

Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM)

Every two years, Commonwealth leaders meet to discuss global and Commonwealth issues, and to agree on collective policies and initiatives. These summits provide a unique forum for consultation at the highest level of government. They are organised by the host nation in collaboration with the Commonwealth Secretariat.

After a public opening ceremony and a formal Executive Session, the leaders – for the most part Presidents and Prime Ministers – meet privately in a ‘Retreat’ setting. The atmosphere is informal, encouraging a full and frank exchange of views, and decisions are normally reached by consensus. Many important Commonwealth initiatives have emerged from these Retreats.

Issues discussed include international peace and security, democracy, good governance, sustainable development, debt management, education, environment, gender equality, health, human rights, information and communication technology, law, multilateral trade issues, small states and youth affairs.





Commonwealth leaders have met regularly for more than a century. The first meetings, known as Colonial Conferences, began in 1887. In 1911, these were replaced by Imperial Conferences, held regularly until 1937. Between 1944 and the early 1960s, Commonwealth Prime Ministers Meetings were held almost annually in London.

In Singapore, in 1971, the term Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) was adopted to encompass both Presidents and Prime Ministers. Since then, CHOGMs have taken place on a biennial basis.

Notable Meetings

May 1944

Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa and the United Kingdom, representing the peoples of the 'British Empire and Commonwealth of Nations', participated in the first Prime Ministers Meeting which succeeded the Imperial Conferences, the change of name signifying the equality of all the members.

October 1948

India, Pakistan and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) joined the original five members. The words 'British Empire' and 'British Commonwealth' did not appear in the communiqué, which throughout referred to the association as 'the Commonwealth'.

April 1949

The meeting agreed to the continued membership of India, which had opted to become a republic. With allegiance to

the British Crown no longer a condition of membership, the way was paved for other countries to join the association after gaining independence.

March 1961

Leaders upheld racial equality as a cardinal principle of the Commonwealth, obliging apartheid South Africa to withdraw its application to remain a member after becoming a republic.

June 1965

The meeting approved the establishment of the Commonwealth Secretariat to facilitate intergovernmental consultation and collaboration, and of the Commonwealth Foundation to promote professional links.

Canadian diplomat Arnold Smith was appointed as the first Commonwealth Secretary-General.

January 1966, Lagos

The first meeting held outside the UK, convened to discuss action against the minority regime which had unilaterally declared independence in Southern Rhodesia, set up a committee to review UN sanctions against Rhodesia, and launched a training programme for Rhodesian Africans.

September 1966, London

Heeding Commonwealth sentiment, the UK declared that no independence would be granted to Rhodesia without majority rule.

January 1971, Singapore

Meetings of Commonwealth Prime Ministers were renamed Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings, as many member countries were by now headed by executive Presidents. Heads of Government issued the Declaration of Commonwealth Principles and welcomed the establishment of the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC), a multilateral fund to assist development.

August 1973, Ottawa

Heads of Government issued a Statement on nuclear weapons tests. They endorsed the Commonwealth Youth Programme, previously approved by Ministers of Youth Affairs, and instructed the Secretary-General to proceed with its implementation. The Retreat, designed to ensure informality and free discussion among leaders, was introduced.

April – May 1975, Kingston

The meeting appointed a Commonwealth Expert Group to assist progress towards narrowing the gulf between rich and poor countries, set up a Commonwealth Committee on Cyprus to help in the implementation of UN resolutions, and looked forward to welcoming Namibia into the Commonwealth following independence. Aid was offered to Mozambique, which was applying sanctions against Rhodesia at great cost to its economy. **Heads of Government elected Shridath Ramphal, Foreign Minister of Guyana, as the second Commonwealth Secretary-General.**

June 1977, London

The meeting recognised that the policies of South Africa played a central role in perpetuating the interrelated problems of Southern Africa. The Gleneagles Agreement discouraged sporting links with South Africa. A Ministerial Committee on Belize was set up to help promote independence for that country.

August 1979, Lusaka

Heads of Government confirmed their commitment to Zimbabwe's independence on the basis of majority rule. They reaffirmed the Commonwealth's commitment to racial equality in the Lusaka Declaration on Racism and Racial Prejudice. They approved the establishment of an Industrial Development Unit within the Secretariat and commissioned a study of factors inhibiting structural change and world economic growth. Tuvalu's

accession to special membership of the Commonwealth was acknowledged.

September-October 1981, Melbourne

The Melbourne Declaration laid down principles for justice in world economic relationships. Commonwealth leaders reaffirmed their determination to ensure that Namibia's right to self-determination and independence be respected, and condemned South Africa's attempts to destabilise its neighbours.

November 1983, New Delhi

Heads of Government issued the Goa Declaration on International Security, calling for East-West dialogue, the end of the nuclear arms race and the strengthening of international machinery to reduce tension and resolve disputes. They constituted the Commonwealth Action Group on Cyprus, issued the New Delhi Statement on Economic Action and set up a Consultative Group to promote agreement on key economic issues. They urged special assistance for the Commonwealth's small states, and initiated an expert study on their security and economic problems.

October 1985, Nassau

The Commonwealth Accord on Southern Africa demanded the dismantling of apartheid and agreed on a range of measures to put pressure on the Pretoria regime. In the Nassau Declaration on World Order, Commonwealth leaders

reaffirmed their support for the UN system and called for a new framework of collective security.

August 1986, Review Meeting, London

Seven leaders met to review progress in South Africa following the Nassau initiatives and the visit of the Eminent Persons Group to South Africa earlier that year. Six leaders decided on strong economic sanctions backed by intensive efforts to obtain concerted international support; the UK agreed on limited measures plus participation in any European Community sanctions.

October 1987, Vancouver

Heads of Government issued the Vancouver Declaration on World Trade, pledging to work for a more open, viable and durable trading system. The Okanagan Statement and Programme of Action on Southern Africa increased the pressure for change in South Africa and established a Committee of Foreign Ministers on Southern Africa. Leaders also set up inquiries into global climate change and sea-level rise, and the impact of structural adjustment programmes on women. They agreed to set up the Commonwealth of Learning to advance distance education.

October 1989, Kuala Lumpur

The Langkawi Declaration on Environment was issued. The Kuala Lumpur Statement entitled 'Southern Africa: The Way Ahead' maintained pressure on the Pretoria regime and endorsed the programme to bring peace and democracy to South Africa outlined in

1986. The meeting initiated a high-level appraisal of the role of the Commonwealth in the 1990s and beyond. **Nigerian diplomat and former Foreign Minister Chief Emeka Anyaoku was elected as the third Commonwealth Secretary-General, starting in July 1990.**

October 1991, Harare

Heads of Government issued the Harare Commonwealth Declaration, which reaffirmed the fundamental values set forth in the 1971 Declaration of Commonwealth Principles, and committed all member countries to work with renewed vigour, especially in the following areas: protecting and promoting democracy, just and honest government, the rule of law and fundamental human rights; equality for women; universal access to education; sustainable development, poverty alleviation and environmental protection; combating drug trafficking and abuse, and communicable diseases; helping small states; and supporting the UN and other international institutions in the search for peace. The Harare Declaration also pledged continuing action towards ending apartheid and establishing a free, democratic, non-racial and prosperous South Africa. Annexed to the Harare Communiqué was the Ottawa Declaration on Women and Structural Adjustment, which included a seven-point action programme.

October 1993, Limassol

The Limassol Statement on the Uruguay Round affirmed the need for

a successful outcome to the Uruguay Round of Multilateral Trade Negotiations. Commonwealth leaders despatched a ministerial mission to Tokyo, Washington DC, London, Bonn, Paris, Geneva and Brussels to urge key countries and international organisations to negotiate positively and flexibly to reach agreement.

November 1995, Auckland

South Africa was welcomed back as a member. Mozambique became the association's 53rd member. Heads of Government agreed the Millbrook Commonwealth Action Programme on the Harare Declaration, designed to fulfil more effectively the democracy and development commitments contained in the Harare Declaration. They established the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group on the Harare Declaration to deal with serious or persistent violations of the Harare principles. Nigeria was suspended from the Commonwealth for a serious violation of those principles.

October 1997, Edinburgh

Commonwealth leaders agreed on a set of economic principles and practical activities to promote trade, investment and sustainable development. Among these was the establishment of a trade and investment access facility. Leaders endorsed a report on criteria for Commonwealth membership. Fiji Islands was welcomed back as a member.

November 1999, Durban

Nigeria was welcomed back to full

membership, following democratic elections earlier in the year. The Fancourt Commonwealth Declaration on Globalisation and People-Centred Development was issued. A High-Level Review Group of 10 Heads was set up to review the role of the Commonwealth and how it could respond to the challenges of the new century. The meeting welcomed the interim report of the Commonwealth/World Bank Joint Task Force on Small States, "Small States: Meeting Challenges in the Global Economy", as a landmark document confirming the special problems and development challenges facing small states. **The Rt Hon Don McKinnon, Foreign Minister of New Zealand, was elected as the fourth Secretary-General, taking office on 1 April 2000.**

March 2002, Coolum

Commonwealth leaders issued the Coolum Declaration, titled 'The Commonwealth in the 21st Century: Continuity and Renewal'. They adopted the Report of the High-Level Review Group established in Durban, which set out concrete steps to build a Commonwealth for the 21st century. They issued a CHOGM Statement on Zimbabwe which mandated three Heads of Government to determine appropriate Commonwealth action on Zimbabwe. They welcomed the Report of the Commonwealth Committee on Terrorism and the Plan of Action based on their own Statement on Terrorism of 25 October 2001. They called for the constitution of a high-level expert group to recommend ways of carrying forward the Fancourt

Declaration, focusing more specifically on how democracies can best be supported in combating poverty.

December 2003, Abuja

In the Aso Rock Commonwealth Declaration, 'Development and Democracy: Partnership for Peace and Prosperity', Heads of Government committed themselves to making democracy work better for pro-poor development, and to an effective, equitable, rules-based multilateral trading system, developed under the auspices of the World Trade Organisation, to support pro-poor development and democracy. Annexed to the Declaration was the Aso Rock Statement on Multilateral Trade, which noted that "a multilateral trading system that is more responsive to the needs of developing countries is particularly important for the Commonwealth." Heads of Government also issued the CHOGM Statement on Zimbabwe, affirming the Commonwealth's commitment to encourage and assist in the process of national reconciliation. Zimbabwe withdrew from the Commonwealth.

November 2005, Valletta

In the Malta Declaration on Networking the Commonwealth for Development, Commonwealth leaders reaffirmed their commitment to develop a global partnership for development by making available the benefits of new technologies, particularly information and communication technologies, in partnership with the public and private sectors. In the Valletta

Statement on Multilateral Trade, the Heads of Government recognised the contribution of international trade to global prosperity, poverty elimination and sustainable development. They resolved to actively pursue a development-oriented Doha Development Agenda of the World Trade Organisation, including balanced agreements on non-agricultural market access, services, rules, trade facilitation and implementation issues. The Gozo Statement on Vulnerable Small States acknowledged the pressing need for firm, sustained and suitably resourced responses to the challenges and vulnerabilities of small states in the face of global climate change, drug trafficking, illegal migration, the impacts of HIV/AIDS and rising levels of youth unemployment. The leaders noted the efforts of small states in diversifying their economies and pledged their support and assistance.

November 2007, Kampala

Commonwealth leaders issued the Kampala Declaration on Transforming Societies to Achieve Political, Economic and Human Development, reaffirming their commitment to achieve a more equitable society through greater international collaboration and co-operation to attain progress for all citizens. They acknowledged that development rests on the foundations of democratic governance, the rule of law, respect for human rights, gender equality, and peace and security. In the Munyonyo Statement on Respect and Understanding, Heads of Government noted the need to build on and extend existing

Commonwealth programmes at national and international levels to promote tolerance and understanding of diversity among and within different societies, cultures and communities. The Lake Victoria Commonwealth Climate Change Action Plan recognised the threat to the survival of some Commonwealth countries, particularly small island states. Leaders stressed that climate change can undermine efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. They agreed that measures to tackle the impacts of climate change should support the positive economic and social transformation of societies. In the Kampala Communiqué, leaders agreed on Commonwealth membership criteria which, among other things, requires the applicant country to have a historic constitutional association with an existing Commonwealth member country, and to accept and comply with the fundamental values and principles of the association. **Kamalesh Sharma, India's High Commissioner to the UK, was elected as the fifth Commonwealth Secretary-General, commencing service on 1 April 2008.**

June 2008, London

Commonwealth leaders from 11 member countries met at a special meeting at Marlborough House, London, UK, to identify underlying principles and actions that should be taken, as a global priority, to achieve reform of international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and lead to new institutions where necessary.

They agreed that these institutions as well as their policies and instruments should be redefined to better serve the needs of all members and the broader global community. The leaders concurred that well designed international institutions have a fundamental role to support all countries to meet their economic, political, humanitarian and security challenges. Through collective co-operation, embodied in international institutions, they noted that the global community will foster the conditions for a fully inclusive and equitable global society. The leaders stressed that the commitment of the world's major powers to multilateralism and its underlying values remains central to any successful settlement on a new architecture of international institutions in this century. They recognised the strength of multilateral co-operation founded on consensus among countries with diverse backgrounds, interests and cultures. They expressed commitment to reform that will create an effective multilateral system, and that supports a more democratic global society with greater equity and fairness, with the new generation of international organisations reflecting a new co-operative spirit. Commonwealth leaders stated that a new system of environmental governance must be fully integrated with development priorities and concerns, and be responsive to the needs of countries, particularly for the smallest, poorest and most environmentally vulnerable countries. They agreed on the need to develop a financing mechanism that underpins the linkage between development

and the environment, and which supports investment in long-term sources of energy and environmental efficiency. Leaders also stated that a comprehensive system of international governance is essential, and collaboration is necessary to meet current and projected environmental efficiency.

September 2008, New York

Commonwealth leaders convened at an extraordinary meeting to discuss progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the role that the Commonwealth can play in achieving these Goals by 2015, and the outcomes of their discussions were carried forward to the UN High Level Event on the MDGs. The leaders discussed continuing Commonwealth efforts to accelerate UN reform, to promote deeper reform in the World Bank and the IMF, to better meet contemporary needs, including enhanced support for small states and developing states, and to promote a new system for global environmental governance. Leaders also considered the impact of high food and associated input prices and the Commonwealth's role in addressing the challenges and opportunities for increasing global food production. They emphasised the importance of reform efforts being inclusive, so that all states, irrespective of size and strength have the opportunity to participate and contribute to global discussions on the issue. They agreed to pursue reform of the current global arrangements for managing the environment and development.

Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM)

YEAR	VENUE	COUNTRY
2009	Port of Spain	Trinidad and Tobago
2008**	New York London	USA United Kingdom
2007	Kampala	Uganda
2005	Valletta	Malta
2003	Abuja	Nigeria
2002	Coolum	Australia
1999	Durban	South Africa
1997	Edinburgh	United Kingdom
1995	Auckland	New Zealand
1993	Limassol	Cyprus
1991	Harare	Zimbabwe
1989	Kuala Lumpur	Malaysia
1987	Vancouver	Canada
1986*	London	United Kingdom
1985	Nassau	The Bahamas

YEAR	VENUE	COUNTRY
1983	New Delhi	India
1981	Melbourne	Australia
1979	Lusaka	Zambia
1977	London	United Kingdom
1975	Kingston	Jamaica
1973	Ottawa	Canada
1971	Singapore	Singapore

** *Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting on the Reform of International Institutions, London, UK, June 2008; and Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting on the Millennium Development Goals, New York, USA, September 2008*

* *Commonwealth Heads of Government Review Meeting, London, UK, 1986*

A large, light blue graphic on the right side of the page. It features a stylized sun with many thin, pointed rays emanating from a central circular area. This central area is overlaid with a grid pattern, resembling a globe or a map of the world. The entire graphic is semi-transparent and set against a light blue background.

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