

**Address by
Commonwealth Secretary-General Kamalesh Sharma
at a reception hosted by
HM The Queen
Buckingham Palace
to celebrate the Commonwealth's 60th anniversary
28 April 2009**

Your Majesty, Your Royal Highnesses, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

We are elated to be part of this milestone event: the Commonwealth, sixty years young, becomes a senior citizen, and earns itself a bus pass for many future journeys

For many of us, the Commonwealth is an affair of the heart.

It inspires the warmth and trust that comes from a sense of deep, inexpressible belonging; of a Commonwealth way of doing things; above all, of a very special community.

On five continents and three oceans, in large countries and small, rich and poor, and amongst peoples of every colour and creed, we are *The Commonwealth*.

Tonight we thank our gracious host, Her Majesty The Queen, the symbol of our association, and – I would say, alongside the values which underpin this organisation – its mainstay and inspiration.

Thank you, Your Majesty – not just for hosting us tonight, but for the unfailing support and direction which you have given us over 57 glorious years – and counting.

Ma'am, it was on this very day 60 years ago, in this very Palace, that your father, King George VI, called an unprecedented audience with the eight Commonwealth leaders who had just signed the London Declaration.

He praised them for their '*adaptability*', for their '*wisdom*', and for their '*toleration*'.

The new arrangement would, said the King, '*redound to the greater happiness of millions*'.

And so, I believe, it has.

The qualities he commended then, are happily still with us.

We have remained the organisation of values; the organisation that tends to its small states and its vulnerable states; the organisation which – in countless

ways – has been ahead of its time, and a pioneer for the wider, global, community.

... And so we extend our warm greetings to all guests here tonight, and particularly to Presidents Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia and Guido de Marco of Malta, and to my fellow Commonwealth Secretaries-General – Sir Shridath Ramphal, Chief Emeka Anyaoku and Sir Donald McKinnon.

All four of us, I know, salute the memory of Arnold Smith, the very first Secretary-General.

But, just as much, I am proud to recognise *everyone* here – servants of the Commonwealth: the essence of its ideals; the practitioners of its magic.

And I warmly welcome the many new faces here tonight – the young people who will inherit and shape this 21st century – ‘the new generation’ which this association now serves.

We value the many contributions which they have already made, and those to come.

I urge them to live out and advance Commonwealth values in their lives, and to work together to meet our shared challenges of promoting democracy, development and diversity.

In our anniversary year of 2009 we have celebrated in thought, and word, and deed and in music.

So our final thanks go to the composer Paul Carroll, and to all who have worked so hard to give us a Commonwealth cantata for this special occasion.

This is our diamond anniversary.

And diamonds, we know, are forever.