



**13/03/2017**

**VIDEO NEWS RELEASE: Her Majesty The Queen celebrates Commonwealth Day at Westminster Abbey**

Her Majesty The Queen, the Head of the Commonwealth, today attended the Commonwealth Service at Westminster Abbey to celebrate Commonwealth Day. The Queen was joined by TRH The Duke of Edinburgh, The Prince of Wales, The Duchess of Cornwall, Prince Harry, The Duke of York and The Earl of Wessex.

The Service was based around the 2017 Commonwealth theme, 'A Peace-building Commonwealth', and is the largest multi-faith celebration in the UK. Commonwealth Day 2017 marks 40 years since Commonwealth Day became a global celebration on the same day every year: the second Monday in March.

The Prime Minister of the UK, the Rt Hon Theresa May MP, was in attendance as well as High Commissioners, dignitaries from across the UK and around the Commonwealth, senior politicians, faith leaders and 800 school children and young people.

Highlights included Reflections from the Prime Minister of Malta and Chair-in-Office of the Commonwealth, the Hon Dr Joseph Muscat MP, and Cameroonian peace advocate Achaleke Christian Leke, a former victim of radicalisation and violence. The Commonwealth Secretary-General, the Rt Hon Patricia Scotland QC, led the Act of Affirmation to the Commonwealth.

Dame Jessica Ennis-Hill DBE and Ms Fadumo Olow, a young Muslim woman from the Youth Sport Trust, processed The Queen's Baton to the High Altar with Commonwealth athletes Anna Meares OAM and Kurt Fearnley OAM. The Queen's Baton arrived at Westminster Abbey from the Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games Queen's Baton Relay launch, which took place at Buckingham Palace in the morning. The Baton will travel through all Commonwealth member countries over 388 days, covering 230,000 kilometres to its final destination, the opening ceremony of the Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games.

The audience also enjoyed performances by Australian musician Cody Simpson, George the Poet, a British spoken-word performer of Ugandan heritage, Maltese poet Dr Immanuel Mifsud and Canadian Soprano Measha Brueggergosman. The event was broadcast live on BBC One and relayed live on BBC World Service.

**A number of interviews were conducted around the Service:**

On Commonwealth trade relations post-Brexit, **the Prime Minister of Malta, Dr Joseph Muscat MP**, who is currently both Chair-in-Office of the Commonwealth and leading Malta's Presidency of the EU in the first half of 2017, said: "There is a huge opportunity, not only for the UK, to have better relations and better trade relations amongst ourselves."

“We have some common rules, most of us have Common Law, which makes trade easier. What I think should be the role of the Commonwealth now is to help its smaller members to come up with the templates to have trade agreements with the UK and amongst themselves, now that there might be this window of opportunity. I see this as a positive aspect, both as a European and as a Commonwealth country.”

On the topic of trade among Commonwealth countries, **Baroness Anelay, Minister of State for the Foreign & Commonwealth Office**, said: “It’s more productive because it’s been proved it’s 19% cheaper to carry on trade within the Commonwealth than outside it. So it’s for every body’s benefit, but above all what it does is build prosperity for the next generation.”

**Geri Horner**, singer and Prince’s Trust Ambassador, who attended the Service, said: “More than ever the Commonwealth is needed, in the times that we live in. Today was a reminder that we need each other, even though we are all different. So to be able to celebrate that together, I felt very proud.”

“The one thing about music is that it doesn’t matter where you’re from, how old you are, old or young, whatever your culture, you can all nod your head to the same beat...Today is a reminder that it doesn’t matter if you are different, we can all together just get on with it, it’s a very positive message. What the Commonwealth stands for is a beautiful thing and so needed in this modern world we live in.”

Speaking about sport as a way to promote peace-building, **Dame Jessica Ennis-Hill DBE** said: “Sport is an incredible tool and it can bring so many people together...it is so powerful.”

**Achaleke Christian Leke**, the 2016 Commonwealth Young Person of the Year said: “I think peace-building starts from the heart...It doesn’t limit to the government, peace-building is a collective process.”

On The Queen’s Baton Relay launch on Commonwealth Day, **Tom Tate, the Mayor of Gold Coast** said: “It’s been marvellous, people have been so generous to make us feel so welcome. And to be sitting there with Her Majesty handing out The Queen’s Baton with her message to go throughout the Commonwealth is one of my proudest moments as Mayor of the City.”

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#### **Notes to Editors:**

**BROADCASTERS, AGENCIES AND ONLINE VIDEO SITES – A free-to-use Video News Release is available for download below:**

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B99sotFuWzoWQno3WHBXWTQ0Vm8/view?usp=sharing>

Video format: Quicktime H.264 1080i HD.

**Contains:**

-Overlay of HM The Queen, Duke of Edinburgh, Prince of Wales, Duchess of Cornwall arriving

**Grabs:**

- Joseph Muscat, Prime Minister of Malta
- Baroness Anelay, Minister of State for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, UK
- Geri Horner, Former Spice Girl and Prince's Trust ambassador
- Dame Jessica Ennis-Hill DBE, Olympic Gold medal winning athlete
- Achaleke Christian Leke, 2016 Commonwealth Young Person of the Year
- Tom Tate, Mayor of the Gold Coast, Australia

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**The Royal Commonwealth Society (RCS)**, founded in 1868, is a network of individuals and organisations committed to improving the lives and prospects of Commonwealth citizens around the world. Through youth empowerment, education and advocacy, the RCS promotes the value and values of the Commonwealth. [www.thercs.org](http://www.thercs.org)

The RCS organises the Commonwealth Service on behalf of the Council of Commonwealth Societies. Find out more: <https://www.thercs.org/our-work/commonwealth-day-service-2017/>.