

Delivering a Common Future

Commonwealth Day | 8 March 2021

Commonwealth Day Message from The Rt Hon Patricia Scotland QC, Commonwealth Secretary-General

Too often, too many of us can think we're powerless. This is particularly true in the face of seemingly insurmountable challenges such as climate change or devastating events like the global pandemic. Especially in our current forced isolation and separation from each other, it can be too easy to forget our common connections or our long bonds of friendship and family. Or to believe that our power, our ability to influence the world around us, is too small or insufficient.

But this isn't true. This year Commonwealth Day is on the same date as International Women's Day. This is very fitting, particularly considering the pioneering leadership given over many decades by the Commonwealth collectively and by our member states on pushing progress to equal participation for women in the social, economic and political lives of our communities and countries.

And this year has seen women across the Commonwealth rise up and lead us all in our fight against COVID-19 and in preparing our countries and communities to recover from the many devastating consequences of this pandemic:

- Women, despite the immensity of the issues we have faced, are rising to these challenges as leaders across our countries, our communities and our homes.
- Women are demonstrating strong leadership on the front line of the pandemic from health care to education to science, where they have led the race to create the vaccines we need to beat COVID.

I know that despite our challenges, the bonds of our Commonwealth family are just as real, strong and vibrant as they ever were and just as strong as the many women who have risen to meet the challenges of the pandemic. And just as powerful.

PAGE 1/2

Please note the embargo on this message: It must not be published in print or online form before 17:00 GMT **Sunday 7 March 2021.**

And the year ahead is, I believe, a year of hope, opportunity and progress for our Commonwealth family – progress as our leaders meet at CHOGM to tackle issues like climate change as we look to the international COP26 meetings later this year and to build on our Commonwealth Blue Charter, which works to protect our oceans and recognises that we will only be safe if we protect our planet and use its resources responsibly. It is only through wise and sustainable stewardship of our world and its bounty that we will safeguard the health of humanity.

Progress on our push across all of our member states for more inclusive economic development and equitable trade to support the good jobs and sustainable economic growth that must underpin our shared prosperity. Progress as we continue to advocate on behalf of small states, who make up such a large part of our family. And whose interests we are all committed to representing because our vision for equality has always been based upon everyone having a voice and a seat at the table, no matter their size.

That is why so much of our work has been focused on making sure those voices are heard, such as through practical support like our Joint Office at the UN providing a permanent representation for those small states who want it. Or our Climate Finance Access Hub which is working to make sure that our small states are able to access the funds they need to respond to the very real challenges they face in tackling climate change. Or recent work to highlight urgent health issues such as equal access for small and developing states to the vaccines that we hope will enable us all to return to normal.

We are also committed to making progress in ensuring that the human rights of all our citizens are respected and that the values of democracy and the rule of law, that are so central to our founding charter and our values, are upheld.

And progress in our relentless drive to end domestic violence and sexual assault through our Commonwealth Says No More campaign. We know that women have borne the brunt of the shocking rise in domestic and gender-based violence during this pandemic. Our Commonwealth Says No More campaign is mobilising action to make our homes and communities the places of safety they ought to be, free from fear of physical or psychological harm.

So while the challenges may seem insurmountable alone, I know that as a Commonwealth family, though we may be apart, we stand together, united in purpose. We are 2.4 billion people, across 54 countries and all of us a part of countless communities, families and homes around the globe. And through all of this we are one Commonwealth family.

So as we celebrate our membership with the 2.4 billion other members of our Commonwealth family, let us this year especially commit ourselves to working for the welfare and well-being, the common wealth of all humanity. Let us together work for a more equal and equitable, a more hopeful future for our Commonwealth and for our world.