



# In Focus

## Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) 27–29 November 2015

From 27 to 29 November 2015, the leaders of Commonwealth countries met in Malta to discuss global issues such as climate change, peace and security, migration and sustainable development, and to elect a new Commonwealth Secretary-General.

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### The Election of the Commonwealth Secretary-General

On 27 November 2015, a closed-vote by the leaders of Commonwealth member states took place at the Malta summit to elect a new Secretary-General. Although the Secretary-General has “[no formal job description](#)”, [their role](#) is to: promote and protect the Commonwealth’s values, as set out in the Commonwealth Charter; represent the Commonwealth globally; and manage the Commonwealth Secretariat, including through the facilitation of biennial Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings.

After two rounds of voting, [Baroness Scotland of Asthal was elected](#) as the next Secretary-General. [Other candidates](#) for the position included Mmasekgoa Masire-Mwamba, who previously served as Deputy Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, and Sir Ronald Sanders, who was twice High Commissioner to the United Kingdom for Antigua and Barbuda, and Ambassador to the World Trade Organisation. During the election campaign, [Baroness Scotland vowed](#) to build “consensus on a revitalised Commonwealth”, which would focus on the “twin goals of democracy and development”. She will replace incumbent, Khamalesh Sharma from India, when his current term ends on 1 April 2016. She becomes the sixth Commonwealth Secretary-General and the first woman to occupy the post.

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### Outcomes of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting

#### Climate Change

During the Malta meeting, the Commonwealth leaders released a [joint statement on climate action](#). In that statement, the leaders noted that they were “deeply concerned” with the threat of climate change, and the impact of it on the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of member states. In addition, the leaders reaffirmed their commitment to raising US\$100 billion per annum by 2020 in order to aid developing countries in adapting to the effects of climate change. Similarly, leaders agreed to establish a Commonwealth Green Finance Access Hub, to strengthen access to existing and new finance for “[small and other climate vulnerable states](#)”.

Commonwealth leaders also called for those at the United Nations Climate Change Conference 2015—which runs from 30 November 2015 to 11 December 2015—to produce a “legally-binding agreement” aimed at reducing emissions and controlling climate change. The leaders’ statement argued that, if such an [agreement](#) was implemented, it would “put the global community on track towards low-emission and climate-resilient societies and economies”.

### Peace and Security

Commonwealth leaders also [discussed peace and security](#) at the Malta meeting. They stated in their [final communiqué](#) that violent extremism and terrorism were “serious threats to the whole world”, before calling on all member governments to implement their obligations under [United Nations Security Council Resolution 2178](#). The Resolution—adopted in September 2014—calls on signatories to prevent individuals believed to be foreign fighters from crossing their borders. In addition, Resolution 2178 stresses that signatory countries should prosecute, rehabilitate and reintegrate foreign fighters returning to their countries. The [final communiqué](#) also included a commitment that member states should fully implement the [Arms Trade Treaty 2014](#), restricting the illegal selling of conventional weapons, such as small arms.

### Migration

The [leaders’ statement](#) also noted that, if “harnessed and properly managed”, migration can deliver economic and social benefits which “improve the resilience and prosperity of Commonwealth member states”. In addition, [leaders called](#) for member states to ensure that migrants—regardless of their migration status—refugees, and displaced people are treated humanely and with “full respect for human rights”. Further, [Heads of Government agreed](#) to “enhance national and international efforts” at addressing ‘irregular’ migration through various means, including: the prevention and ending of conflict, terrorism and violent extremism; the eradication of poverty; strengthening the rule of law; reinforcing respect for human rights; promoting sustainable economic development; and combating organised crime, such as modern-day slavery and people trafficking.

### Sustainable Development

In their [final communiqué](#), the leaders also welcomed the adoption of the [2030 UN Agenda for Sustainable Development](#)—a set of 17 goals with 169 targets aimed at resolving sustainable development issues, such as poverty, health and inequality. The Commonwealth leaders described the agenda as “historic” and containing “the ability to change the world”. Similarly, it was agreed that the Commonwealth should provide assistance to member states in order for them to attain long-term debt sustainability by providing technical advice on “institutional strengthening, debt financing, debt strategy formulation and debt restructuring”.

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### Further Reading

- Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting Malta 2015, ‘[About the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting](#)’, accessed 4 December 2015
- The Commonwealth, [Fast Facts on the Commonwealth: A Briefing for Journalists](#), 30 October 2015

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