

Commonwealth Initiative for the Freedom of Religion or Belief

Timeline of the Commonwealth

The history of the Commonwealth goes back to the British Empire. However, the Commonwealth as an organisation was formed in 1949.

1884 – Empire described as a ‘Commonwealth of Nations’

1926 – The United Kingdom (UK) and its dominions agree they are “equal in status”

1930 – The First Commonwealth Games held in Hamilton, Canada (then called the ‘British Empire Games’)

1931 – Statute of Westminster gives legal status to the independence of Australia, Canada, Irish Free State, Newfoundland, New Zealand and South Africa

1931 – Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa join the Commonwealth

1947 – India and Pakistan join The Commonwealth

1948 – Sri Lanka joins The Commonwealth

1949 – Beginning of the modern Commonwealth: leaders of Commonwealth nations agree that members are “free and equal members of the Commonwealth of Nations, freely co-operating in the pursuit of peace, liberty and progress”

1957 – Ghana and Malaysia join The Commonwealth

1960 – Nigeria joins The Commonwealth

1960 – Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan set up – helps graduates study in other member countries

1961 – South Africa withdraws from the Commonwealth

1961 – Republic of Cyprus, Sierra Leone, and the United Republic of Tanzania join The Commonwealth

1962 – Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uganda join The Commonwealth

1963 – Kenya joins the Commonwealth

1964 – Malawi, Malta and Zambia join The Commonwealth

1965 – The Gambia and Singapore join The Commonwealth

1965 – The Commonwealth Secretariat and the Commonwealth Foundations are established (both organisation are housed in Marlborough House)

1965 – Arnold Smith becomes the first Commonwealth Secretary-General (served 1965-75)

1966 – Barbados, Botswana, Guyana and Lesotho join The Commonwealth

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- 1968 – Mauritius, Nauru and Swaziland join The Commonwealth
- 1970 – Fiji, Samoa and Tonga join The Commonwealth
- 1971 – Singapore Declaration of Commonwealth Principles
- 1971 – Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC) set up
- 1971 – First Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Singapore
- 1972 – Pakistan withdraws from The Commonwealth
- 1972 – Bangladesh joins The Commonwealth
- 1973 – The Bahamas joins The Commonwealth
- 1973 – CHOGM held in Ottawa, Canada
- 1974 – Grenada joins The Commonwealth
- 1975 – Papua New Guinea joins The Commonwealth
- 1975 – CHOGM held in Kingston, Jamaica
- 1975 – Sir Shridath Ramphal becomes the second Commonwealth Secretary-General (1975-1990)
- 1976 – The Seychelles joins The Commonwealth
- 1977 – Gleneagles Agreement
- 1997 – CHOGM held in London, UK
- 1978 – Dominica, Solomon Islands and Tuvalu join The Commonwealth
- 1979 – CHOGM held in Lusaka, Zambia
- 1979 – Lusaka Declaration on Racism and Racial Prejudice
- 1979 – Kiribati, St Lucia and St Vincent, and the Grenadines join The Commonwealth
- 1980 – Commonwealth group observes elections for the first time in the newly independent Zimbabwe
- 1980 – Vanuatu and Zimbabwe join The Commonwealth
- 1981 – Commonwealth establishes ‘Small States Office’ in New York – small states can take part in UN negotiations
- 1981 – Antigua and Barbuda, and Belize join The Commonwealth
- 1981 – CHOGM held in Melbourne, Australia

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1981 – Melbourne Declaration reinforces Commonwealth commitment to fairer economic deal for developing countries

1982 – The Maldives joins The Commonwealth

1983 – St Kitts and Nevis joins The Commonwealth

1983 – CHOGM held in New Delhi, India

1984 – Brunei Darussalam joins The Commonwealth

1985 – CHOGM held in Nassau, The Bahamas

1987 – Fiji's membership of The Commonwealth lapses after it declares itself a republic following a military coup

1987 – CHOGM held in Vancouver, Canada

1989 – Langkawi Declaration on the Environment commits the Commonwealth to an active role in protecting natural balances and preventing environmental deterioration

1989 – Pakistan re-joins The Commonwealth

1989 – CHOGM held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

1990 – Namibia joins The Commonwealth

1990 – Emeka Anyaoku becomes the third Commonwealth Secretary General (1990-2000)

1991 – CHOGM held in Harare, Zimbabwe

1991 – Harare Commonwealth Declaration sets association's priorities for 1990s and beyond and strengthened emphasis on contribution to democracy, human rights and equality

1993 – CHOGM held in Limassol, Cyprus

1994 – South Africa re-joins The Commonwealth

1994 – The Victoria Falls Declaration on the Promotion of the Human Rights of Women

1995 – Millbrook Commonwealth Action Plans on the Harare Declaration

1995 – Nigeria suspended from The Commonwealth

1995 – Commonwealth Ministerial Actions Group (CMAG) established to "deal with persistent and serious violations of the Commonwealth's shared principles"

1995 – CHOGM held in Auckland, New Zealand

1995 – Cameroon and Mozambique join the Commonwealth

1997 – CHOGM held in Edinburgh, UK

- 1997 – New Criteria for Commonwealth Membership decided
- 1997 – Fiji re-joins The Commonwealth
- 1999 – Fancourt Commonwealth Declaration on Globalisation and People-Centred Development
- 1999 – Pakistan suspended from The Commonwealth
- 1999 – CHOGM held in Durban, South Africa
- 1999 – Chair-in-Office position created
- 2000 – Fiji suspended from the Councils of The Commonwealth
- 2000 – Don McKinnon becomes fourth Commonwealth Secretary-General (2000-2008)
- 2001 – Fiji suspension lifted
- 2002 – CHOGM held in Coolum, Australia
- 2002 – The Coolum Declaration
- 2002 – Zimbabwe suspended from the Councils of The Commonwealth
- 2003 – Aso Rock Commonwealth Declaration on Development and Democracy
- 2003 – Zimbabwe withdraws from the Commonwealth
- 2003 – CHOGM held in Abuja, Nigeria
- 2004 – Pakistan suspension lifted
- 2004 – Latimer Principles
- 2005 – CHOGM held in Valletta, Malta
- 2005 – Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation and Code of Conduct for International Election Observers
- 2005 – CHOGM held in Malta
- 2005 – Declaration on Strengthening Co-operation in International Humanitarian Law
- 2005 – Malta Declaration on Networking the Commonwealth for Development
- 2006 – Fiji suspended from the Councils of The Commonwealth
- 2007 – Kampala Declaration on Transforming Societies to Achieve Political, Economic and Social Development
- 2007 – CHOGM held in Kampala, Uganda
- 2007 – Pakistan suspended from The Commonwealth

2007 – ‘Civil Paths to Peace’ launched

2008 – Kamallesh Sharma becomes fifth Commonwealth Secretary-General (2008-2016)

2008 – Pakistan’s suspension from Commonwealth Councils lifted

2009 – CHOGM held in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago

2009 – Trinidad and Tobago Affirmation of Commonwealth Values and Principles

2009 – The Declaration of Port of Spain on Partnering for a More Equitable and Sustainable Future

2009 – Commonwealth Heads of Government establish the Eminent Persons Group

2009 – Rwanda joins The Commonwealth

2009 – ‘Investing in Young People’ Declaration

2011 – Perth Declaration on Food Security Principles

2011 – CHOGM held in Perth, Australia

2011 – Commonwealth sets up ‘Small States Office’ in Geneva – small states can participate in the human rights wing of the UN

2013 – CHOGM held in Sri Lanka

2013 – Fiji re-joins The Commonwealth as a full member

2013 – The Gambia withdraws from the Commonwealth

2013 – Queen Elizabeth II signs The Commonwealth Charter

2015 – CHOGM held in Malta

2016 – Her Excellency the Right Honourable Baroness Scotland QC becomes the sixth Commonwealth Secretary-General

2018 – CHOGM held in London and Windsor, UK