

Deputy chair of the Pan-Commonwealth Youth Caucus, Rebecca Solomon, at the start of the 18th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers Youth Forum

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Mauritius

Minister of Youth and Sports of Mauritius Satyaprakash Ritoo

Commonwealth Deputy Secretary-General Mmassekgoa Masire-Mwamba

Director, Curriculum and Evaluation Ministry for Education and Human Resources of Mauritius, C. Dookhony

Youth and Student Leaders from Africa, Asia, Caribbean and the Pacific

Other Distinguished Guests

Members of the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen

In December 2010 in Chandigarh, India, I was elected to serve as deputy chair of the Pan-Commonwealth Youth Caucus. I was elected with one clear mandate: to work with others to strengthen the participation and voice of youth in the Commonwealth. Commonwealth youth leaders from every region have taken a long hard look at the state of youth engagement and representation in the Commonwealth and we believe the time has come for change in the Commonwealth.

In 2009 at the 17th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (CCEM), youth expressed the need for their voice to be heard at all levels of decision-making across the Commonwealth. The Pan-Commonwealth Youth Caucus then formed an Education Sub-Committee where regional consultations were conducted and the message there was the same: "An official establishment of a Commonwealth student body to ensure that youth voices are being heard and well represented in the Commonwealth." I want to acknowledge the Education Sub-Committee for the very hard work done on behalf of the youth of the Commonwealth.

On that same note, on behalf of the chair of the Pan-Commonwealth Youth Caucus and the executive, I would also like to congratulate you for making it to 18CCEM, a conference that would provide us with another opportunity to make a difference for youths in the Commonwealth, with the aim of establishing the Commonwealth Student Body.

When we consider the Commonwealth demographic trends, the challenges and also the opportunity for the youth are apparent. We know that Commonwealth youth are well-educated, vibrant, dynamic, young and a talented workforce. When I look around the room this afternoon I am convinced that the Commonwealth youth around the world are in good hands, we can make the change happen.

We all understand that life can be rather complicated and I cannot explain it in a way that will encourage us to live with its complexity but two things stand out:

1. Young people will be the elders for tomorrow
2. We need each other

You will not be a youth forever. The first principal clearly indicates to us today that this ageing process will eventually move us out of this stage of life to another stage, but when you do you can

ask yourself: what mark/contribution did you make as youth? There is however a consensus that the effect of ageing reaches deep into our beings. The second principle “we need each other” is one of the reasons why we have the Commonwealth of Nations whereby the under-privileged can learn from the privileged, the uneducated will learn from the educated, the weak will learn from the strong, and so on in spite of the language we speak, our race and our nationalities. These two principles will somehow direct us to understand ourselves. It is a very important fact of life that each one of us must understand who he/she is, what he/she can do, how he/she can do to move on in life, and only then he/she can understand the people around him/her. To “be the change” is to be humble. Humility is a necessary virtue in life if we are to accept to be honest to ourselves and others. It does not restrict us to accept tragedy. Humility is quite compatible with feelings of joy and self-respect.

Every one of us here today is being directed by a call of passion to duty. The call takes different forms for different people, some people hear it, some people feel it, and others just come to know it. However there are people who search long and hard for their callings. Some people prepare themselves for it and yet wait for a long time, but sadly some will miss their callings. This is your time, this is your space, make the best out of the opportunity to make the change. Our calling always helps us find our vision. It is better to be aware of our special journey and follow it than to be followers of other people. Without our own visions we may be tempted to retreat to the crowd and do whatever it takes to maintain refuge there. Let us pursue our vision in order to achieve an identity of our own. We can know and enjoy the glory of working our own road. We are here today not because we choose to come but rather it is an opportunity given to each one of us to help to improve the world we are living in. In other words, make the changes to make it a better place.

Considering the theme “Be the Change”, it is rather difficult for us to make changes in others and in our environment without making the changes to ourselves first. Psychologist Carl Rogers said, and I quote: “When I accept myself as I am, then I change”. If I can manage a change in myself I can courageously go about the changes in my environment. Remember it is not how we spend our time, it is about how we will make our contributions. It is important for each one of us to understand that it is a very difficult task to decide exactly what can be changed and what cannot be changed. So it will be a collective decision out of long and free deliberations. I want to leave with you the words of St Francis of Assisi today as a challenge and prayer for each one of us.

“God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.”

Our very first challenge is to accept our present circumstances as they are, ourselves as we are, and the people about us as they are, and only then we can somehow manage to make some changes. It must be clear to us that there are things about ourselves which we cannot change without the help of other people.

It is my hope that during our deliberations together we will come to understand and make use of all the opportunities and put our potential into action, and to have courage to make changes in our lives and in doing so influence changes in our respective countries. Make the change fellow delegates, but let the change begin with you.