



DEBATE PACK

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Opportunities and challenges facing the modern Commonwealth in its 70th year

Main Chamber

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Debate nominated by the
Backbench Business Committee

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The House of Commons Library prepares a briefing in hard copy and/or online for most non-legislative debates in the Chamber and Westminster Hall other than half-hour debates. Debate Packs are produced quickly after the announcement of parliamentary business. They are intended to provide a summary or overview of the issue being debated and identify relevant briefings and useful documents, including press and parliamentary material. More detailed briefing can be prepared for Members on request to the Library.

1. Background

Outcome of the 2018 CHOGM

The 2018 [Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting](#) took place in London in 2018, after Cyclone Pam spoiled plans to hold it in Vanuatu. Its themes were:

- environmental sustainability – climate change and pollution, particularly of the oceans
- fairness – democracy, good governance and human rights
- security – organised crime, cyber security, violent extremism
- prosperity – trade, investment and jobs.

A [headline announcement](#) at the beginning of the summit was that the UK would ban plastic drinking straws, plastic-stemmed cotton buds and drink stirrers.

Among other commitments in the 12-page [communiqué](#) issued at the end of the meeting, they agreed to on the need for democratic, accountable institutions and access to justice for all, and to encourage trade among members.

In March 2018, Lord Anderson of Swansea, a former chair of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, [talked of](#): “the need to distinguish between the Commonwealth of declaration and the Commonwealth of reality”.

The Commonwealth Secretariat published an [annual results report for 2016/17](#).

India

Perhaps the most significant outcome of the 2018 meeting was the decision of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to attend, after years of non-attendance by Indian prime ministers. The Director of the Royal Commonwealth Society said last year:

As India cements its status as an economic superpower, it is increasingly apparent that they are starting to see the enormous potential of the Commonwealth as a ready-made soft power network.¹

An Indian official put a slightly different slant on it: “The Commonwealth is useful to us because it gives us a chance to talk to fellow Asian countries without China being in the room.”²

Professor Harsh V. Pant agreed that the UK was not the only country looking for new and stronger international role:

As a rising power, India too is looking at those avenues where its status as an emerging power is recognised during this period of unprecedented global structural changes and shifts in balance-of-power equations. The Commonwealth of Nations (or simply, ‘Commonwealth’) provides India with a platform to engage with a

¹ ‘Modi visit boosts UK ambitions on post-Brexit diplomatic sway’, *Financial Times*, 16 April 2018

² *Ibid.*

wide array of states across the world with similar political cultures. As India grows to a US\$10-trillion economy by 2030, it needs its own arenas and platforms, especially ones where China is not a member. Modi's renewed look at the Commonwealth may well be an indication that New Delhi is eyeing the organisation as a prospective forum for its power projection. To actualise this, however, New Delhi will have to invest diplomatic capital to remould the platform according to its own strategic needs. Modi's London visit, in this context, could be considered as a step in that direction.³

As the Commonwealth's largest economy (or very soon to be), India may be re-imagining the Commonwealth with itself as the most important member; this could provide some significant opportunities for the Commonwealth as an organisation.

Trade

With the present focus in the UK on trade, there is a focus on the possible trade opportunities that the Commonwealth might present. At present the [Commonwealth accounts for 9.1%](#) of UK exports in 2017 – roughly the same as UK exports to Germany.

Free trade deals between Commonwealth countries is the most likely way [promote intra-Commonwealth trade](#) and after Brexit the UK would be free to conclude such deals. The debate on how easily that could be achieved is continuing. Regular meetings between Commonwealth trade ministers were inaugurated in March 2017.

The Commonwealth does not have a strong role on trade at present, according to a senior Australian diplomat, having “no capacity on trade. We see it as a useful adjunct to our engagement with small island nations but give it no priority.”⁴

Resources

A significant question for the future of the Commonwealth is how much money it has to spend. One [research article from 2003 says](#):

When the UN spends 0.23 euro per year and per inhabitant with its various programmes, and the Francophonie spends 0.3 euro per year and per inhabitant, the Commonwealth can only spend 0.03 euro per year and per inhabitant, 10 times less.

³ Harsh V Pant, [Modi and CHOGM 2018: reimagining the Commonwealth](#), ORF Issue Brief, 18 April 2018

⁴ 'Is the Commonwealth a plausible substitute for the EU?', *Economist*, 14 April 2018

2. Press articles

The following is a selection of press and media articles relevant to this debate.

Please note: the Library is not responsible for either the views or accuracy of external content.

[Global Britain can refresh the Commonwealth for people worldwide](#)

Daily Telegraph
Emma McClarkin
20 April 2018

[Commonwealth of homophobia: One billion live under anti-gay laws exported by Britain](#)

Pink News
Benjamin Butterworth
20 April 2018

[Government announces £5.5m boost to end modern slavery in Commonwealth](#)

Independent
Lizzy Buchan
18 April 2018

[UK pledges £212m to assist one million girls from Commonwealth to attend school for longer](#)

Independent
David Wilcock
17 April 2018

[Theresa May to offer Commonwealth post-Brexit bonus](#)

Financial Times (*subscription required)
George Parker,
15 April 2018

[The Commonwealth – has it had its day?](#)

Guardian (Letters - responses to the two articles below)
Alison Watson, David Howell and Richard Bourne
11 April 2018

[Sorry, Brexiters. Banking on the Commonwealth is a joke](#)

Guardian
Philip Murphy
10 April 2018

[Britain sees the Commonwealth as its trading empire. It is sadly deluded](#)

Guardian
Ian Jack
7 April 2018

3. Press releases

[Foreign Secretary celebrates Commonwealth progress](#)

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

26 September 2018

In his first major Commonwealth event since becoming Foreign Secretary, Jeremy Hunt hosted a reception for the 52 Foreign Ministers of the Commonwealth in the margins of the UN General Assembly in New York on 25 September 2018.

Mr Hunt welcomed progress by Commonwealth countries on the commitments they made at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting (CHOGM) in April.

Since CHOGM, the UK and Kenya have hosted the Global Disability Summit; Vanuatu became the first country in the world to enact a ban on a range of single-use plastics, with other states including India following suit; the Commonwealth SheTrades programme has launched in Ghana, Kenya, Bangladesh and Nigeria, with over 1300 women entrepreneurs now registered.

The Foreign Secretary also announced a £1.8 million UK contribution to the Commonwealth's electoral observation programme.

Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt said:

“The Commonwealth is responding to the global challenges of today, from climate change to economic protectionism.

Five months on from the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in London, the 53 countries of the Commonwealth are taking forward real action on their commitments to a fairer, more secure, more sustainable and prosperous future.

The Commonwealth is a unique organisation and a champion for the rules-based international system - but it must be seen to deliver, and then keep delivering.”

Minister for the Commonwealth Lord Tariq Ahmad of Wimbledon said:

“The Commonwealth, through its organisations and its member states, large and small, developed and developing, is a force to be reckoned with.

During the next two years when the UK is Chair-in-Office, we are determined to work closely with our partners to keep up the momentum, to revitalise and reform the Commonwealth for the 21st century.

The Foreign Secretary will be chairing a Commonwealth Foreign Ministers meeting, where discussions will include progress on the Commonwealth Blue Charter; increasing intra-Commonwealth trade; addressing cyber security threats, and reform of the Commonwealth Secretariat to ensure it is efficient and delivering for its member states.”

4. PQs

Commonwealth: Trade

28 Feb 2019 | HL13853

Asked by: Lord Chidgey

To ask Her Majesty's Government, following the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in April 2018, what plans there are for the World Trade Organization's Trade Facilitation Agreement to boost intra-Commonwealth trade; what are the expected outcomes of such plans; and when such outcomes are expected to be delivered.

Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

The UK-funded Commonwealth Trade Facilitation Programme is helping member states implement the World Trade Organization Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA). The two year programme aims to help developing and least developed countries in the Commonwealth adopt faster and more efficient customs procedures that will in turn reduce the cost of doing business and create a more enabling environment for intra-Commonwealth Trade.

While the Commonwealth Trade Facilitation Programme is due to conclude by April 2020, implementation of the TFA will continue for several more years. The Agreement is unique in that it allows developing and least developed countries to set their own timetable for implementing elements of the agreement: developing countries are required to provide definitive dates for implementation by August 2019, and Least Developed Countries by 2022.

Overseas Trade: Commonwealth

27 Feb 2019 | 222774

Asked by: Sir John Hayes

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what plans he has to increase trade with (a) Commonwealth realms and (b) other countries of the Commonwealth after the UK leaves the EU.

Answering member: George Hollingbery | Department for International Trade

At last year's Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, hosted by the UK, leaders adopted a six-point Connectivity Agenda for Trade and Investment to boost intra-Commonwealth trade to \$2 Trillion by 2030. As Chair-In-Office, the UK is committed to working with our Commonwealth partners to achieve this target.

The Government is seeking continuity for existing EU trade arrangements, including those with Commonwealth countries, to ensure there is no disruption to our existing trade as we leave the EU.

Commonwealth: Drinking Water

25 Feb 2019 | 223831

Asked by: Chris Elmore

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what steps her Department is taking to help ensure that there is safe drinking water available in (a) Sri Lanka and (b) all other Commonwealth countries.

Answering member: Alistair Burt | Department for International Development

The UK is committed to supporting countries achieve the Sustainable Development Goal 6 target of universal access to water and sanitation by 2030. Since 2015, we have supported 40 million people to gain access to clean water and sanitation. This includes beneficiaries in Commonwealth countries in Africa and Asia such as Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Bangladesh and Pakistan.

DFID has also supported Commonwealth countries in the Caribbean. For example, following Hurricane Maria DFID allocated £25 million to Dominica to repair and strengthen the water supply system across the island.

DFID's bilateral programme in Sri Lanka country closed in 2006 when the country graduated to middle income status, and DFID does not have water and sanitation programmes in Sri Lanka.

Commonwealth: Malaria

12 Feb 2019 | 216396

Asked by: Catherine West

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if he will use the UK's period of time as Chair-in-Office of the Commonwealth to ensure that progress is made on the commitment agreed to at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 2018 to halve incidences of malaria by 2023.

Answering member: Alistair Burt | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

At the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in April 2018, the Prime Minister reaffirmed the UK's commitment to fight malaria. She restated our five-year pledge, made in 2016, to spend half a billion pounds a year tackling this disease. We are fulfilling that pledge and, as Chair-in-Office, continue to work with Commonwealth countries and members of the Roll Back Malaria Partnership to achieve the commitment of Commonwealth Heads of Government to halve the incidence of malaria in the Commonwealth by 2023. UK ministers will attend events in the coming months to highlight and accelerate progress towards that goal.

[Angola: Commonwealth](#)

05 Feb 2019 | HL13079

Asked by: Lord Steel of Aikwood

To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to invite the President of Angola to visit the UK in order to discuss his stated wish to have his country join the Commonwealth.

Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

The UK is committed to deepening our bilateral relationship with Angola. Decisions on Commonwealth membership are made by consensus by all Commonwealth member states. The UK is supportive of Angola's aspiration to join the Commonwealth, provided it meets the criteria for membership. The Permanent Under Secretary of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office discussed this matter with the Angolan Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs during his visit to Luanda in August 2018. There are no immediate plans for the President of Angola to visit the UK, but he would be very welcome to visit.

[Zimbabwe: Commonwealth](#)

29 Jan 2019 | 210566

Asked by: Rebecca Long Bailey

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what the Government's policy is on Zimbabwe's application to re-join the Commonwealth.

Answering member: Harriett Baldwin | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

It is not for the UK to decide if Zimbabwe is to re-join the Commonwealth as the final decision is for all Commonwealth members. However, in light of the Commonwealth's high standards on human rights, the UK would not currently support an application from Zimbabwe.

[Commonwealth: Press Freedom](#)

27 Nov 2018 | HL11434

Asked by: Lord Chidgey

To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they support the objectives of the Commonwealth principles of freedom of expression and the role of the media in good governance developed by the Commonwealth Working Group on Media and Good Governance; what steps they will take to promote the principles within the Commonwealth; and whether they will advocate for their consideration at the next Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Rwanda in 2020.

Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

The Government is committed to tackling intimidation and violence against journalists wherever it occurs, including in Commonwealth countries, and to challenging impunity for such crimes. The Foreign

Secretary highlighted our determination to address this issue on the International Day to End Impunity for Attacks Against Journalists on 2 November, announcing our intention to put the resources of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) behind the cause of media freedom and to hold an international conference on this issue, in 2019. We welcome the attention UNESCO has given to this problem.

We support the work of the Commonwealth Working Group on Media and Good Governance on Commonwealth principles of freedom of expression and the role of the media in good governance, and their continued efforts to prepare them for consideration at the Heads of Government meeting in Rwanda in 2020. Officials from the FCO and Cabinet Office have offered advice and support to members of the Working Group, most recently on 12 November 2018. The Working Group was given the opportunity to brief all member states on the proposed principles at senior official level, ahead of the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in April 2018. However, there was no consensus amongst member states for the principles to be formally included on Heads' agenda or in their official communiqué. We have discussed the principles with the Commonwealth Secretariat on several occasions since the Heads of Government Meeting. We continue to encourage the Working Group to work with member states and the Secretariat to build consensus towards adoption of the principles.

[Commonwealth: UK National Security](#)

26 Nov 2018 | 650 c1

Asked by: Barry Sheerman

Does the Secretary of State agree that we owe a huge debt to the Commonwealth not only for conflicts of the past, but for those of the future? Is it not time that we started to use the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association to actually talk about big issues such as defence and the things that join legislators across the world, rather than as a meaningless talking shop?

Answered by: Gavin Williamson | Ministry of Defence

We certainly do not want meaningless talking shops. The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point; perhaps I should make him an honorary colonel to take the message right around the Commonwealth and get it across. He makes a valuable point about the important network of influence that the Commonwealth provides, which is demonstrated every time we visit Commonwealth countries. We are looking closely at how we can do more with Commonwealth armed forces.

[Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting](#)

09 Nov 2018 | 186274

Asked by: James Duddridge

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what progress has been made on the actions agreed at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 2018.

Answering member: Alistair Burt | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Further to my answer to PQ 162458, the UK continues to work with the three pillars of the Commonwealth – the Commonwealth Secretariat, its member states, and its people to people networks – to deliver on commitments set out in the 2018 Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting (CHOGM) communique. For example;

- Member states have increased cooperation in international organisations. In Geneva, the UK hosted a meeting of Commonwealth Permanent Representatives to discuss multilateral issues in advance of the Human Rights Council. New Zealand has hosted a similar Commonwealth meeting to discuss issues relating to the World Trade Organisation. In New York, it has been agreed that Commonwealth members of the UN Security Council will regularly brief other Commonwealth countries in Security Council business.
- The Prime Minister included a passage on the Commonwealth in her speech to the UN General Assembly. She spoke explicitly as Commonwealth Chair-in-Office on behalf of the Heads of Government of 53 Commonwealth countries – over a quarter of the UN membership – to reaffirm their shared commitment to work together within a rules based international system to address shared global challenges.
- The UK and Ghana convened the inaugural meeting of the Commonwealth-led Digital Finance Champions Group in Accra on 26 September. The initiative will drive the use of secure and inclusive digital finance, especially for vulnerable and underbanked people.
- The Commonwealth Standards Network launched in Geneva on 26 September. The network aims to boost trade between Commonwealth member states by increasing the use of existing international standards. The network will allow member states to share knowledge and enable the creation of vital links between our economies.
- Following the lead of Commonwealth Heads of Government, 152 countries have now endorsed the joint statement calling on states to leave no girl behind, and provide opportunity for at least 12 years of quality education for all girls and boys.
- Following its launch in Bangladesh, Ghana, Kenya and Nigeria, over 1,300 women entrepreneurs have registered with 'SheTrades Commonwealth'. The Programme aims to increase economic growth and job creation by enabling the increased participation of women-owned businesses in international trade.
- Guyana has become the first country to partner with the UK funded Commonwealth Marine Economies Programme to develop a Maritime Economy Plan. The Programme aims to support the sustainable growth and development of 17 Commonwealth Small Island Developing States in the Caribbean and Pacific.

- Twenty countries, over a third of the Commonwealth, have now signed up to the Commonwealth Clean Oceans Alliance – the Blue Charter Action Group co-chaired by the UK and Vanuatu to tackle marine plastic pollution. During her visit to Africa in September, the Prime Minister announced that the UK would make up to an additional £5 million available to provide technical assistance to developing countries that join the initiative.
- The Prime Minister also announced a Young Leaders Plastic Challenge Badge, working in partnership with UN Environment, Scouts and Girl Guides, to help an estimated 50,000 young people in Kenya and two further African countries to become leaders in raising awareness about the importance of reducing plastic consumption.
- In support of the Commonwealth Cyber Declaration, the UK has partnered with the World Bank to deliver national cyber security capacity reviews in 11 member states. With support from Oxford University's Global Cyber Security Capacity Centre and Australia's Oceania Centre, we are now well placed to meet the commitment for every Commonwealth country to voluntarily undertake reviews by CHOGM 2020.

Commonwealth: LGBT People

02 Nov 2018 | HL11035

Asked by: Lord Kennedy of Southwark

To ask Her Majesty's Government what action they have taken to support equality for LGBT people in the Commonwealth.

Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

As host of the 2018 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in April, we ensured that equality issues were raised throughout the week, including at Head of Government and Foreign Minister Level. In her speech to Commonwealth Forums, the Prime Minister expressed regret that discriminatory legislation continues to affect the lives of people across the Commonwealth, criminalising same-sex relations and failing to protect women and girls. The Prime Minister was clear that the UK stands ready to support any Commonwealth member wanting to reform outdated legislation that makes such discrimination possible. We have since announced a £5.6m programme working with civil society organisations to support those countries who might wish to reform discriminatory legislation. As Chair-in-Office of the Commonwealth, the UK will continue to raise the importance of countering all forms of discrimination, including on the basis of gender and sexual orientation.

Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting

26 Oct 2018 | HL10740

Asked by: Lord Luce

To ask Her Majesty's Government what are the timescales and resources allocated to each of the projects announced by the UK in support of the outcomes from the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 2018.

Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

The UK announced over £500 million of projects under four themes outlined below to support commitments made at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in April 2018:

- fairness (£235 million), including £212 million to support nine Commonwealth member states deliver 12 years of quality education for girls;
- security (£37 million), including £5.5 million to enhance cyber security by assisting member states identify and address vulnerabilities and gaps in capacity;
- sustainability (£172 million), including £66.4 million to support member states to reduce plastic pollution of the oceans; and
- prosperity (£105 million), including £7 million to promote women's economic empowerment supporting women-owned businesses to trade internationally.

An overview of CHOGM commitments and the projects designed to fulfil them will be placed in the Library of the House. These projects will be delivered throughout the UK's two years as Chair-in-Office of the Commonwealth.

Cameroon: Commonwealth

01 Aug 2018 | HL9732

Asked by: Lord Boateng

To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the Commonwealth Secretariat about the compliance of Cameroon with the Harare Declaration and its continuing membership of the Commonwealth.

Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

The UK High Commissioner to Cameroon discussed the situation in Cameroon with the Secretary General of the Commonwealth during her visit in December, and again in January. The UK will continue to discuss this with the Commonwealth Secretariat, as it does a range of issues relating to the Commonwealth's fundamental political values, which are enshrined in the Commonwealth Charter.

Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting

16 Jul 2018 | 162458

Asked by: Sir Nicholas Soames

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what progress has been made on the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting Communiqué entitled Towards a Common Future published on 20 April 2018.

Answering member: Alistair Burt | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

As Chair-in-Office, the UK is working with Commonwealth partners to ensure the delivery of commitments set out in the Commonwealth Heads of Government (CHOGM) communiqué and to build a Commonwealth which is fairer and more prosperous, sustainable, and secure.

The Commonwealth Secretariat and Commonwealth Member States have already made good progress in the two months following CHOGM. For example:

- The Commonwealth Secretariat convened, and the UK chaired, the first Senior Trade Officials Meeting to agree the framework for implementation of the Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda for Trade and Investment;
- Vanuatu, which co-Chairs the Commonwealth Clean Oceans Alliance with the UK, became the first country in the world to enact a ban on the manufacture and sale of single use plastic bags, polystyrene takeaway boxes, and plastic drinking straws. Indian Prime Minister Modi has announced a ban of all single use plastics, which will come into effect in 2022;
- The UK and the International Trade Centre launched SheTrades Commonwealth in Kenya to enable the increased participation of women-owned businesses in international trade; and
- Thérèse Coffey MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment and Rural Life Opportunities, hosted Commonwealth High Commissioners to discuss ambitions and expertise in tackling plastic pollution, and provide more detail of the UK support available to them to help them reduce plastic pollution in our Oceans under the Commonwealth Blue Charter.

Commonwealth: Diplomatic Relations

15 May 2018 | 641 c116

Asked by: Julia Lopez

Will my right hon. Friend explain how the UK is currently working with allies such as Australia to bolster Commonwealth ties in the south Pacific as a counter balance to growing Chinese influence in places such as Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands?

Answered by: Boris Johnson | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for her question, and it has been raised specifically with me by our friends in the south Pacific that they want to see the UK back there. A head of an island there described to me his sense of grief at seeing a vacant UK seat at a recent meeting—I will not name the country in which the meeting took place. We are filling that seat; we will be back there in all the countries that I have just announced.

Commonwealth: Diplomatic Relations

15 May 2018 | 641 c116

Asked by: Jim Shannon

Bearing in mind the recent return of Zimbabwe to our Commonwealth family, can the Secretary of State tell us what other countries might be about to join the Commonwealth? Is it too much to hope that perhaps the Republic of Ireland might be one of them?

Answered by: Boris Johnson | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

In these questions, it is important not to get too far ahead of ourselves. Zimbabwe is a great news story at the moment, but, alas, she has not yet reapplied for membership of the Commonwealth. We await that application to the Commonwealth secretariat. It is certainly something that the UK and other countries would strongly support, as we discovered at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting. As the hon. Gentleman knows, there are other countries that are in the pipeline, but they have yet to identify themselves publicly.

Commonwealth: Diplomatic Relations

15 May 2018 | 641 cc115-7

Asked by: Andrea Jenkyns

What steps his Department is taking to strengthen bilateral relations with Commonwealth countries.

Answered by: Boris Johnson | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

During the recent Heads of Government meeting at the Commonwealth summit, we announced the opening of nine new missions, to great acclaim throughout the Commonwealth. They include six high commissions in Lesotho, Swaziland, the Bahamas, Tonga, Samoa and Vanuatu. As I have told the House before, we are expanding the UK diplomatic network to become the biggest in Europe.

Commonwealth: LGBT People

02 May 2018 | 136399

Asked by: Sarah Champion

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, what the timetable is for the publication of the guidance on international best practice on sexual orientation and gender identity; and what steps his Department is taking to help ensure this guidance is rolled out throughout commonwealth countries.

Answering member: Victoria Atkins | Women and Equalities

The International Best Practice Guide to Equality on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, developed by OutRight Action International and commissioned by the Government Equalities Office, was published on 18th April 2018.

The Department has taken a number of steps to ensure the guide is distributed throughout Commonwealth countries. It was distributed at the Commonwealth Summit, which was attended by parliamentarians, diplomats, business leaders, civil society and activists from across the Commonwealth. Events will be held in different regions of the world in order to distribute the guide and facilitate opportunities for discussion and the sharing of best practice. A copy of the guide has also been sent to the House of Commons Library.

[Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting](#)

09 Apr 2018 | HL6762

Asked by: Baroness Hodgson of Abinger

To ask Her Majesty's Government whether there will be a focus on the Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in London in April.

Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

We anticipate the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting will cover various gender issues, given member states' unanimous commitment to the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, including Goal 5 on ending all forms of discrimination against women and girls. However, the Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative is not a standalone agenda item.

Delegates from across the Commonwealth will attend the Commonwealth Women's Forum at the start of summit week. The programme will include substantive plenary sessions and parallel workshops, providing delegates with the chance to focus on specific areas including gender-based violence and women, peace and security.

[The Commonwealth](#)

27 Mar 2018 | 638 c639

Asked by: Richard Graham

What recent assessment he has made of future political and diplomatic opportunities for the Commonwealth.

Answered by: Boris Johnson | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

The Commonwealth is a unique global framework. Its members are home to a third of the world's population, with a combined GDP last year of over \$10 trillion. That shows the extraordinary potential of the Commonwealth summit in London next month. We have a fantastic programme and agenda that includes the discussion of cyber, free trade and free trade deals, how to rid the world's oceans of plastics and how to ensure that every girl in the world gets 12 years of quality education.

5. Other Parliamentary material

5.1 Debates

[Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 2018](#)

22 Mar 2018 | House of Lords | 790 cc422-448

Lords motion to take note of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 2018. Agreed to on question. (Part 1 of 2)

[Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 2018](#)

22 Mar 2018 | House of Lords | 790 cc457-498

Lords motion to take note of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 2018. Agreed to on question. (Part 2 of 2)

[Future of the Commonwealth](#)

21 Mar 2018 | House of Commons | 638 cc163-187WH

Motion that this House has considered the future of the Commonwealth. Agreed to on question.

[Commonwealth Summit 2018](#)

02 Nov 2017 | House of Lords | 785 cc1543-1565

Lords question for short debate on whether they will ensure that the programme for the Commonwealth Summit in London in 2018 includes a People's Forum and a Parliamentary Forum. the outcomes of which are recorded in the final communiqué, as has been the case for similar summits in the past.

[Commonwealth](#)

16 Mar 2017 | House of Lords | 779 cc1983-2062

Lords motion to take note of the United Kingdom's relationship with the Commonwealth, ahead of the United Kingdom hosting the Heads of Government meeting in 2018. Agreed to on question.

[Commonwealth: Trade](#)

22 Feb 2017 | House of Commons | 621 cc407-432WH

Motion that this House has considered promoting trade with the Commonwealth. Motion lapsed.

5.2 Statements

[Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting: Update on delivery](#)

14 Jan 2019 | HCWS1247

Mr Jeremy Hunt (Secretary of State for Foreign and

Commonwealth Affairs): In April, the UK hosted the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM). The summit was the largest of its kind in our history. 46 Heads of Government and 49 Foreign

Ministers met and agreed a range of actions to build a Commonwealth that is fairer, more sustainable, more prosperous, and more secure.

As Chair-in-Office, the UK has continued to work with the three pillars of the Commonwealth – the Commonwealth Secretariat, its member states, and its organisations and networks to deliver on commitments made at CHOGM. To support this work, the UK announced over £500 million of projects under the four themes discussed at the summit. An overview of these commitments and projects has been placed in the Library of the House and I am pleased to report progress in a number of areas today.

To build a fairer Commonwealth, the UK is supporting nine Commonwealth member states deliver 12 years of quality education for girls by 2030. I co-chaired the first meeting of the Platform for Girls' Education with the Kenyan Education Minister, Amina Mohamed, in September. The Platform will work together throughout the UK's period as Chair-in-Office and report on progress ahead of the CHOGM 2020 in Rwanda. The UK has also partnered with the Secretariat for Pacific Communities to launch the Pacific Commonwealth Equality Project, which will enable Pacific leaders to champion and advance human rights by strengthening the capacity of their countries to deliver on their international human rights commitments. Reinforcing the belief that effective Parliaments are one of the principal institutions of any functioning democracy, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association launched updated benchmarks for democratic legislatures in November. Following the offer made by my right honourable Friend the Prime Minister, a number of Commonwealth countries have expressed interest in reviewing and reforming outdated legislation that makes it possible to discriminate on the grounds of sex, gender identity, or sexual orientation. The Equality and Justice Alliance has held the first meeting of its Group of Experts, convened the first regional dialogue of high-level champions of reform, and has engaged national and regional civil society to support this work.

To build a more sustainable Commonwealth, the UK is delivering on the Commonwealth Blue Charter by helping member states protect and sustainably develop the ocean. Twenty-three Commonwealth countries have signed up to the UK and Vanuatu led 'Commonwealth Clean Oceans Alliance' (CCOA) to tackle marine plastic pollution. Two of these countries joined the Alliance at the first CCOA Ministerial Meeting chaired by my noble Friend Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, Minister of State for the Commonwealth, in the margins of the Sustainable Blue Economy Conference in Nairobi in November. During her visit to Kenya, my right honourable Friend, the Prime Minister also announced a Young Leaders' Plastic Challenge Badge to help an estimated 100,000 young people in the Commonwealth become leaders in raising awareness about reducing plastic consumption. In response to the challenge of climate change, the UK and New Zealand are also providing support for the establishment of a Regional Pacific Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) Hub, which will help Pacific Island Countries implement the Paris Agreement.

To build a more prosperous Commonwealth, the UK is helping member states harness trade and investment as a means of delivering inclusive

economic growth and prosperity. The Commonwealth Trade Facilitation Programme is helping member states implement the World Trade Organisation (WTO) Trade Facilitation Agreement, creating more efficient customs procedures and boosting intra-Commonwealth trade. Scoping missions have already taken place in Eswatini, Tonga and Zambia; and technical support has already been delivered in Sierra Leone and Malawi. In October, Guyana became the first country to partner with the UK-funded Commonwealth Marine Economies Programme to develop a national Maritime Economy Plan. The programme is supporting the sustainable development and growth of 17 Commonwealth Small Island Developing States. To support inclusive and sustainable trade, the UK has partnered with the International Trade Centre to deliver 'SheTrades Commonwealth'. The project aims to promote women's economic empowerment by helping women-owned businesses to trade internationally. Following its launch in Bangladesh, Ghana, Kenya and Nigeria, over 2,300 women entrepreneurs have registered with the initiative and 518 companies have attended capacity building events.

To build a more secure Commonwealth, the UK is enhancing cooperation on cyber security by helping member states identify and address vulnerabilities and gaps in capacity. In support of the Commonwealth Cyber Declaration, the UK has partnered with the World Bank to deliver national cyber security reviews in a range of member states. We are on track to meet the commitment for every Commonwealth member state to voluntarily undertake a review by CHOGM 2020. The UK is also enabling Commonwealth countries to strengthen their national responses to modern slavery. This will include a legislative drafting seminar in March 2019 that will bring together parliamentarians from across the Commonwealth to consider how their legislation and wider national responses to modern slavery can be strengthened. Further training on how to tackle online child exploitation will be provided to 19 Commonwealth countries over the next 18 months.

Finally, we have sought to strengthen cooperation in international organisations. In Geneva, my noble Friend Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon hosted a meeting of Commonwealth Permanent Representatives to discuss greater cooperation between Commonwealth Missions in advance of the Human Rights Council. New Zealand has hosted two similar meetings to discuss WTO reform. My right honourable Friend, the Prime Minister also included a passage on the Commonwealth in her speech to the UN General Assembly. She spoke explicitly as Commonwealth Chair-in-Office on behalf of the Heads of Government of 53 Commonwealth countries – over a quarter of the UN membership – to reaffirm their shared commitment to work together within a rules based international system to address shared global challenges.

[Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting](#) **23 Apr 2018 | HCWS634**

Theresa May (Prime Minister): Last week I hosted the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (19 - 20 April) – the largest summit of its kind in our country's history. Leaders from 53

countries gathered together with over 15,000 delegates, including at 90 side events, demonstrating that the Commonwealth is united not only by a common history, but by a common future.

We put young people at the heart of the summit, recognising the need to ensure the actions we took would renew the Commonwealth and promote its relevance to its people, 60% of whom are under 30.

We agreed a range of actions to build a Commonwealth which is fairer, more sustainable, more secure and more prosperous. These commitments were captured in a Communiqué and accompanying Leaders' Statement. I have placed a copy of both in the House of Commons Library.

A central theme of our leaders' meeting was our resolve to stand together in defence of the rules based international system.

To build a more secure future, we expressed our unanimous opposition to the use of chemical weapons, and committed to strengthen the effective implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention. We also agreed the 'Commonwealth Cyber Declaration,' the world's largest and most geographically diverse intergovernmental commitment on cyber-security co-operation and capacity building, helping to protect our people and businesses from ever-more sophisticated digital threats. The UK has committed £15 million to help member states boost their cyber-security capabilities.

To build a more sustainable future, we celebrated every nation of the Commonwealth having now ratified the Paris Agreement, and recommitted to pursuing efforts to limit the increase in global average temperature to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. We also took specific action to protect our oceans and launched the 'Commonwealth Blue Charter', supported by the UK and Vanuatu's 'Clean Oceans Alliance.' A number of Commonwealth countries have made a series of commitments to tackle the scourge of plastic pollution, including Papua New Guinea, which has banned plastic bags; Belize, which has banned plastic bags, forks and other single-use items by 2019; and New Zealand, which has announced a ban on microbeads. The UK pledged to ban plastic straws, stirrers and plastic-stemmed cotton buds, as well as announcing funding for research into tackling marine litter. With over 90% of Commonwealth citizens living in malaria-affected countries, leaders pledged to halve malaria across the Commonwealth by 2023.

To build a more prosperous future, we made a unanimous statement on the need to fight protectionism – the first Commonwealth summit to do so. We launched initiatives to break down barriers to trade through the promotion of common standards across the Commonwealth, to address systemic barriers to women's full and equal participation in the economy, and to boost youth employment through a new Commonwealth apprenticeships programme. We also pledged to ensure that all girls and boys across the Commonwealth will be able to access at least 12 years of quality education and learning by 2030. The UK has committed a further £212 million to ensure no child is left behind.

To build a fairer future, we agreed the critical importance of the full social, economic and political participation of all our citizens for democracy and sustainable development to thrive. In my speech to the Joint Forum Plenary on Tuesday 17 April, I set out that nobody should face persecution or discrimination because of who they are or who they love, and announced a programme of support for any Commonwealth member wanting to reform outdated legislation that permits discrimination, including against same-sex relations.

The week also provided the opportunity for bilateral meetings with Commonwealth leaders. I met Caribbean leaders on Tuesday 17 April and gave an absolute commitment that the Government will do whatever it takes - including, where appropriate, payment of compensation - to resolve the anxieties and problems which some of the Windrush generation have suffered. My Rt Hon Friend the Home Secretary will be providing a further update in Parliament later today.

We expressed deep gratitude for everything that Her Majesty The Queen has done to nurture this remarkable organisation, and agreed that the next Head of the Commonwealth shall be His Royal Highness Prince Charles, The Prince of Wales.

As we begin the UK's two-year Chair in Office, I look forward to working with all our Commonwealth partners in fulfilling the commitments we have made, and preparing for the next meeting in Rwanda, in 2020.

Expansion of UK diplomatic network in the Commonwealth

19 Apr 2018 | HCWS625

Boris Johnson (Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs): Global Britain is this government's ambition to increase the UK's national security, prosperity and influence, signalling our resolve to remain a big and influential player on the world stage.

In March, I announced plans to open around 10 new sovereign missions over the next two years, drawing on additional funding granted to the Foreign & Commonwealth Office by the Chancellor of the Exchequer to enhance our diplomatic capability overseas.

During the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in London this week, I am announcing the location of nine new missions: six High Commissions in Lesotho (Maseru); Swaziland (Mbabane); the Bahamas (Nassau); Tonga (Nuku'Alofa); Samoa (Apia); Vanuatu (Port Vila); and a further three missions, in Antigua and Barbuda (St John's); Grenada (St George's); and St Vincent & the Grenadines (Kingstown). These new missions will strengthen the UK's diplomatic influence in the Commonwealth and help to deliver the UK's security and prosperity objectives.

This expansion of our diplomatic network in the Commonwealth, which marks the beginning of the UK's two-year tenure as Chair,

demonstrates our commitment to making an even greater success of this historic and important network of like-minded friends.

5.3 Early Day Motions

ZIMBABWE'S APPLICATION TO RE-JOIN THE COMMONWEALTH

EDM 1317 (session 2017-9)

24 May 2018

Frank Field

That this House welcomes Zimbabwe's application to re-join the Commonwealth; hopes the processes of assessment of compliance with the values and principles of the Commonwealth Charter will enable its application to be considered collectively by the Heads of Government of Commonwealth countries; and believes that with a fair wind Zimbabwe could become a country that uses its natural resources responsibly and equitably to enhance the wellbeing of all its citizens.

COMMONWEALTH CITIZENS AND THE RIGHT TO REMAIN IN THE UK

EDM 1145 (session 2017-9)

28 March 2018

Keith Vaz

That this House acknowledges the role of Her Majesty the Queen as Head of the Commonwealth; welcomes the contribution that has been made to the UK by Commonwealth citizens; notes the research carried out by the Migration Observatory estimating that there are up to 50,000 Commonwealth-born persons in the UK who are undocumented residents; is deeply concerned at the treatment of some Commonwealth citizens, including those from Barbados by the Home Office; and calls on the Government to address this issue ahead of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in April 2018.

COMMONWEALTH HEADS OF GOVERNMENT MEETING 2018 - FREEDOM OF WORSHIP

EDM 1141 (session 2017-9)

29 March 2018

Patricia Gibson

That this House is aware that the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) 2018 will take place in London from 16 to 20 April 2018; appreciates that the Commonwealth is a diverse community and that CHOGM 2018 is an important opportunity to promote democracy and peace; understands that religion plays a huge part in life across all Commonwealth countries with incredibly diverse religions and belief systems practised throughout member states; urges the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to ensure that freedom to practice the religion or belief of one's choice is firmly on the agenda at that CHOGM; is alarmed that freedom of religion is facing increased restrictions around the globe and therefore Commonwealth countries affirming the importance of that fundamental right, highlighting good

practice across its member states, would be hugely important; and stresses that CHOGM 2018 provides opportunities for robust dialogue with those member states which fall short in protecting freedom of religion which should not be missed.

COMMONWEALTH LEADERSHIP TO END MODERN SLAVERY

EDM 276 (session 2017-9)

6 September 2017

Ann Clwyd

That this House welcomes the opportunity presented by the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 2018 in London, for the Commonwealth to take a leading role in ending modern slavery and achieving SDG 8.7 in Member States; notes, with regret and concern, that the Commonwealth is disproportionately affected by modern slavery; welcomes the involvement of civil society in the run-up to the Summit, including through the Commonwealth 8.7 Group convened by the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, and in on-going initiatives to end modern slavery; further welcomes the Government's commitment to achieving SDG 8.7; and urges the Government and parliamentarians to actively support significant political and financial investment, including at the Summit, in global Commonwealth leadership in this area.

COMMONWEALTH HEADS OF GOVERNMENT MEETING WOMEN'S FORUM 2015

EDM 807 (session 2015-6)

2 December 2015

Valerie Vaz

That this House commends the historical first meeting of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) Women's Forum; notes that there are approximately one billion women and young girls throughout the commonwealth; further notes the statement from the conference that our granddaughters will not achieve wage parity unless there is significant national and international action implemented on equality; recognises the importance of the Bechdel test as a good indication for equal gender representation and notes the benefits of applying it to areas of society other than media; and calls on the Government to establish an independent Technical Working Group of Experts on Gender Equality to enable women's empowerment through transformative systems for education, health and employment opportunities to follow-up on priorities for gender equality and women's empowerment in alignment with the targets for the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to report progress to subsequent CHOGMs.

6. Further reading

[**Commonwealth Day 2019**](#), Commonwealth Parliamentary Association
Commonwealth Day will be observed in 2019 on Monday 11 March 2019. The theme will be 'A Connected Commonwealth'.

[**Statistics on UK trade with the Commonwealth**](#), Commons Briefing papers CBP-8282, 28 January 2019

[**Trade and the Commonwealth: Australia and New Zealand inquiry**](#) (Inquiry status: open)

The International Trade Committee launches a new inquiry into trade and the Commonwealth: Australia and New Zealand. It will be the first in a series of inquiries examining the potential for new trade relationships with members of the Commonwealth.

[**Brexit reading list: Global Britain**](#), Commons Briefing papers CBP-8338, 21 August 2018

[**Global Britain and the 2018 Commonwealth Summit: Government response to the Committee's Seventh Report**](#), Eleventh Special Report of Session 2017–19, Foreign Affairs Committee, HC 1427, 13 July 2018

[**Global Britain and the 2018 Commonwealth Summit**](#), Seventh Report of Session 2017–19, Foreign Affairs Committee, HC 831, 5 April 2018

[**All-Party Parliamentary Group for the Commonwealth**](#)

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