



THE ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY
AT THE COMMONWEALTH CLUB

Science to be at the heart of Britain's largest inter-faith gathering

Commonwealth Day, on Monday 8th March, will be marked in London by an Observance at Westminster Abbey. For the first time, Britain's largest inter-faith service will put science and technology centre stage.

Organised by The Royal Commonwealth Society on behalf of the Council of Commonwealth Societies, this annual event is attended by HM The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh. This year, they will be joined by HRH The Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall.

In recognition of the role played by scientific achievement in the advancement of societies the world over, The Queen will lay a wreath at the tomb of Sir Isaac Newton.

The UK's Young Scientist of the Year, Peter Hatfield, will conduct a live experiment in the Abbey and will be joined by leading young scientists from India, Malawi and Kenya.

Commonwealth leaders including the current Chairperson-in-office, Prime Minister Patrick Manning of Trinidad and Tobago and the President of the Commonwealth's newest member, Paul Kagame, will also attend. They will be joined in the Abbey by more than 1,000 schoolchildren, as well as hundreds of VIPs.

Representatives of all the major Christian denominations will take part, alongside faith leaders from the Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh, Baha'i, Zoroastrian and Jain communities, their collective participation reflecting the unity and diversity of the Commonwealth.

The Commonwealth theme for 2010, and the focus of the Observance, will be 'Science, Technology and Society'. Musical performances from around the world will include the debut of a newly created Commonwealth Choir.

Commonwealth Secretary-General, Kamalesh Sharma said: "It was our Heads of Government who in 1975 chose the second Monday of March as Commonwealth Day, since on that day all Commonwealth children in 54 countries – north and south, east and west – are in school. It is a day to inspire young people about a community of shared values, shared aspirations, and shared responses to shared challenges. Science and technology have brought transformative progress: our challenge is to ensure that this progress is shared by all, the world over."

The Lord Watson of Richmond CBE, Chair of the Council of Commonwealth Societies said: "The Commonwealth is unique. It encompasses great diversity, yet produces intimate and invaluable dialogue in discussing shared

challenges and opportunities. It has all the energy of populations that are young and that now inherit not only history but a future shaped by science and technology. Commonwealth Day and our observance of it celebrate this extraordinary human collaboration and above all rejoice in the potential of the Commonwealth."

Clare Matterson, Director of Medical Humanities and Engagement at the Wellcome Trust said: "This year's theme of science, technology and society complements our aim to improve understanding of the ways science and medicine have developed, and how research affects people and society today. We are delighted to have been able to support this event in bringing together and inspiring the scientists of the future, particularly those from developing Commonwealth countries".

Notes to Editors

The Observance is by invitation only. Any press interested in attending the event, should contact Duncan Jeffery at Westminster Abbey:
+44 (0) 20 7654 4888, duncan.jeffery@westminster-abbey.org.

All other press enquiries should be directed to Joanna Bennett at The Royal Commonwealth Society: joanna.bennett@thercs.org, +44 (0) 20 7766 9240.

Doors to the Abbey will open at 1.45pm. Guests must be seated by 2.45pm and the Observance will begin at 3.15pm.

The Royal Commonwealth Society: Founded in 1868, the RCS conducts a range of events and activities aimed at promoting international understanding. These include educational, youth and cultural programmes from the world's oldest and largest school's essay competition, to an innovative youth leadership programme. HM Queen Elizabeth II is Patron and Peter Kellner is Chairman. Headquartered at the Commonwealth Club in London, the RCS has some 5000 members in the UK and a presence in 40 Commonwealth countries through a network of branches and Commonwealth societies. The RCS is a registered charity in England & Wales (226748). www.thercs.org

The Council of Commonwealth Societies: A group of Commonwealth civil society organisations and partners, the CCS aims to promote understanding of the people and cultures of the Commonwealth through the celebration of Commonwealth Day both in the UK and internationally. Its Chairman is Lord Watson of Richmond CBE.

The Wellcome Trust: We are a global charity dedicated to achieving extraordinary improvements in human and animal health. We support the brightest minds in biomedical research and the medical humanities. Our breadth of support includes public engagement, education and the application of research to improve health. We are independent of both political and commercial interests. www.wellcome.co.uk

To find out more about the Commonwealth theme for 2010 – Science, Technology and Society – visit: <http://www.sci-tech-soc.org/>