noble Lord for raising an important question. Each of the four thematic areas identified at CHOGM—fairness, sustainability, prosperity and security—is overseen by the UK Commonwealth envoy. Quarterly steering board meetings assess progress and beneath that is a raft of other structures. I reassure the noble Lord that the matter is under constant review and a structure ensures that the money reaches where it is intended to go.

Asked by: Lord Howell of Guildford

My Lords, I declare an interest, as in the register. Does my noble friend agree that the modern Commonwealth is not just about governance and is not a treaty organisation at all? Today, it is just as much a vast network of professions, civic agencies, universities, schools and every kind of professional and scientific or medical interest. This side of it is, in many ways, more important than the headlines we read about treaties, communiqués and so on. As we are the chair in office, does she undertake that we will do all we possibly can to strengthen this side of the Commonwealth, because it is a terrific and major transmission mechanism for Britain's influence and soft power in a fast-changing world?

Answering member: Baroness Goldie

I suspect everyone in the Chamber will entirely agree with my noble friend. The Commonwealth is an extraordinary organisation. With over 2.4 billion people, it is home to one-third of the world's population, 60% of whom are under 30, so my noble friend is right to talk about the potential for influence and opportunity. Underpinning it all is the important component that its people are united by a shared history, language, values and legal system. It is a very relevant, strong and commendable structure.

Asked by: Lord Collins of Highbury

To pick up the Minister's point about shared values, before the last CHOGM in London, the Prime Minister quite rightly apologised for the colonial legacy of criminalising homosexuality. The Government have promised to fund and support those countries that wish to change those laws and get rid of that legacy. What progress has been made and can we anticipate other countries decriminalising homosexuality?

Answering member: Baroness Goldie

The noble Lord makes a very important point. The Prime Minister's declaration was very positive and well received. The noble Lord will be aware that the Commonwealth Secretariat and associations work with member states to raise general standards on human rights. On his specific issue, it was interesting that the 2018 Commonwealth summit saw the largest ever number of visiting LGBT activists from around the Commonwealth attending all four official forums. Using UK funding, the Equality and Justice Alliance is working to create a fairer, more equal and more inclusive Commonwealth for women and girls and for the LGBT community.

Asked by: The Lord Bishop of Southwark

My Lords, I congratulate Her Majesty's Government on the usefulness of the programmes outlined on 14 January, not least in education. What steps do the Government of Zimbabwe need to take to secure the support of Her Majesty's Government for an application to rejoin the Commonwealth?

Answering member: Baroness Goldie

I thank the right reverend Prelate for that question. He will understand that it is not for the UK to decide whether Zimbabwe is to rejoin the Commonwealth; the final decision is for all Commonwealth members. The UK would support readmission only if Zimbabwe meets the admission requirements, complying with the values and principles set out in the Commonwealth charter. I must say, the disproportionate use of force by its security forces, as seen in January, is inconsistent with the charter.

Asked by: Viscount Waverley

My Lords, there is disquiet in trade policy circles about a lack of co-ordination over how the Commonwealth fits in the overall constellation of EU-UK FTAs. Will the Government set a time limit for improving the unilateral preferences it grants to the Commonwealth in the longer term, with more clarity on the level of access to be provided to less-developed countries?

Answering member: Baroness Goldie

I thank the noble Viscount. He will be aware of our healthy trading relationships with our Commonwealth members; indeed, he will be aware of what is called the Commonwealth advantage, which is a very important component of those relationships. I do not have any information on the specific issue he raises but I undertake to investigate it. If I find anything out, I will write to him.

Asked by: Lord Marland

My Lords, I declare an interest as the chair-in-office of the Commonwealth Enterprise and Investment Council. Does the Minister agree that it is all very well having these initiatives, but unless the Commonwealth institutions are strengthened to deliver them, they are all for naught? What steps are the Government taking to strengthen those institutions?

Answering member: Baroness Goldie

At CHOGM, leaders emphasised that the full social, economic and political participation of all—irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status—is essential for a healthy Commonwealth and for democracy and sustainable development to thrive. He may be aware that the UK provided additional funding to the Commonwealth Secretariat to conduct its class-leading electoral observations and engage with Commonwealth electoral management bodies to advise them on improving democratic processes in the Commonwealth.

6. Debates

[Global Britain](#)

30 Jan 2020 | House of Commons | 670 cc132-1037

Motion that this House has considered global Britain. Agreed to on question.

[UK Foreign Policy in a Shifting World Order \(International Relations Committee Report\)](#)

21 May 2019 | House of Lords | 797 cc1903-1965

Lords motion to take note of the fifth report of the International Relations Committee on UK foreign policy in a shifting world order (HL 250). Agreed to on question.

[Commonwealth Personnel in the Armed Forces](#)

08 May 2019 | House of Commons | 659 cc322-343WH

Motion that this House has considered fair treatment for Commonwealth personnel in the armed forces.

[Commonwealth](#)

28 Mar 2019 | House of Lords | 796 cc1912-1961

Lords motion to take note of the continuing and evolving role of the Commonwealth and the United Kingdom's relationship with it.

[The Modern Commonwealth: Opportunities and Challenges](#)

07 Mar 2019 | House of Commons | 655 cc1197-1218

Motion that this House has considered opportunities and challenges facing the modern Commonwealth.

Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 2018

22 Mar 2018 | House of Lords | 790 [cc457-498](#) and [cc422-448](#)

Lords motion to take note of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 2018. Agreed.

[Future of the Commonwealth](#)

21 Mar 2018 | House of Commons | 638 cc163-187WH

Motion that this House has considered the future of the Commonwealth. Agreed to on question.

7. Statements

Commonwealth Day

11 Mar 2019 | 656 cc75-88

The Minister for Africa (Harriett Baldwin): It is an absolute delight to make this statement today to the House as we celebrate Commonwealth Day together. The UK joins our fellow member states in celebrating the bonds between people, organisations and Governments across 53 countries under the theme of a connected Commonwealth.

The Commonwealth is a unique organisation, rich in diversity yet connected by a common language, common history and common values. There is much to celebrate. Celebrations of these unique connections are taking place right across the UK today. As head of the Commonwealth, Her Majesty the Queen attended the service of celebration this afternoon in Westminster Abbey. Many other senior members of the royal family, representatives from all Commonwealth countries, the Prime Minister, Members of Parliament, representatives from Commonwealth organisations and over 700 schoolchildren also attended the service. Many councils are raising the Commonwealth flag in celebration, from Dorset to Newport to Glasgow, building connections across the Commonwealth at community level. Indeed, just outside Parliament the flags of the 53 nations of the Commonwealth are flying. Along Whitehall, multiple Government Departments are also flying the Commonwealth flag as a symbol of the UK's commitment to the Commonwealth.

In her Commonwealth Day message, Her Majesty the Queen highlighted the collective values we share as a family of nations and the networks of co-operation that we both draw on and contribute to. The Prime Minister's Commonwealth statement, published earlier today, reflects on the UK's role as chair-in-office, driving forward projects that span the Commonwealth, connecting its citizens in shared aims.

Across our diplomatic network, British high commissioners are celebrating today and this week with a variety of events, programme visits and receptions. Celebrations range from a fashion show showcasing recycled materials in Singapore to the Bangladesh women's cricket team visiting a UK-funded programme helping women and children to escape domestic violence. Even embassies in non-Commonwealth countries such as Brazil are celebrating by bringing together Commonwealth colleagues to discuss shared values.

So how is the UK delivering on this, our connected Commonwealth? Since hosting last year's Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting, the UK has taken on the position as chair-in-office—a role that we will hold until leaders from the 53 member states reconvene in Rwanda next year. It is a role that we take extremely seriously, but what does it mean in practice? We have four objectives as chair-in-office, and these can be summarised in four words: delivery, voice, solidarity and reform.

We want to deliver the commitments set out in the official Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting communiqué, the leaders' statement, the Commonwealth Blue Charter, the cyber-declaration and the Commonwealth connectivity agenda for trade and investment. We want to promote the voice of the Commonwealth within the rules-based international system; the diversity of the Commonwealth is a strength and an opportunity. We should continue to come together as a collective voice to advocate for the rules-based international system. We want to enhance practical solidarity among Commonwealth members in international organisations by ensuring that we know about one another's candidacies and by briefing one another on the business of regional and wider bodies to which we do not all belong. We want to reinforce the three pillars of the Commonwealth by supporting continued reform of the Commonwealth secretariat to ensure that it is a modern, agile organisation.

Since taking on the role as chair-in-office, we have been working hard to ensure that the Commonwealth delivers on the commitments made by leaders at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting. Many Members will be interested in the progress made on the commitments made by leaders—commitments that will benefit all 2.4 billion citizens.

At the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in April last year, heads made ambitious commitments to build a Commonwealth that is fairer, more sustainable, more prosperous and more secure. Over the last 11 months, the UK has been working hard to ensure that together, we deliver on those commitments. We cannot do this alone and are working closely with the three pillars of the Commonwealth—our 52 fellow member states, the Commonwealth secretariat and the many Commonwealth organisations and networks. This includes the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, in which many hon. Members here play active roles. These three pillars demonstrate a connected Commonwealth in action.

Her Majesty's Government have allocated over £500 million towards projects designed to deliver on the Commonwealth Heads of Government commitments. Let me highlight just a few examples of the significant progress that we have been making, from oceans to cyber-security and from trade facilitation to education.

We are building a more sustainable future through our action on the Commonwealth Blue Charter. The UK is co-leading with Vanuatu the Commonwealth Clean Oceans Alliance. Twenty-four Commonwealth member states from every region have already joined this alliance to tackle marine plastic pollution and have committed to concrete action that will reduce the scourge of plastics in the oceans. There are eight other action groups of member states targeted at different challenges to the oceans' sustainability. In addition, with UK funds and expertise, the Commonwealth marine economies programme is facilitating the creation of sustainable marine economies in 17 Commonwealth island states, promoting growth, innovation, jobs and investment while safeguarding healthy seas and ecosystems.

We are building a more secure future through programmes to strengthen countries' cyber-resilience. In partnership with the World

Bank, we are enabling national cyber-security reviews. In Africa, these have already been delivered in Nigeria, the Gambia, Mauritius and Lesotho. We have established an African cyber-security fellowship network and helped nine African Commonwealth countries to share expertise and build capacity in critical information infrastructure protection. We are also funding training events that will benefit the cyber-security of 37 Commonwealth countries.

We are building a more prosperous future by working with Commonwealth partners to boost intra-Commonwealth trade and investment. Since its launch last year, the UK-funded Commonwealth trade facilitation programme has already increased the capacity and capability of customs organisations in 18 Commonwealth countries. The UK and South Africa recently announced that we would co-lead the digital connectivity element of the Commonwealth connectivity agenda to boost inclusive growth. We are also promoting inclusive and sustainable trade through the SheTrades in the Commonwealth programme. More than 2,300 women-owned businesses have signed up to this initiative, which will also increase women's participation in international trade.

We are also improving employment prospects for young people through training and skills development programmes. We are building a fairer future through supporting the provision of 12 years of quality education for girls and boys. In particular, we are providing over £200 million of support for girls' education in nine Commonwealth African countries. During Commonwealth Heads of Government meetings, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister offered to help Commonwealth partners who wished to address legacies of legislation that discriminates against women and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender citizens. We are supporting collaboration between civil society and Governments that have responded positively to this offer.

The three pillars of the Commonwealth have made important progress, delivering on the Commonwealth Heads of Government commitments, and we will continue to drive this engagement in the year ahead to the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting 2020 in Rwanda. This Government are determined to make the most of our two years as chair-in-office. As we mark the 70th anniversary of the modern Commonwealth next month, we also want to ensure that it can meet future challenges—from climate change to cyber-attacks—and to seize the opportunities from the organisation's huge diversity and global reach. As I said last week, we will work tirelessly with our Commonwealth partners to build a fairer, more sustainable, more prosperous and more secure Commonwealth. I commend this statement to the House.

[Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting](#)

23 Apr 2018 | HCWS634

The Prime Minister (Theresa May): Last week I hosted the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (19 - 20 April) – the largest summit of its kind in our country's history. Leaders from 53 countries gathered together with over 15,000 delegates, including at 90

side events, demonstrating that the Commonwealth is united not only by a common history, but by a common future.

We put young people at the heart of the summit, recognising the need to ensure the actions we took would renew the Commonwealth and promote its relevance to its people, 60% of whom are under 30.

We agreed a range of actions to build a Commonwealth which is fairer, more sustainable, more secure and more prosperous. These commitments were captured in a Communiqué and accompanying Leaders' Statement. I have placed a copy of both in the House of Commons Library.

A central theme of our leaders' meeting was our resolve to stand together in defence of the rules based international system.

To build a more secure future, we expressed our unanimous opposition to the use of chemical weapons, and committed to strengthen the effective implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention. We also agreed the 'Commonwealth Cyber Declaration,' the world's largest and most geographically diverse intergovernmental commitment on cyber-security co-operation and capacity building, helping to protect our people and businesses from ever-more sophisticated digital threats. The UK has committed £15 million to help member states boost their cyber-security capabilities.

To build a more sustainable future, we celebrated every nation of the Commonwealth having now ratified the Paris Agreement, and recommitted to pursuing efforts to limit the increase in global average temperature to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. We also took specific action to protect our oceans and launched the 'Commonwealth Blue Charter', supported by the UK and Vanuatu's 'Clean Oceans Alliance.' A number of Commonwealth countries have made a series of commitments to tackle the scourge of plastic pollution, including Papua New Guinea, which has banned plastic bags; Belize, which has banned plastic bags, forks and other single-use items by 2019; and New Zealand, which has announced a ban on microbeads. The UK pledged to ban plastic straws, stirrers and plastic-stemmed cotton buds, as well as announcing funding for research into tackling marine litter. With over 90% of Commonwealth citizens living in malaria-affected countries, leaders pledged to halve malaria across the Commonwealth by 2023.

To build a more prosperous future, we made a unanimous statement on the need to fight protectionism – the first Commonwealth summit to do so. We launched initiatives to break down barriers to trade through the promotion of common standards across the Commonwealth, to address systemic barriers to women's full and equal participation in the economy, and to boost youth employment through a new Commonwealth apprenticeships programme. We also pledged to ensure that all girls and boys across the Commonwealth will be able to access at least 12 years of quality education and learning by 2030. The

UK has committed a further £212 million to ensure no child is left behind.

To build a fairer future, we agreed the critical importance of the full social, economic and political participation of all our citizens for democracy and sustainable development to thrive. In my speech to the Joint Forum Plenary on Tuesday 17 April, I set out that nobody should face persecution or discrimination because of who they are or who they love, and announced a programme of support for any Commonwealth member wanting to reform outdated legislation that permits discrimination, including against same-sex relations.

The week also provided the opportunity for bilateral meetings with Commonwealth leaders. I met Caribbean leaders on Tuesday 17 April and gave an absolute commitment that the Government will do whatever it takes - including, where appropriate, payment of compensation - to resolve the anxieties and problems which some of the Windrush generation have suffered. My Rt Hon Friend the Home Secretary will be providing a further update in Parliament later today.

We expressed deep gratitude for everything that Her Majesty The Queen has done to nurture this remarkable organisation, and agreed that the next Head of the Commonwealth shall be His Royal Highness Prince Charles, The Prince of Wales.

As we begin the UK's two-year Chair in Office, I look forward to working with all our Commonwealth partners in fulfilling the commitments we have made, and preparing for the next meeting in Rwanda, in 2020.

8. Further reading

Library Briefing Papers

[Statistics on UK trade with the Commonwealth](#)

Commons Briefing Paper 8282
6 February 2020

Books

David Howell, [The Mother of All Networks: The Resurgent Role of the Commonwealth in the New World Order](#), 2018
(available for loan from the House of Commons Library)

Websites

[The Commonwealth](#)

[CHOGM 2020](#)

Website for the 2020 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Rwanda

[CHOGM 2018](#)

Website for the 2018 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in London

[Commonwealth Foundation](#)

The Commonwealth's agency for civil society, supporting people's participation in democracy and development.

[The Royal Commonwealth Society](#)

The Royal Commonwealth Society (RCS) is a network of individuals and organisations committed to improving the lives and prospects of Commonwealth citizens across the world.

Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting Communiqué:

["Towards a Common Future"](#)

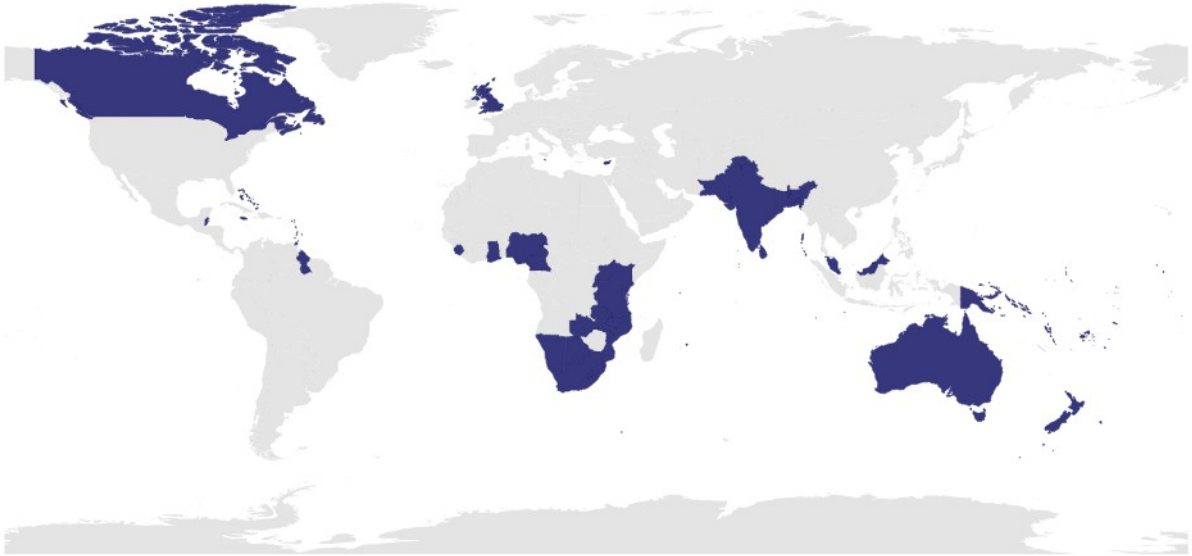
CHOGM 2018

[Commonwealth Parliamentary Association](#)

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) has been the voice of parliamentary democracy across the Commonwealth for more than nine decades. The CPA covers 185 Parliaments and Legislatures, with 17,000 Members.

9. Annex: Map of member states

[Commonwealth member countries](#)



A full list of member countries is also available via the link above.

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