

SPEECH BY THE AUSTRALIAN PRIME MINISTER, JULIA GILLARD

COMMONWEALTH HEADS OF GOVERNMENT MEETING

OFFICIAL OPENING CEREMONY 2011

[Check against delivery]

Your Majesty

Your Royal Highness

Her Excellency the Governor General

His Excellency Mr Bryce

Secretary General

Fellow Commonwealth leaders

Premier Barnett

Ministerial and Parliamentary colleagues

Delegates from around the Commonwealth

Other distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

I extend a very warm welcome to all leaders and delegates to this great city of Perth.

A city so emblematic of the resilience and optimism of the Australian character.

A city that looks out along the arc running from Asia and the Subcontinent to Africa where so much of the Commonwealth's history has been written.

It is the story of an Empire with a complex past, that chose to reinvent itself as a free association of nations, drawn from all six inhabited continents, and from many backgrounds, faiths and cultures.

The strength and success of our fellowship is no accident.

It comes from a commitment to make Commonwealth values real and present in the life of each member nation.

And to ensure those member nations that fall short understand that their peers want to see change.

Unlike other global bodies united by practical concerns such as commerce or trade, we are also joined by a very different motivation.

We are a "Commonwealth of values".

Shared values of peace, democracy, racial equality, the rule of law and a commitment to social and economic progress.

Shared values freely embraced and consensually expressed.

Values we can put to work in addressing some of the most pressing concerns that face our world like climate change, financial stability and food security.

The Commonwealth is vital to addressing such challenges.

Representing 54 nations and one-third of the world's people, how could it be otherwise?

But we also must be a more agile Commonwealth, equipped to respond when our values are tested and to speak clearly when our voice needs to be heard.

At Port of Spain we re-affirmed the special strengths that come from our unique heritage but we also resolved to make the Commonwealth stronger.

Friends, 2011 is a fitting moment for reflection and renewal because it marks the 80th anniversary of our association.

80 years since our predecessors endorsed the Statute of Westminster in 1931.

That year saw Gandhi imprisoned in the struggle for India's freedom.

Australia marvelled at the batting feats of a young cricketer called Bradman.

And a baby named Desmond Tutu was born in a remote town in the Transvaal.

Recently Archbishop Tutu celebrated his 80th birthday, and it is amazing to think of the changes that have occurred in just one lifetime:

The Cold War has come and gone.

New challenges like Aids and climate change have emerged.

Marvellous new technologies like the Internet have transformed the way we live.

The world has changed, and a wise institution changes too.

So as the Commonwealth journeys towards its centenary, it is time for renewal.

To answer the question posed of our organisation – how do we best pursue our timeless values in a world of change?

Let us make CHOGM 2011 memorable for answering this question.

Memorable for being the Meeting that gave the Commonwealth the direction it needed at a time of global uncertainty and risk.

In so doing, we will be faithful to our values, and faithful to the people who have sent us here.

May we prove worthy custodians of the trust they have placed in us.

And ensure our Commonwealth values speak as clearly to future generations as they have to the past.

On behalf of the Australian people, I am deeply honoured to be your Host.

And I wish this for our meeting – that we each give our best to achieve the best for all of our nations.

[End]