



## **‘Health and Vitality: the Commonwealth Challenge’**

*Commonwealth Day 2006 Statement by  
Secretary-General Don McKinnon*

Monday 13 March is Commonwealth Day - a day once a year in which we celebrate being members of a unique global family and organisation.

The essence of the Commonwealth is in its fundamental values of mutual respect, tolerance and equality. It brings us together as individuals, groups, organisations, and governments.

Building on that foundation, we are driven by a determination to help each other create strong democracies that encourage respect for human rights – political, economic, social, cultural, and others. Together, the Commonwealth aspire to just and honest government, supported by the rule of law. And we aim to create prosperity and economic opportunity for all.

To belong to the Commonwealth means to engage with the international community with one voice. Fifty-three nations speaking in unison can send a powerful message to the rest of the world.

Last year, the Commonwealth’s Heads of Government met in Malta to set out the direction and priorities for our organisation over the next few years. We agreed to continue to channel our work to promote democracy and development and to give priority to assisting those who are most vulnerable – those in developing countries and in small states. This year, global trade liberalisation will be one of our greatest challenges. We recognise that trade is one of the most potent ways of generating prosperity and eradicating poverty. We will also help bridge the digital divide that is holding back progress by promoting new technology.

Also in Malta, were over 200 different organisations and over 500 people representing doctors, dentists, businessmen and women, lawyers and others, all of whom believe in the value of the Commonwealth. Confidence in the Commonwealth is running high as the number of civil society organisations grows and the Commonwealth Youth Programme continues to expand.

This year the Commonwealth Day theme is, ‘Health and Vitality: the Commonwealth Challenge’. In a year in which our finest athletes, at the peak of their physical abilities, will be competing at the 18th Commonwealth Games, it is appropriate that we should devote attention to good health for all.

Commonwealth interests are our shared interests. Every step forward that member countries take to make a difference is an advance for us all. That is good grounds for celebration.