



The Commonwealth Conversation

HOSTED BY THE ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY

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Leaders heed Commonwealth Conversation findings

In a closing statement from the Port of Spain Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) yesterday, Commonwealth leaders recognised the work carried out by the Royal Commonwealth Society in the Commonwealth Conversation and called for the creation of an Eminent Persons' Group to look at options for reform.

The Commonwealth Conversation is a global public consultation on the future of the Commonwealth which, so far, has engaged tens of thousands of people worldwide. Emerging findings were published last week ahead of the CHOGM in a report entitled 'Common What?'. The report called for the Commonwealth to be bold in rebuilding its worryingly low profile, by focusing on three Ps: Principles, Priorities and People.

In the *Trinidad & Tobago Affirmation on Commonwealth Values and Principles* released yesterday, leaders took note of many of the major findings of the Conversation:

- They recognised the need to 'enhance the public **profile** of the organisation' and underscored 'the importance of coherence in order to protect the Commonwealth's image and credibility'.
- They restated the core values and **principles** of the Commonwealth, recognised the vital role of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) as their custodian, and called on CMAG 'to explore ways in which it could effectively deal with the full range of serious or persistent violations of such values by member states'.
- They called for the Commonwealth Secretary-General to 'consolidate and further strengthen ongoing efforts to improve the Secretariat's governance [and] its responsiveness to changing **priorities** and needs'.
- They recognised the importance of the **people** in the Commonwealth and they 'committed to securing a greater level of coordination and collaboration between all Commonwealth contributors and stake-holders, particularly including governments, civil society, business, the diversity of commonwealth professional and other associations that bring together our citizens, academia and others'.

The full declaration can be downloaded here:

<http://www.thecommonwealth.org/files/216908/FileName/TrinidadandTobagoAffirmationonCommonwealthValuesandPrinciples.pdf>

Dr Danny Sriskandarajah, Director of the Royal Commonwealth Society, said: "The Royal Commonwealth Society is delighted that Commonwealth leaders have listened to the voices of the people through the Commonwealth Conversation. We hope that all Commonwealth organisations will join us in seeking to implement this mandate to revitalise the Commonwealth. We particularly look forward to supporting the Eminent Persons' Group as it explores options for reform."

Notes to Editors

Commonwealth Conversation: On 20 July 2009, the RCS launched the ‘Commonwealth Conversation’, the largest-ever public consultation on the future of the Commonwealth. The centrepiece of the Commonwealth Conversation is an open, interactive website to host discussions and invite ideas. (www.thecommonwealthconversation.org) The Conversation has also involved:

- Nationally representative opinion polls in 7 Commonwealth countries with a combined sample of 6,200
- Over 30,000 visits to the website from almost all Commonwealth countries (and 100+ other countries)
- 1,500+ comments via the website, email and post
- Surveys of more than 1,250 people, including key opinion leaders, in over 40 countries
- Almost 70 events in 21 Commonwealth countries across all regions involving some 2,600 people
- Extensive media coverage, including 15 op-ed pieces in leading national newspapers around the Commonwealth
- 8 expert groups on key aspects of the Commonwealth’s work
- Bespoke online focus groups involving young people from around the Commonwealth

Copies of the report ‘*Common What? Emerging findings of the Commonwealth Conversation*’ can be downloaded from www.thecommonwealthconversation.org.

The Commonwealth Conversation is still ongoing and a final report will be published in early 2010.

The Royal Commonwealth Society: Founded in 1868, RCS conducts a range of events and activities aimed at promoting international understanding. 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) and conducts a number of educational, youth and cultural programmes across the Commonwealth, including one of the world’s largest school essay competitions and a youth leadership programme. It also organises numerous events dealing with issues of Commonwealth interest. See www.thercs.org.

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.

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