

**Aga Khan Foundation Special Lecture
by Rt Hon Don McKinnon,
Commonwealth Secretary-General
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Shaping the Global Agenda: Role of the Commonwealth

Let me first of all say how delighted I am to be in Pakistan. I am particularly happy to be in Karachi, a city I do not always manage to visit. I am also looking forward to my discussions in Islamabad tomorrow.

I would like to thank the President of the Aga Khan University, Mr Shams Kassim Lakha, for the invitation to address you this evening.

Pakistan is one of the 'founder' members of the new Commonwealth which emerged from the London Declaration of 1949. Notwithstanding the ups and downs in its relationship with the Commonwealth, this country occupies an important place in the Commonwealth family and plays an active role within it.

The philanthropic and community development work done by the Aga Khan Foundation, the Aga Khan University and other parts of this excellent network have greatly benefited many Commonwealth member countries, particularly here on the sub-continent and in East Africa, but also other states elsewhere. The values of religious and moral correctness and their compatibility with educational and scientific pursuit, which your Foundation seeks to uphold and promote, contribute greatly to the global effort to achieve prosperity, knowledge and justice for all.

I have chosen my subject for today's speech to ensure that you understand the Commonwealth of today which, despite its antecedents going back to the 1870s, is a modern organization. It is relevant to each of its members, competitively dynamic and, in this very interdependent global community, can add real value to the external aspirations of its member states.

It is important to recognize at the very outset that we are not a regional organisation, like the EU or SAARC, nor a special interest group, like the G-8 or the G-77. It is one that straddles all regions and all interests. It therefore provides its members, including Pakistan, a

window to 52 other countries, from the richest to the poorest, from the largest to the smallest, island and landlocked, all of which build on what they have in common and collaborate on the basis of consensus.

The main directions of the Commonwealth's work are established by mandates from Heads of Government at their biennial summits, or CHOGMs. The most recent was held in Malta last November. Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz headed your country's delegation there.

I thought I would use this opportunity to tell you about some of the significant outcomes of the Malta CHOGM, to demonstrate how we in the Commonwealth respond to global challenges and how we influence the international agenda.

In doing so, I will highlight three main themes -- free and fair multilateral trade; mutual respect and understanding across faiths and communities; and good governance, which also facilitates sustainable development.

Multilateral Trade

The Commonwealth's ability to galvanize itself politically was demonstrated most effectively in Malta, when Heads of Government agreed on a principled, robust and forward-looking Valletta Statement on Multilateral Trade. Through this they called on the international community, on the eve of the Hong Kong ministerial meeting of the WTO, to deliver a genuine development-oriented outcome to the Doha Round of trade negotiations.

This was not an isolated statement. Two years earlier, leaders had asserted their determination to see a true development round and mandated a group of Commonwealth Trade Ministers to visit key global capitals. They had also asked the Secretariat to give whatever assistance it could to our capacity-constrained countries.

This was based on the recognition that if you are concerned about poverty, free international trade can do more than aid or writing off debt.

That is why the Valletta Statement recognised the key contribution of trade to global prosperity, poverty elimination and sustainable development. They recognised that in today's globalised world, trade issues can no longer be negotiated in isolation and that the weak and vulnerable must benefit from an equitable share in trade opportunities.

They did not wish for the legitimacy of the multilateral negotiating system to be called into question.

Leaders strongly reaffirmed their commitment to the objectives of the Doha Development Agenda and urged a rapid and successful conclusion of the talks so that all developing countries, particularly the most vulnerable, small states and LDCs, could reap early and substantial dividends. Heads called for urgent support to assist the most vulnerable in repositioning their economies to take advantage of new growth opportunities; they called for Special and Differential Treatment where this was needed.

Essentially, via the Valletta Statement, more than 50 Commonwealth leaders collectively resolved to raise the level of ambition for the Hong Kong meeting. Leaders also called on developed countries to demonstrate the political courage to be able to give more than they receive, particularly in the negotiations on agriculture and market access.

Here was an example of Britain and Canada agreeing with Bangladesh and Cameroon on an issue as divisive as trade. Once again, we were able to show that "the Commonwealth cannot negotiate for the world but it can certainly help the world to negotiate," -- to quote one of my distinguished predecessors, Sir Shridath Ramphal.

Even if Hong Kong did not deliver the outcome the Commonwealth wanted, we can take credit for having kept ambitions pitched high, as well as for the progress that was actually made. The commitment by the European Union and the United States to end agricultural export subsidies by 2013, with substantial progress to be made by 2010, is not insignificant. Nor is the agreement to grant duty-free and quota-free access to 97 percent of exports from developing countries.

Pakistan has been a member of the WTO since 1995, and has some very accomplished negotiators. It is one of those many new members of the organisation that have joined in the last decade or so and that have changed the dynamics of the WTO. As a result, today's Doha Round is very different from its predecessor, the Uruguay Round, in terms of both how it is negotiated and what its outcomes are expected to be.

The growth in membership has meant agriculture and development considerations have moved to the top of the agenda like never before. It has also meant that that the so-called, "Green Room" is no longer

an appropriate mechanism where deals are made between the major players on either side of the Atlantic plus a handful of others, and the rest stand outside waiting to be deal-takers. The voices of newer members such as Pakistan can be heard and should be heard.

The Commonwealth collectively is pressing for the Doha Round to be brought to a meaningful conclusion this year, one which goes well beyond the "we're at the 65% mark" assessment made by Pascal Lamy after Hong Kong, and a conclusion which instils a continued commitment by the developing world, particularly small and vulnerable states, to the multilateral trading system. If not, I cannot be optimistic about the future of the WTO itself. Being a member therefore gives Pakistan a legitimate interest and stake, and also a responsibility.

Bridging Divides

The world in which we live is troubled not only by the inequities of global trade. It is divided in other, some would say more dangerous, ways.

Although we share a common humanity, efforts are being made constantly by those with sinister interests to divide people, by appealing to primordial instincts which fragment humanity. Ask the millions of Muslims – and many non-Muslims -- the world over who have been deeply offended by cartoons that appeared originally in a Danish newspaper. Or, for that matter, ask the traumatised citizens of Denmark, who are now being vilified for the actions of one cartoonist and one newspaper editor.

I have made it clear that while freedom of expression is a core Commonwealth principle, that freedom has to be exercised with responsibility and restraint. We must respect people's religious and cultural sensitivities. A very successful HSBC advertisement points out how a particular gesture, sign or number considered lucky or auspicious in one country can convey quite the opposite sense in another.

Equally, violence is not the answer. That will only fuel the cycle of hatred. Respect for others and their points of view cannot be imposed nor demanded at the end of a fist or a gun; it must be built up through dialogue, understanding and goodwill.

The cartoons controversy has sharpened tensions and tends to get painted on to a canvas that portends a great clash of civilisations. But

that itself is a simplification of what is a much larger problem -- that of a world being made ever smaller by the forces of globalisation.

Many more people now interact and engage with people of other races, ethnic groups, religious denominations, or even income groups than ever before in history. They do not consider this unusual, or feel threatened by it in any way.

But despite this natural evolution, there are those who seek to force these groups apart, expounding chauvinism, intolerance, threatening behaviour and extremism.

It is not a matter of Islam versus Christianity. Extremists who distort the pillars of a faith are not peculiar to any one religion – sadly, they all have their share of them. But it is also not just a matter of religion. Faith does not explain ethnic genocide or inter-clan warfare, nor why appealing to racial prejudice wins votes in some elections.

Alienation, marginalisation, exclusion are phenomena that have many roots – religion, language and culture are among them. But so too are poverty, illiteracy, environmental degradation and perceived political injustice.

As we have become more globalised by communication advances, we can no longer have the comfort of isolation and ivory tower existence. The ability of people, the spoken word, and images to move rapidly and largely unchecked around the world has brought tremendous freedom and opportunity. But those means of communication are also open to equally unchecked abuse. One person's views can poison and distort the minds of millions of others today in ways which were never possible before.

We have all heard of the need for 'responsible globalisation' and I would suggest that this is one dimension of it requiring further attention: the challenge is to find ways in which the channels of communication and freedom created by globalisation are used responsibly.

We really do need to stop and think about how we can all get on better together. Indeed, we have to get on better. I know, that this is where the Commonwealth can draw on its comparative advantage.

The Commonwealth is, an excellent example of unity in diversity. As I mentioned earlier, we have every major religious group, every major

ethnic group, every economic category. Yet we are fond of describing ourselves as a family. Family members do not always agree but they usually understand each other very well. They may be very aggressive towards each other at times – but they are still family. This is because they share common DNA.

The Commonwealth DNA is what allows an organisation with such a wide range of membership and vastly differing economic realities, to stand as a good example of solidarity. Nelson Mandela remarked famously some twelve years ago, “The Commonwealth makes the world safe for diversity.”

We believe that this comparative advantage makes the Commonwealth well placed to lead by example, work with others, and campaign actively on the world stage for justice, tolerance and respect.

That is why our leaders asked me in Malta to explore initiatives by which the Commonwealth can not only contribute to the growing international efforts to promote cross-cultural dialogue in a way which adds value, but also how it can use best practice from successful examples within its own ranks to enhance in practical ways mutual understanding and respect and social harmony.

South Asia is a region which has seen – and continues to witness – examples of religious extremism, ethnic conflict, economic deprivation and challenges to democratic practice. Pakistan itself has paid a heavy price – politically, economically and socially – for the conflict in Afghanistan in the 1980s and the war against terror post 9/11.

So you see – we all have to work harder to ensure that people in any society, wherever they live, are not made to feel that they are outsiders, that they are marginalized, that they don't have equality of opportunity, that they must simply give up in despair on their children's future.

We have to do more -- talk yes, but also walk the walk, see changes on the ground, respond to the circumstances of those whose lives see the least change – and to do so rapidly. The cost of not doing so will only continue to increase.

I am sure, therefore, that the direction provided by Commonwealth leaders in Malta will have resonance and support here in Pakistan, as well as in the other member states of this region.

Good Governance

I now come to the third theme.

If the Commonwealth has had a renaissance in the last 15 years, it is because it has made a mark in the area of 'good governance'. This has become a Commonwealth flagship, one that has enhanced its profile considerably on the international scene.

Fifteen years ago, the Commonwealth adopted the Harare Declaration, which followed the Singapore Declaration and defined the association's fundamental values of democracy, human rights, the rule of law, independence of the judiciary, gender equality, just and honest government and sustainable development. These were not new principles. What was new was the determination to implement them. Lip service would no longer be acceptable.

Since 1991, a dozen countries have moved from one-party states, military rule or other forms of non-representative government to multi-party democracy. More and more countries are seriously applying the Harare principles in their governance structures and institutions.

At the New Zealand CHOGM in 1995, the Harare principles were translated into the Millbrook Action Programme, giving them real teeth. The Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) was created to deal with serious or persistent violations of the Harare principles.

CMAG has been a trailblazer on the international scene. No equivalent organisation exists elsewhere. It is not a tribunal or judicial body, but a political one, allowing its members, who represent a cross-section of the Commonwealth, to take a political, not a legal, view. And it has repeatedly shown that it does have real teeth -- with Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Fiji and Zimbabwe all having been on CMAG's agenda in the recent past.

As we all know, Pakistan too has been on CMAG's agenda since 1999. Clearly, there are divided views in Pakistan about the manner in which the Commonwealth, and CMAG specifically, has dealt with the situation in your country. But it is important to understand that this has been based not on any animus towards Pakistan as such, but on generally accepted Commonwealth principles and practice.

After all, Pakistan too was a party to and a supporter of the Harare Declaration and to the Millbrook Action Programme.

In this business of remaining true to fundamental values, there is no room for expediency or extenuating circumstances. It is not possible to make exceptions in any organisation, least of all one which has 53 members. You cannot begin to distinguish between good coups and bad ones, between benevolent dictators and malevolent ones. The properly expressed will of the people and the accountability of those who govern them are the bottomline.

But what is this thing called good governance? It is not just about avoiding coups, or having an election. It was last defined by a Commonwealth expert group which brought together academics, politicians, business persons, social scientists and others. Their report laid down some broad markers which define true democracy. They come closest to what good governance is all about and what we should be working towards.

Let me reiterate these benchmarks to you:

- A freely and fairly elected Parliament that is broadly representative of the people of the country and whose election is overseen by an independent electoral commission.
- An Executive that is answerable to – and funded solely through – the Parliament.
- An independent judiciary, which means judges must be financially secure during the period of their appointment and in retirement.
- A transparent and straightforward public accounts system which clearly reflects where money is coming from and where it is going to.
- A Public Accounts Committee, ideally chaired by a member of the Opposition, responsible for monitoring public expenditure.
- An Auditor-General answerable to Parliament ensuring the financial accountability of the Executive.

- An independent Human Rights Commission that protects citizens from discrimination and human rights abuses and ensures that the government treats all citizens equally.
- A Freedom of Information Act that enables the public to gain access to information about executive decisions.
- An Ombudsman who addresses the grievances of the public.
- A police force that responds to the law for its operations and the government for its administration.
- Armed forces that are answerable to government and Parliament, not to political parties, and are responsible for the defence of the country.

That is a long list, but those are the essential building blocks.

To its credit, Pakistan has always been ready to engage with the Commonwealth. I remember my first visit to Islamabad as Secretary-General six years ago. I remember also that President Musharraf responded positively to the issues I raised with him and set out a roadmap for the restoration of democracy, most of which he then proceeded to implement.

At Malta Heads of Government did welcome "the progress made by Pakistan in restoring democracy and rebuilding democratic institutions." Among the notable developments in this regard are the resolution of the LFO through Parliament, enhanced representation of women in the Senate and National Assembly, increased press freedom and efforts to combat corruption. Pakistan has also willingly engaged with the Commonwealth and permitted CMAG to monitor progress.

But in Malta our leaders also concluded that "the holding by the same person of the offices of Head of State and Chief of Army Staff is incompatible with the basic principles of democracy and the spirit of the Harare Commonwealth principles." They further stated that "until the two offices are separated, the process of democratisation in Pakistan will not be irreversible", and "urged Pakistan to resolve this issue as soon as possible, and not beyond the end of the current presidential term in 2007 at the latest. They noted that CMAG will retain Pakistan on its agenda pending the resolution of this outstanding issue."

I was asked by leaders to “continue to maintain high level contacts with Pakistan” in pursuance of Commonwealth goals. That is why I am here. I am confident that my discussions in Islamabad tomorrow will help further strengthen the relationship between Pakistan and the Commonwealth and help Pakistan rebuild those democratic institutions.

I know that the people of Pakistan feel committed to the Commonwealth. They are passionately attached, not least, to the great Commonwealth game of cricket! I congratulate your team on its recent Test victories over England and India and wish the cricketers well as they prepare for the World Cup. I hope your other sportsmen and women make your country proud at the Commonwealth Games next month.

I hope I have been able to demonstrate, by highlighting these three themes, how the Commonwealth is a relevant and credible player on the international scene, and how it helps shape the global agenda. Demonstrate that, whatever you do in this world, it is hard to get away from the Commonwealth and its world wide web of activities.

Thanks again for inviting me and for your warm hospitality.
