



# The Commonwealth Conversation

HOSTED BY THE ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY

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## **Global polls show Commonwealth popular in developing countries but underrated in richer countries**

Nationally representative surveys in seven Commonwealth countries (Australia, Canada, Great Britain, India, Jamaica, Malaysia and South Africa) are published today by the Royal Commonwealth Society to launch 'The Commonwealth Conversation'. This large-scale public consultation across five continents, to mark the Commonwealth's 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, will look at the future of the 53-member association, what it should focus on and how it can raise its profile.

On average, people in developing countries were twice as likely to think the Commonwealth was important compared to developed countries. Indians value the Commonwealth more than America or South Asia. South Africans value it more than America or Africa. Yet, Canadians are four times more likely to value America higher, Australians are twice as likely to value Asia higher, and the Commonwealth comes a distant third behind Europe and America to Britons.

Only about a third of Australians or Canadians would be sorry or appalled if their country left the Commonwealth, compared to two-thirds of Indians and Malaysians. In general, of the countries polled, the Commonwealth was least valued in Great Britain.

Levels of knowledge about the Commonwealth are low. Only a third of people polled could name any activity carried out by the Commonwealth and only half knew the Queen was the head. A quarter of Jamaicans think President Barack Obama is the head, and one in ten Indians and South Africans think Kofi Annan is head.

### **Dr Danny Sriskandarajah, Director of the Royal Commonwealth Society said:**

"At sixty not out and with some big hits along the way, the Commonwealth has had a strong innings so far. But now we need to find a second wind to make the century.

While few people dislike the Commonwealth, our polls show that not enough people know much about it or have reason to love it. The Commonwealth Conversation is a rare and important opportunity for people to shape the future of their association."

### **Asked to comment, Rt. Hon. David Milliband MP, UK Foreign Secretary said:**

"There are two billion people out there who are members of the Commonwealth family and I don't think we have done a good enough job talking to them about the future of the Commonwealth.

The Commonwealth was founded on the basis of strong shared values but it needs to prove its worth. I think that can not just be done by the elites of the Commonwealth. It needs to be driven forward on a wider scale and that's why I welcome not just the substance of the Conversation but the process as well."

Asked to comment, **H.E. Kamalesh Sharma, Commonwealth Secretary-General** said:

“It is very important that there is a continuing dialogue about the Commonwealth among its peoples. I therefore welcome the Commonwealth Conversation, and look forward to the new ideas that it will bring.”

### **Notes to Editors**

**Commonwealth Conversation:** The Commonwealth Conversation will be launched in London at the headquarters of the Royal Commonwealth Society (RCS) at 12.15 GMT (13.15 BST) on Monday, 20 July 2009 by the Director of the RCS and UK Secretary of State for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The RCS will present the poll results, and the Foreign Secretary will launch a paper outlining the UK’s position.

The centrepiece of the Commonwealth Conversation will be an open, interactive website that will host discussions and invite ideas. Several notable people have already contributed, including President Nasheed of the Maldives, Pakistani cricketer and politician Imran Khan, and former Private Secretary to the Her Majesty the Queen, Lord Robin Janvrin. The Conversation will also involve offline discussion groups, expert meetings and other events around the Commonwealth. Findings from the Conversation will be presented to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Trinidad and Tobago in November 2009. A final report will be published in early 2010.

**Website:** [www.thecommonwealthconversation.org](http://www.thecommonwealthconversation.org) (to be formally launched on 20 July)

**The Commonwealth:** The modern Commonwealth was established with 8 members in 1949. In 2009, it has 53 members with a total population of nearly 2 billion. It is an association of governments and peoples, built around shared language, institutions, challenges, aspirations and values. The Commonwealth promotes democracy, development, and diversity within its member countries and across the world.

**The RCS:** The RCS is the oldest and largest civil society organisation devoted to the Commonwealth. Founded in 1868, the RCS conducts a range of events and activities aimed at promoting international understanding. Headquartered at the Commonwealth Club in London, the RCS has some 5000 members in the UK and a presence in some 40 Commonwealth countries through a network of branches and Commonwealth societies.

**Polling methodology:** The surveys were carried out between 26 June 2009 and 13 July 2009 (except in Great Britain where they were conducted in March 2009). The surveys were carried out online by YouGov Plc, except the Jamaican survey which was conducted over the telephone by Hope Enterprises Ltd. Each survey had a sample size from 500 to 2,119 respondents, and was representative of the adult population of each country. Full results are available on request.

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