

The Commonwealth



Countries

Africa

Botswana
Cameroon
Ghana
Kenya
Lesotho
Malawi
Mauritius
Mozambique
Namibia
Nigeria
Rwanda
Seychelles
Sierra Leone
South Africa
Swaziland
Uganda
United Republic of Tanzania
Zambia

Europe

Cyprus
Malta
United Kingdom

Caribbean and Americas

Antigua and Barbuda
Bahamas, The
Barbados
Belize
Canada
Dominica
Grenada
Guyana
Jamaica
Saint Lucia
St Kitts and Nevis
St Vincent and The Grenadines
Trinidad and Tobago

Asia

Bangladesh
Brunei Darussalam
India
Malaysia
Pakistan
Singapore
Sri Lanka

Pacific

Australia
Fiji
Kiribati
Nauru
New Zealand
Papua New Guinea
Samoa
Solomon Islands
Tonga
Tuvalu
Vanuatu

Commonwealth Structure

Head of the Commonwealth

Queen Elizabeth II, as established by the London Declaration.

The Queen is also Head of State in the Commonwealth Realms i.e. sixteen members of The Commonwealth.

When the Monarch dies, however, the position of Head of the Commonwealth will not automatically succeed to The Prince of Wales. The new Head of the Commonwealth will be decided by all 52 member states.

Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM)

The main decision-making forum of The Commonwealth is the biennial meeting of the heads of government of all 52 members.

The Commonwealth Chairperson-in-Office is the head of the government hosting CHOGM, and he or she retains the position until the next CHOGM takes place.

The first CHOGM meeting was in 1971.

Since 1997, the meetings have held an official theme on which primary discussions are focused. The theme is set by the host nation.

The Commonwealth Secretariat

Established in 1965, the Commonwealth Secretariat is the main intergovernmental agency of The Commonwealth. It facilitates consultation and co-operation among member governments. It is the executive branch of The Commonwealth, and takes responsibility for carrying out the various programmes agreed upon by members at CHOGMs and other meetings.

The Secretariat is headed by the Secretary –General – The Right Honourable Baroness Patricia Scotland (since 2016)

The Commonwealth Secretary-General is responsible for:

- Promoting and protecting the Commonwealth's values;
- Representing the Commonwealth publicly; and
- The management of the Commonwealth Secretariat.

The Secretary-General is nominated by Commonwealth leaders and can serve a maximum of two four-year terms.

Baroness Scotland

Patricia Janet Scotland was born on the 19th August 1955 in Dominica. She moved to the United Kingdom (UK) with her family, growing up in east London. She trained as a lawyer and became the

first black woman to be appointed a Queen's Counsel in 1991. At 35, she was also the youngest woman ever to be made a QC. Baroness Scotland was also the first black woman to be appointed Deputy High Court Judge, Recorder and Master of Middle Temple. She joined the House of Lords in 1997 as Baroness Scotland of Astral going on to serve as a minister in the Foreign Office, Home Office and Lord Chancellor's Department. She undertook major reform of the criminal justice system, including the introduction of the Domestic Violence Crime and Victims Act. She also founded the Eliminate Domestic Violence Global Foundation in 2011. Baroness Scotland was appointed Attorney General in 2007 – the first woman to hold the post since it was created in 1315.. She was appointed Prime Ministerial Trade Envoy to South Africa in 2012. She was also elected as the Alderman of Bishopsgate in the City of London in 2014. Other offices held by Baroness Scotland include Chancellor of the University of Greenwich, Patron of the Corporate Alliance against Domestic Violence, and Patron of Lifeline (Trinidad & Tobago) and the Caribbean Science Foundation.

Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG)

CMAG was established in 1995 by the Commonwealth Heads of Government as part of the Millbrook Commonwealth Action Plan. CMAG is mandated to deal with serious or persistent violations by any Member State of fundamental political values of the Commonwealth set out in the 1991 Harare Commonwealth Declaration. The Group is thus mandated to assess the nature of the infringement and recommend measures for collective Commonwealth action aimed at the speedy restoration of democracy and constitutional rule.

CMAG is convened by the Commonwealth Secretary General and is constituted by foreign ministers of eight Commonwealth member countries, and additionally, since 2003, the foreign minister of the Commonwealth Chairperson-in-Office. It is reconstituted at every Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) with the ministers generally serving two terms. CMAG meets twice every year and can convene on an *ad hoc* basis if required.

In 2009, the Commonwealth Heads of Government agreed that consideration be given to strengthening the role of CMAG in order to enable the group to deal with the full range of serious or persistent violations of the Harare Declaration. After reviewing its own mandate and work, CMAG presented its recommendations in the form of a report titled 'Strengthening the Role of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group' at the 2011 CHOGM, and the Heads agreed with the recommendations in entirety. The core changes in the CMAG mandate identified CMAG as the custodian of the 2009 Affirmation of Commonwealth Values and Principles, which is an update and strengthening of the Harare Declaration. In this capacity, CMAG must scrutinise member states in violation of Commonwealth values, and not limit its role to examining situations where there has been an unconstitutional overthrow of the government. Despite these changes, to date, CMAG continues to interpret its mandate narrowly. The countries that have been under CMAG's review are Gambia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Pakistan, Solomon Islands, Zimbabwe, and Maldives. CMAG is currently reviewing the situation in Fiji Islands.

Current CMAG members are Cyprus, Guyana, India, Kenya, Namibia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Solomon Islands, and Malta.

The Commonwealth and FoRB

The Commonwealth has a critical role to play in the promotion and protection of civil society space across the world. It is committed to protect and promote civil society space and the rights of citizens to engage with civil society through a number of key Declarations and Principles over the past 30 years. Countries in The Commonwealth share similar parliamentary systems, and share a language and a commitment to uphold values in the Commonwealth Charter. The Commonwealth therefore presents both a unique context for efforts to secure political change, and is a distinctive forum for incubating and delivering fresh initiatives to advance the freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) through the protection of civil society..

The use of multi-lateral fora such as the Commonwealth is particularly important for FoRB, as the nature of religious belief transcends boundaries. Monica Toft of CIFoRB suggests established networks may have a better chance of succeeding at promoting FoRB than lone governments or parliamentarians for three reasons. First, a network of local parliamentarians and advocates has a better sense of the underlying issues that allow for hatred and violence to fester and emerge. These local parliamentarians are often better placed to know the issues to better protect their fellow citizens. Second, there is safety in numbers. If parliamentarians in Britain unite with like-minded parliamentarians in other countries in the Commonwealth, then such an alliance provides a form of protection. It conveys that the parliamentarians and their domestic allies are not alone in their struggle, and that others are joining them in the fight against those who seek to deny religious freedom or human rights. Third, such networks allow for the development of better policies and processes through the sharing of information and resources.

Accredited Organisations of The Commonwealth

CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation – CIVICUS is an international alliance of members and partners that constitutes a network of organisations at the local, national, regional and international levels, and spans the spectrum of civil society. CIVICUS has a vision of a global community of active, engaged citizens committed to the creation of a more just and equitable world. This is based on the belief that the health of societies exists in direct proportion to the degree of balance between the state, the private sector and civil society.

Contact: oli.henman@civicus.org

Commonwealth Association of Law Reform Agencies (CALRAs) –CALRAs has been formed to encourage, facilitate and take forward cooperative initiatives in law reform. It was established in 2003 to encourage, facilitate and take forward cooperative initiatives in law reform so as to improve the law and society across the world. It is committed to the Commonwealth's values, and received formal accreditation to the Commonwealth in 2005. CALRAs provides capacity-building in law reform, including for law reformers in government. It supports good practice for high quality law reform, which can be especially valuable for small states.

Commonwealth Consortium for Education (CCfE) – The Commonwealth Consortium for Education was established by a group of education-related Commonwealth NGOs to coordinate their efforts on

behalf of Commonwealth education, to stimulate more coherence in their work, and to provide a collective mechanism for interaction with ministries and official Commonwealth organisations. Its activities have focused on making representations to Commonwealth governments regarding the place of education in future Commonwealth priorities and programmes.

Contact: secretary@commonwealtheducation.org

Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) – CHRI is an international NGO that works for the practical realisation of human rights throughout the Commonwealth. It has been headquartered in India since 1993. CHRI also has offices in Ghana and the UK. CHRI advocates for better respect for, protection and promotion of international human rights standards and ensuring greater adherence to the Commonwealth Harare Principles. Issues relating to accountability and participation in governance, access to justice and access to information, are at the heart of CHRI's work. It also monitors the human rights situation in countries of the Commonwealth, focusing particularly on human rights defenders, compliance with international treaty obligations, and monitoring the performance of Commonwealth members of the United Nations Human Rights Council.

Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF) – CLGF is an Associated Organisation of the Commonwealth. It works to promote and strengthen democratic local government across the Commonwealth, and to encourage the exchange of best practice through conferences and events, projects and research. CLGF work with national and local governments to support the development of democratic values and good local governance. As a Commonwealth organisation, CLGF draws on the influential network of the Commonwealth that provides a solid basis for its programmes and activities. As an associated organisation officially recognised by the Commonwealth Heads of Government, CLGF is well placed to influence policy development and lead on democracy and good governance at the local level.

Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) – The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) is an associated organisation of the Commonwealth. The CPA links members of national, state, provincial and territorial parliaments and legislatures across the Commonwealth. Its mission is to promote the advancement of parliamentary democracy by enhancing knowledge and understanding of democratic governance. CPA International is a UK charity and is led by Secretary General Akbar Khan. CPA UK is meanwhile based in the UK Parliament and is active in providing training and programmes for Commonwealth parliamentarians.

The Commonwealth Foundation – The Commonwealth Foundation is an intergovernmental foundation that was established following CHOGM 1966, one year after the formation of the Commonwealth Secretariat, its sister foundation. It is known as the Commonwealth agency for civil society. The Foundation is funded by 45 member states, and provides resources, grants and access for civil society, to promote and encourage engagement between civil society and governments.

Membership of the Commonwealth Foundation is separate from membership of the Commonwealth; thus only 45 out of the 52 member states of the Commonwealth are members of the Commonwealth Foundation. The member states that are not members of the Foundation are Fiji, Nauru, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Samoa, Singapore, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) – The IPU was established in 1889, and is the focal point for parliamentary dialogue world-wide. It fosters contacts and co-ordination among parliaments and parliamentarians of all countries.

Forum of Federations – The Forum of Federations is an international governance organisation founded by Canada and nine other partner governments – Australia, Brazil, Ethiopia, Germany, India, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan and Switzerland. It is a learning network concerned with promoting intergovernmental learning on governance challenges in multi-level democracies. The Forum is not an advocacy organisation and does not advocate for any particular structure of government. It aims to provide innovative solutions to challenges posed by multi-level governance in a range of devolved, decentralised or federal countries.

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International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH) – FIDH is an international NGO defending all civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It acts in the legal and political field for the creation and reinforcement of international instruments for the protection of human rights and for their implementation. FIDH is a federalist movement that acts through and for its national member and partner organisations.

Contact: michellman99@aol.com

Muslim Aid – Muslim Aid is a British Muslim relief and development agency, guided by the teachings of Islam. It endeavours to tackle poverty and its causes by developing innovative and sustainable solutions that enable individuals and their communities to live with dignity and by supporting initiatives that promote economic and social justice.

Contact: imtiazh.mohammed@muslimaid.org

Royal Commonwealth Society (RCS) – The RCS was founded in 1868, and is a network of individuals and organisations committed to improving the lives and prospects of Commonwealth citizens across the world. Through youth empowerment, education and advocacy, it promotes the values of the Commonwealth. It aims to champion human rights, democracy and sustainable development across the member states that are intrinsically linked through their common history and shared values.

Contact: director@thercs.org

The Roundtable – Since being founded in 1910, The Round Table has had a dual function. First, it is a peer-reviewed scholarly journal. The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs now appears six times a year. The UK's oldest international affairs journal, it provides analysis and commentary on all aspects of international affairs, and is the major source for coverage of the policy issues concerning the contemporary Commonwealth and its global role. Second, The Round Table is a forum for Commonwealth debate and advocacy. It hosts periodic dinner and other meetings, with invited speakers, and organises seminar and conferences on a regular basis. It works closely with the Commonwealth Secretariat and Foundation, and with a range of other Commonwealth organisations.

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Commonwealth Youth Forum – Organised as part of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), the Commonwealth Youth Forum (CYF) aims to achieve cross-cultural connection and learning between participants and consensus on policies to address the challenges and opportunities facing young people. It is jointly organised by the Commonwealth Youth Council, the Commonwealth Secretariat and the hosting government of CHOGM. The Youth Forum's international taskforce, made up of representatives of the Commonwealth Youth Council and the hosting government, is youth-led, with young people managing and setting their own agenda under four sub-themes: economic, political, environment and social.

Commonwealth Business Forum – The Commonwealth Business Forum is the largest business event held under the Commonwealth umbrella. It aims to bring together the private sector and government to discuss the key economic issues of the day. The Forum traditionally works with heads of government, ministers and senior business leaders from across the Commonwealth and beyond. It is organised by the Commonwealth Enterprise and Investment Council and the CHOGM host country.

Commonwealth People's Forum (CPF) – The first Forum took place in 1997. Since then, it has taken place every two years immediately before CHOGM. It is organised by the CHOGM host government, civil society organisations, and the Commonwealth Foundation. The Forum provides an environment for civil society organisations to network, and a space for dialogue with governments. It brings together representatives from civil society across Commonwealth nations, and is the single largest opportunity to engage with Commonwealth leaders on global development issues.