

International Human Rights Day

Message by Commonwealth Secretary-General Kamallesh Sharma

We greet and celebrate International Human Rights Day, which upholds also the centrality of human rights among the Commonwealth's fundamental values, in this 60th anniversary year of the modern Commonwealth. Only two weeks ago, Commonwealth Heads of Government renewed their commitment to human rights, 'without discrimination on any grounds', as fundamental Commonwealth values in the Trinidad and Tobago Affirmation on Commonwealth Values and Principles.

The Commonwealth shares its anniversary with the 30th anniversary of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the 20th anniversary of the Convention of the Rights of the Child. Today, we also honour the adoption by the UN General Assembly of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948.

The theme adopted by the United Nations for this year's International Human Rights Day, "Embrace Diversity, End Discrimination", is very much at the heart of the Commonwealth's affirmation of human rights. The world has seen the Commonwealth exemplify the positive potential of collective activity that draws on diversity. The Commonwealth has also demonstrated its implacable opposition to racism, especially in apartheid South Africa, and has continued to promote non-discrimination and equality for its nearly two billion citizens.

This year's International Human Rights Day theme prompts the Commonwealth to work with renewed vigour to combat all forms of discrimination in line with its Trinidad and Tobago Affirmation. The Commonwealth will stand together in efforts to ensure that Commonwealth values and principles are promoted and upheld for all, being born free and equal in dignity and rights. We need to redouble our efforts to maximise the power of diversity and to fight discrimination as the basis for sustainable peace and development for all.