

Respecting difference, promoting understanding

Commonwealth Day

Monday 12 March 2007

A message from Her Majesty The Queen, Head of the Commonwealth

Today's Commonwealth is home to nearly a third of the world's population. Its almost two billion citizens come from so many faiths, races, cultures and traditions.

I think that one of the reasons for the success of this organisation is that it draws not only on certain shared values, but also from the principles and practices of everyday life, which can be observed day after day in the cities, towns and villages of our 53 member countries.

Over thousands of years, the very basis of community life has been the pooling together by individuals of their resources and skills.

Rather than having to be good at everything, people were able to practise their own skill or craft. The lesson of community life is that to flourish we must help each other. To do this, there has to be a sense of fairness, a real understanding of others' needs and aspirations, and a willingness to contribute.

Despite its size and scale, the Commonwealth to me is still at heart a collection of villages. In close-knit communities like these, there are beliefs and values we share and cherish. We know that helping others will lead to greater security and prosperity for ourselves.

Because we feel this way, our governments and peoples aim to work even more closely together. And as individuals, we find that taking part in Commonwealth activities can be inspirational and personally rewarding.

In today's difficult and sometimes divided world, I believe that it is more important than ever to keep trying to respect and understand each other better. Each and every one of us has hopes, needs, and priorities. Each of us is an individual, with ties of emotion and bonds of obligation – to culture, religion, community, country and beyond. In short, each of us is special.

The more we see others in this way, the more we can understand them and their points of view. In what we think and say and do, let us as individuals actively seek out the views of others; let us make the best use of what our beliefs and history teach us; let us have open minds and hearts; and let us, like the Commonwealth, find our diversity a cause for celebration and a source of strength and unity.

This is a thought worth bearing in mind as we gather on Commonwealth Day: we are a thriving community; we value our past; we make the most of our present; and we are working together to build our future. By respecting difference and promoting understanding, that future will be a better one for us all.

Elizabeth R.
12 March 2007