



Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting

Republic of Trinidad & Tobago, 27-29 November
2009

Trinidad & Tobago Affirmation on Commonwealth Values and Principles

1. We, the Heads of Government of the Commonwealth, meeting in Port of Spain in this the 60th anniversary year of the modern Commonwealth, take pride in our collective achievements over the past six decades and, as we look to the future, reaffirm our strong and abiding commitment to the Commonwealth's fundamental values and principles.
2. We reaffirm that the special strength of the Commonwealth lies in the diversity of its membership, bound together not only by shared history and tradition but also by an ethos of respect for all states and peoples, of shared values and principles, and of concern for the vulnerable.
3. We reaffirm our belief in the Commonwealth as a voluntary association of sovereign independent states whose pursuit of common principles continues to influence international society to the benefit of all. We are resolved to make the Commonwealth an even stronger and more effective international organisation as we look ahead to the rest of the 21st century.
4. We recall earlier statements through which the Commonwealth's values and principles have been defined and strengthened over the years, including the Singapore Declaration, the Harare Declaration, the Millbrook Action Programme, the Latimer House Principles and the Aberdeen Principles.

Our Values and Principles

5. We solemnly reiterate our commitment to the Commonwealth's core values:
 - International peace and security: believing firmly that international peace and security, economic growth and development and the rule

of law are essential to the progress and prosperity of all; and expressing our commitment to an effective multilateral system based on inclusiveness, equity and international law as the best foundation for achieving consensus and progress on major global challenges;

- Democracy: reaffirming our belief in the inalienable right of the individual to participate by means of free and democratic political processes in shaping the society in which they live; underlining that not only governments but all political parties and civil society also have responsibilities in upholding and promoting democratic culture and practices as well as accountability to the public in this regard; and recognising that parliaments and representative local government and other forms of local governance, are essential elements in the exercise of democratic governance;
- Human rights: reaffirming our commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and human rights covenants and instruments; and recalling our belief that equality and respect for protection and promotion of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights for all without discrimination on any grounds, including the right to development, are foundations of peaceful, just and stable societies, and that these rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated and cannot be implemented selectively;
- Tolerance, respect and understanding: recognising that tolerance respect and understanding strengthen democracy and development; recognising also that respect for the dignity of all human beings is critical to promoting peace and prosperity;
- Separation of powers: recognising the importance of maintaining the integrity of the roles of the Executive, Legislature and Judiciary;
- Rule of law: reiterating that each country's Legislature, Executive and Judiciary are the guarantors of the rule of law and emphasising that access to justice and an independent judiciary are fundamental to the rule of law, enhanced by effective, transparent, ethical and accountable governance;
- Freedom of expression: emphasising that peaceful, open dialogue and the free flow of information, including through a free, vibrant and professional media, enhance democratic traditions and strengthen democratic processes;

- Development: stressing the importance of economic and social transformation to, *inter alia*, eliminate poverty and meet the basic needs of the vast majority of the people of the world; seeking the removal of wide disparities and unequal living standards, guided by the Millennium Development Goals; reiterating that economic and social progress enhances the sustainability of democracy;
- Gender equality: reaffirming gender equality and empowerment as an essential component of human development and basic human rights, and acknowledging the advancement of women's rights as a critical precondition for effective and sustainable development;
- Access to health and education: reaffirming our commitment to health and education for all citizens, both as human rights and as instruments for poverty alleviation and sustainable development; and
- Good governance: reiterating our commitment to promote the rule of law, ensure transparency and accountability and root out, both at national and international levels, systemic and systematic corruption.
- Civil society: acknowledging the important role that civil society plays in our communities and nations as partners in promoting and supporting Commonwealth values and the interests of the people.

6. We reiterate our commitment to the core principles of consensus and common action, mutual respect, inclusiveness, transparency, accountability, legitimacy, and responsiveness.

Working Together to Strengthen our Values and Principles: Looking to the Future

7. We reaffirm our full support for the Good Offices role of the Secretary-General in supporting adherence to Commonwealth principles; in conflict prevention and resolution; and as an instrument to protect and promote the Commonwealth's fundamental values.

8. We recognise the vital role of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) as the custodian of the Commonwealth's fundamental political values. We call on CMAG to explore ways in which it could more effectively deal with the

full range of serious or persistent violations of such values by member states and to pronounce upon them as appropriate.

9. We also express our continuing support for the Commonwealth Secretariat's work on strengthening democratic institutions, processes and culture. In this context, we welcome the Secretariat's collaboration with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF) and other relevant organisations to promote best practice and democratic culture.

10. We underscore the importance of coherence in order to protect the Commonwealth's image and credibility. We urge all Commonwealth organisations to subscribe and adhere to Commonwealth values and principles in every possible way, including by acting in conformity with the letter and spirit of the decisions of CMAG.

11. Acknowledging the key role of elections in furthering and entrenching democratic processes and accountability, and affirming our commitment to the Commonwealth Secretariat's work in strengthening democratic institutions, processes and culture through election observation, we endorse the proposed Commonwealth Network of National Election Management Bodies, which would facilitate experience sharing and serve to create support mechanisms, promote good practices and facilitate opportunities for peer support across the Commonwealth, thus enhancing member countries' capacity to hold credible elections which enjoy the confidence of the people. Through this Network, we envisage the Commonwealth advancing the norm of the highest electoral standards.

12. We welcome forward-looking, contemporary and innovative initiatives that generate and strengthen creative networking and partnerships within the Commonwealth community, and that underpin adherence to the Commonwealth's fundamental values and principles, mindful especially of the theme of the 2009 CHOGM, *Partnering for a More Equitable and Sustainable Future*. In that regard, we endorse the proposed Commonwealth Partnership Platform Portal, and encourage support for it.

13. We note the need to strengthen Commonwealth processes, institutional frameworks and capacities for delivering collective action and global public goods as highlighted by the Report of the High Level Group in 2001/02 and the 'Commonwealth Conversation'. We call for the creation of an Eminent Persons Group to undertake an examination of options for reform in order to bring the Commonwealth's many institutions into a stronger and more effective framework of cooperation and partnership. We are committed to securing a greater level of

coordination and collaboration between all Commonwealth contributors and stake-holders, particularly including governments, civil society, business, the diversity of Commonwealth professional and other associations that bring together our citizens, academia and others.

14. We call for the Commonwealth Secretary-General to consolidate and further strengthen ongoing efforts to improve the Secretariat's governance, its responsiveness to changing priorities and needs, and its ability to enhance the public profile of the organisation. We commit ourselves to supporting the Secretariat in this endeavour. We also underline the importance we attach to intensifying the Secretariat's commitment to strategic partnerships with other international organisations and partners in order to promote the Commonwealth's values and principles.

15. We call for the Eminent Persons Group to examine, *inter alia*, the format, frequency, and content of Ministerial meetings in order to ensure that these continue to support the Commonwealth's values and principles, and provide the greatest possible addition of value and cost-effectiveness. We affirm that such meetings should also continue to have mandates that are focused; time-bound; affordable; of the highest possible relevance at the national level and in international exchanges; and are delivered.

16. By these and other practical measures, we believe that the Commonwealth will build a stronger and more resilient and progressive family of nations founded on enduring values and principles. By such measures, we also believe that the Commonwealth will remain relevant to its times and people in future.

Port of Spain
Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

29 November 2009