



Press statement 15 May 2015

ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY CYGEN CONFERENCE CALLS FOR GREATER INVOLVEMENT OF WOMEN IN PEACEBUILDING

The Commonwealth Youth Gender and Equality Network meeting in Malta has heard how Commonwealth Countries must include women in politics to avoid future conflict. The Royal Commonwealth Society has brought together young gender specialists and advocates from 22 countries and every region of the Commonwealth to discuss vital gender issues in the lead up to the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Malta in November.

Issues discussed have included child marriage, sexual and reproductive health and rights, equal access to education, sexual orientation and gender identity, and governance across all societies. Women have been marginalised from politics in many countries across the Commonwealth. The UK's MPs are 30% women; far behind the Commonwealth leader, Rwanda which has 64% female MPs. Out of the 53 Commonwealth member states only 4 have female Heads of Government.

The forum heard about the dangers of excluding women and girls from politics. Experts spoke of women becoming victims of violence, suffering sexual violence in conflict and being exposed to radicalisation and involvement in terrorism where they are excluded.

The Head of the Commonwealth Gender Division, Kemi Ogunsanya speaking on the transformative power of women said: "They have a critical role to play and in situations of conflict, women are most likely to be the victims of sexual slavery and violence. But many have been able to transform their pain and discomfort to become heads of households. They become custodians of culture".

Participants have also articulated how young girls and young people more generally must be included in politics. Kemi invoked the name of the famous Pakistani Nobel Peace Prize Winner, Malala Yousafzai, "Malala is an image of what we wish to be. We need to groom more Malala's to have that voice."

Pakistani education activist Gulalai Ismail, said: "We need more young women in leadership, we need to increase the focus on their education, we need to provide platforms for girls so they can advocate on these issues".

The CYGEN conference is the first of its type in bringing young Commonwealth citizens together to use their common connections across the 53 nation family to form a youth network for specifically for gender equality.

It's hoped that the outcomes and objectives reached by the youth network will feed into the first-ever Women's Forum at CHOGM in November.

BROADCASTERS, AGENCIES AND ONLINE VIDEO SITES

A free-to-use Video News Release featuring conference highlights is available for download below.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B7XVgx5S_NZWQVhY0FiempBZTQ/view?usp=sharing

Video format: Quicktime H.264 1080i HD.

Audio: Dual channel (L- Interviews, grabs. R- Natural sound)

Contents:

-Presentation and interview with Penny Williams

-GVs of Penny's speech and delegates at CYGEN

NOTES TO EDITORS

The CYGEN Conference runs from 13-17 May at the Corinthia Hotel, St George's Bay, Malta.

The Royal Commonwealth Society is the oldest civil society organisation in the Commonwealth, established in 1868 to uphold the value and values of the Commonwealth.

RCS Report on 'Hidden Violence in the Commonwealth' can be found at:

<https://thercs.org/assets/Research-/Summit-Booklet-Website.pdf>

RCS Report on 'Building a Constructive Commonwealth Approach to LGBT Rights at:

<https://thercs.org/assets/Research-/LGBTCitizenshipReport-130315-FINAL.pdf>

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