



Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 2018

Debate on 22 March 2018

Summary

This House of Lords Library Briefing has been prepared in advance of the debate scheduled to take place in the House of Lords on 22 March 2018 on the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 2018 and on the House of Lords International Relations Committee report, *Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 2018*.

From 16 to 20 April 2018, the United Kingdom will host the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. The summit will focus on delivering four outcomes under the theme of working 'towards a common future'. The outcomes are: prosperity by boosting intra-Commonwealth trade and investment; security and increasing cooperation to tackle issues such as cybercrime and human trafficking; fairness by promoting democracy across the Commonwealth; and sustainability through building the resilience of smaller states to deal with the effects of climate change and global crises. In her speech at the meeting, the Prime Minister, Theresa May, will outline the need for the Commonwealth to have a clearer purpose, and to be better able to address the global challenges that the Commonwealth faces.

Preceding the Heads of Government Meeting will be four forums: the Commonwealth Youth Forum; the Commonwealth Women's Forum; the Commonwealth Business Forum; and the Commonwealth People's Forum.

This Briefing examines the upcoming Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting and the desired outcomes of the meeting. It also details recent parliamentary activity about the 2018 meeting, including the recommendations and conclusions made by the House of Lords International Relations Committee in its report, *Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 2018*, published on 7 February 2018. In addition, this Briefing provides a background to the Commonwealth and some of its bodies.

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I. Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 2018

I.1 Background to the Summit

The United Kingdom will host the 2018 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), having succeeded Malta as the Chair-in-Office, from 16 to 20 April 2018. The meeting was to be held in Vanuatu in 2017, however, the damage caused by Cyclone Pam in 2015 made this impossible, with the Commonwealth asking the United Kingdom to host instead.¹

On 13 March 2017, the Prime Minister, Theresa May, met with the Maltese Prime Minister and then Commonwealth Chair, Joseph Muscat, to discuss preparations ahead of CHOGM 2018. Mrs May announced that she and her cabinet would oversee preparations, alongside an Inter-Ministerial Group co-chaired by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Boris Johnson, and Secretary of State for the Home Department Amber Rudd.²

In addition, the Prime Minister's Office announced that a central team in the Cabinet Office had been set up to deliver the meeting, and would work closely with the Commonwealth Secretariat and member states. Tim Hitchens, a former British Ambassador to Japan, would head the central team and would report directly to the Prime Minister.³

In a statement prior to her meeting with Joseph Muscat, Theresa May said that the UK had a "longstanding and firm commitment" to the Commonwealth and to the values it upholds, including democracy, human rights and the rule of law.⁴ Mrs May also stated that by hosting the Heads of Government meeting in 2018, the UK was:

[C]ommitted to working with all members not only to reaffirm these shared values, but also to re-energise and revitalise the Commonwealth to cement its relevance to this and future generations.

As we look to create a truly global Britain, the deep partnerships that we share through a 21st century Commonwealth can help us strengthen the prosperity and security of our own citizens, and those of our many friends and allies across the world.⁵

¹ House of Lords International Relations Committee, [Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 2018](#), 7 February 2018, HL Paper 74 of session 2017–19, p 1.

² Prime Minister's Office, '[PM: Summit Will Set Out Future for a Vibrant and Diverse Commonwealth](#)', 13 March 2017.

³ *ibid.*

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ *ibid.*

According to the Prime Minister's Office, at the summit Theresa May will outline the need for the Commonwealth to have a clearer purpose, and that it should be better able to address the global challenges that the Commonwealth faces.⁶

On 20 February 2018, an oral question was asked in the House of Lords about the meeting and about the UK's priorities. The Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, said the Government had not decided its priorities, which it would do during the Heads of Government Meeting. However, he said there had already been a "real focus" by the Government on the meeting's agenda themes, such as empowerment and education; cybersecurity; trade; climate change; and human rights.⁷

1.2 Desired Outcomes

The theme of CHOGM 2018 is 'Towards a Common Future'. It aims to focus on "building on the strengths" of the Commonwealth to ensure the organisation is "responsive to global challenges", and to deliver a more prosperous, secure, sustainable, and fair future for all its citizens, particularly, its young people.⁸ As part of this meeting, leaders at the summit will focus on delivering four outcomes:

- a more sustainable future;
- a fairer future;
- a more secure future; and
- a more prosperous future.

Sustainability

According to the Commonwealth's website, without "urgent action" to reduce vulnerability and increase resilience, the impacts of climate change could push an additional 100 million people across the world into poverty by 2030.⁹ It contends this is relevant for the association, as 39 of its 53 members are "small or other vulnerable states".¹⁰ The Commonwealth estimates that each year, across its membership, natural disasters affect 28 million people and cause economic losses of up to US\$8 billion.¹¹

⁶ Prime Minister's Office, '[PM to Call for Revitalised Commonwealth at Reception Ahead of 2018 Heads of Government Meeting](#)', 19 September 2017.

⁷ [HL Hansard, 20 February 2018, cols 10–11](#).

⁸ Commonwealth website, '[Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting London 2018: The Ambition](#)', accessed 7 March 2018.

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ *ibid.*

The Commonwealth has previously adopted several measures to tackle climate change, protect the environment and increase the resilience of small or vulnerable member states. In 2016, the Commonwealth saw the successful completion of the inception phase of the Climate Finance Access Hub, previously announced at CHOGM 2015, with full delivery of the Hub expected in the 2016/17 financial year.¹² The Hub will help countries “untangle the red tape” around climate financing, and make successful applications to the international funds that address climate change.¹³

In addition, in its latest annual report, the Commonwealth Secretariat has sought to tackle increasing debt in its membership resulting from climate change. Consequently, the Secretariat proposed that bilateral funds already pledged for climate finance in indebted countries should be used for purchasing debt.¹⁴ In exchange, funds otherwise allocated to servicing debt would be used for climate adaptation. The Secretariat stated this would improve debt management and increase investment in climate resilience. The Secretariat has also collaborated with the World Bank to develop a version of “debt swap for climate action (DSCA)” to be trialled in Jamaica. If successful, the United Nations Economic Commission for the Caribbean and Latin America (UNECLAC) will roll out DSCA in other Caribbean countries.¹⁵ DSCA is an agreement between participating climate finance providers and debtor countries, to reduce their debt in exchange for “a commitment to use debt repayments to finance local climate change projects”.¹⁶

Fairness

The Commonwealth Charter sets out a shared vision of democracy, good governance, human rights and the rule of law. According to the Charter:

We [the Commonwealth] recognise the inalienable right of individuals to participate in democratic processes, in particular through free and fair elections in shaping the society in which they live. Governments, political parties and civil society are responsible for upholding and promoting democratic culture and practices and are accountable to the public in this regard.¹⁷

The Commonwealth website for the Heads of Government Meeting states that by upholding and promoting the principles, member states can ensure a “fairer future” for all members of the Commonwealth, and provide the

¹² Commonwealth Secretariat, [Annual Results Report 2015/2016](#), December 2016, p 21.

¹³ Commonwealth website, [‘The Climate Finance Access Hub’](#), accessed 10 March 2018.

¹⁴ Commonwealth Secretariat, [Annual Results Report 2015/2016](#), December 2016, p 21.

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ Commonwealth website, [‘We Can Tackle Climate Change and National Debt Together’](#), 24 February 2016.

¹⁷ Commonwealth website, [Charter of the Commonwealth](#), 22 March 2013, p 5.

essential basis for sustainable development.¹⁸

The Commonwealth also promotes fairness through the work of several bodies, including the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group, who assess violations of Commonwealth values and recommend measures to restore democracy and constitutional rule.¹⁹ The Action Group comprises ten Commonwealth countries and has the authority to suspend a country from the Commonwealth. Its work includes supporting members in improving election management and the advancement of such values.

The Commonwealth Secretariat's latest annual report states that between 2015 and 2016, Commonwealth Observer Groups were present and reported on elections in seven member countries: Seychelles; Sri Lanka; St Vincent and the Grenadines; Tanzania; Trinidad and Tobago; Uganda; and Vanuatu.²⁰ Following the elections, the Groups submitted recommendations to strengthen electoral processes.²¹ At the time of the annual report's publication in December 2016, some member states had already begun to implement the recommendations.²² This included the establishment of an Electoral Commission in Sri Lanka, and the introduction of strengthened processes for campaign financing in Trinidad and Tobago.²³

In addition, the Secretariat outlined that it was collaborating with several bodies in its member states, such as the African Union. Work included promoting female participation in politics and increasing the number of women in political leadership.²⁴

However, several member states have previously ignored recommendations by the Commonwealth. For example, in 2016, following a general election in Uganda, the Commonwealth made recommendations to address concerns about the election. This included lifting restrictions placed on the freedom of movement of opposition members and supporters.²⁵ Despite this, Human Rights Watch reported that in 2017, police forces had “unjustifiably block[ed], restrict[ed], and disperse[d] peaceful assemblies and demonstrations” by opposition groups.²⁶

¹⁸ Commonwealth website, '[Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting London 2018: The Ambition](#)', accessed 7 March 2018.

¹⁹ Commonwealth Secretariat, '[Annual Results Report 2015/2016](#)', December 2016, p 3.

²⁰ *ibid.*, p 4.

²¹ *ibid.*

²² *ibid.*

²³ *ibid.*

²⁴ *ibid.*, p 3.

²⁵ Commonwealth website, '[Commonwealth Offers Recommendations on Uganda Elections](#)', 25 May 2016.

²⁶ Human Rights Watch, '[Uganda: Events of 2017](#)', accessed 10 March 2018.

Security

The Commonwealth faces many shared security challenges, including: terrorism; serious organised crime; cybercrime; violent extremism; human trafficking and slavery, including children; and early and forced marriage. For example, as of September 2017, approximately 43 percent of women in the Commonwealth married when they were younger than 18 years old.²⁷ The Commonwealth's website contends that such challenges can only be addressed by increased multilateral action and cooperation, whereby member states are placed to partner, aid and learn from each other in tackling these threats.²⁸

However, the Commonwealth has adopted several measures to tackle the security challenges. This includes member states receiving targeted technical assistance from the Commonwealth for national legal reform, making use of existing rule of law guidelines.²⁹ This process led to the Seychelles, Botswana and Nigeria reforming legislation relating to cybercrime, and to Barbados commencing processes of reform to cybersecurity law and policy between 2015 and 2016.³⁰

In September 2017, Baroness Scotland of Asthal, the Commonwealth Secretary-General, announced that she had created the Commonwealth Office of Civil and Criminal Justice Reform to craft templates for legislation, institutional reform and best practice across a broad range of disciplines and activity, including the media and freedom of expression.³¹ It was intended this could help tackle issues including slavery, such as early and forced marriage, in its member states.³²

Prosperity

The Heads of Government Meeting will focus on creating a prosperous future for all Commonwealth member states. The association is home to half of the world's "top emerging cities" and to a total population of 2.4 billion people, which is nearly a third of the global population.³³

To this end, member states aim to work together and promote trade and investment, to drive economic growth, create jobs, and "ensure the

²⁷ Commonwealth website, '[Combined Action Needed to Tackle Modern Slavery, Says Secretary-General](#)', 29 September 2017.

²⁸ Commonwealth website, '[Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting London 2018: The Ambition](#)', accessed 7 March 2018.

²⁹ Commonwealth website, '[Promoting the Rule of Law](#)', accessed 7 March 2018.

³⁰ Commonwealth Secretariat, [Annual Results Report 2015/2016](#), December 2016, p 8.

³¹ Commonwealth website, '[Combined Action Needed to Tackle Modern Slavery, Says Secretary-General](#)', 29 September 2017.

³² *ibid.*

³³ Commonwealth Secretariat, [Annual Results Report 2015/2016](#), December 2016, p 8.

prosperity of [its] citizens”.³⁴ According to the Commonwealth, member states have a ‘Commonwealth Advantage’, where shared values, regulatory systems and language “has the potential” to increase intra-Commonwealth trade by 20 percent and to reduce the cost of doing business between member countries by up to 19 percent.³⁵

In its latest annual report, the Commonwealth Secretariat noted that, as of December 2016, the Secretariat had supported policy makers and stakeholder representatives from 43 countries in “better appreciating” the implications of emerging issues, while also advancing their positions in multilateral and regional trade forums.³⁶ In addition, Bahamas, Fiji, Malta, Sri Lanka and Trinidad and Tobago had already accepted recommendations to improve their public debt management.³⁷

The Commonwealth has developed partnerships with international and regional agencies, as well as country debt management bodies, such as the Commonwealth’s public debt management programme. For example, the Secretariat partnered with the World Bank on an assessment of the status of ocean resources for economic growth—also known as the Blue Economy—in the Caribbean, to provide technical assistance in the region.³⁸ In January 2018, the Minister of State at the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Dr Thérèse Coffey, also repeated plans, previously set out by Baroness Scotland of Asthal in 2017, for a ‘blue charter’ for Commonwealth nations to be adopted at the April summit.³⁹ The charter will involve commitments on reducing plastic waste entering the seas from Commonwealth countries.⁴⁰

1.3 Forums

Preceding the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, there will be several forums taking place in London from 16 to 18 April 2018, bringing together representatives from business, civil society and government. The forums will focus on business, civil society, young people and women.⁴¹

³⁴ Commonwealth Secretariat, [Annual Results Report 2015/2016](#), December 2016, p 8.

³⁵ *ibid.*

³⁶ *ibid.*, p 18.

³⁷ *ibid.*

³⁸ *ibid.*, p 22.

³⁹ Fiona Harvey, ‘[Government to Carry Out Major Environmental Assessment of UK Seas](#)’, *Guardian*, 19 January 2018.

⁴⁰ Commonwealth website, ‘[“Game Changing” Blue Charter to Guide Nations in Sustainable Ocean Development](#)’, 9 June 2017.

⁴¹ Commonwealth website, ‘[Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting London 2018: Forums](#)’, accessed 7 March 2018.

Commonwealth Business Forum

The Commonwealth Business Forum is organised by the Commonwealth Enterprise and Investment Council, in partnership with the City of London. Attendees of the forum will include business leaders from across the Commonwealth, in addition to heads of government and ministers. At the Business Forum, attendees will discuss practical ways to “enhance trade, showcase investment opportunities and promote sustainable development”.⁴² The Business Forum will also seek to address several key themes, including: access to modern financial services; business and growth; Commonwealth technology and innovation; creating a new attitude to sustainable business; mobilising an export economy; and attracting inward investment.⁴³

Commonwealth People’s Forum

The Commonwealth People’s Forum is organised in partnership with the Commonwealth Foundation. The Commonwealth’s website describes it as “the single largest opportunity for civil society to engage with leaders and influence policy”.⁴⁴ The Commonwealth contend that civil society plays a “key role” in helping the organisation develop innovative solutions to global development problems, in addition to holding governments to account for their “commitments”.⁴⁵

The People’s Forum will also help “showcase and celebrate” the shared values and cultures of Commonwealth nations, whilst highlighting the diversity of the Commonwealth’s “global community”.⁴⁶

Commonwealth Youth Forum

The agenda for the Commonwealth Youth Forum is developed by an International Taskforce, comprised of young leaders from across the Commonwealth, working in partnership with the Commonwealth Youth Council (CYC).⁴⁷ The Youth Forum is described by the Commonwealth as an opportunity for young people of the Commonwealth to build cross-cultural connections and networks, to debate the challenges facing its young and to agree youth-lead initiatives to influence decision makers and ensure young people have a voice in its future.⁴⁸

⁴² Commonwealth website, ‘[Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting London 2018: Forums](#)’, accessed 7 March 2018.

⁴³ Commonwealth Enterprise and Investment Council, ‘[Commonwealth Business Forum 2018](#)’, accessed 7 March 2018.

⁴⁴ Commonwealth website, ‘[Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting London 2018: Forums](#)’, accessed 7 March 2018.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

The Commonwealth's website states that the future of its organisation is "dependent" on the one billion young people living in its member states.⁴⁹ Writing in the *Telegraph* on 22 February 2018, the Minister of State at the Department for Education, Nick Gibb, said that at the summit and preceding forums, the Government would be encouraging all Commonwealth countries to "give a commitment to ensuring every child has at least 12 years of quality education".⁵⁰ Mr Gibb stated that the Government's ambition was that this would be achieved by 2030.

Commonwealth Women's Forum

The inaugural Commonwealth Women's Forum took place at the last CHOGM in Malta in 2015, with the aim of increasing gender equality and promoting women's rights in the Commonwealth and beyond. The 2018 Women's Forum will examine some of the global challenges faced by women, as part of the Commonwealth's wider commitment to "leave no one behind" in their goal of achieving gender equality by 2030.⁵¹

The Women's Forum will also highlight women's positive political, economic and societal contributions, and will set out how women and girls will be key to building sustainable and resilient societies. In an article in the *Sunday Express* on 11 March 2018, the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Boris Johnson, said that he would ensure that the summit "focuses on the terrible injustice that deprives millions of girls of the chance to go to school", contending that over 130 million girls do not attend school, "many of whom" live in Commonwealth countries.⁵²

1.4 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 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.⁵³

Climate Change

During the meeting, Commonwealth leaders released a joint statement on climate action. In the statement, the leaders noted that they were "deeply

⁴⁹ Commonwealth website, '[Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting London 2018: Forums](#)', accessed 7 March 2018.

⁵⁰ Nick Gibb, '[Commonwealth Countries Must Ensure That Each Child Has 12 Years of Quality Education](#)', *Telegraph* (£), 22 February 2018.

⁵¹ Commonwealth website, '[Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting London 2018: Forums](#)', accessed 7 March 2018.

⁵² Boris Johnson, '[Commonwealth Has Key Role to Play in the Bright Future For Brexit Britain](#)', *Sunday Express*, 11 March 2018.

⁵³ Commonwealth website, '[Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting \(CHOGM\): Malta, 27–29 November 2015](#)', accessed 7 March 2018.

concerned” with the threat of climate change, and the impact of it on the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of member states.⁵⁴

Consequently, the leaders agreed many outcomes to tackling the impact of climate change. This included leaders reaffirming their commitment to raising US\$100 billion per annum by 2020 to aid developing countries in adapting to the effects of climate change. In addition, 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”.⁵⁵

Peace and Security

Commonwealth leaders 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](#).⁵⁶ 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.⁵⁷ 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’ final communiqué 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”.⁵⁸ 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”.⁵⁹ Further, heads of government agreed to “enhance national and international efforts” aimed 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.⁶⁰

⁵⁴ Commonwealth website, ‘[Commonwealth Leaders’ Statement on Climate Action](#)’, 28 November 2015.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*

⁵⁶ Commonwealth website, ‘[Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 2015: Communiqué](#)’, 29 November 2015.

⁵⁷ United Nations Security Council, ‘[Resolution 2178](#)’, 24 September 2014.

⁵⁸ Commonwealth website, ‘[Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 2015: Communiqué](#)’, 29 November 2015.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

⁶⁰ *ibid.*

Sustainable Development

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”.⁶¹ It was also agreed that the Commonwealth should provide assistance to member states to attain long-term debt sustainability, by providing technical advice on “institutional strengthening, debt financing, debt strategy formulation and debt restructuring”.⁶²

Election of the 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. After two rounds of voting, Baroness Scotland of Asthal was elected Secretary-General. Other candidates 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”.⁶³ She replaced Khamalesh Sharma from India, when his term ended on 1 April 2016. Baroness Scotland became the sixth Commonwealth Secretary-General and the first woman to occupy the post. In line with Commonwealth rules, the Secretary-General can serve a maximum of two four-year terms.⁶⁴

2. Recent Parliamentary Activity About the 2018 Meeting

This section examines recent parliamentary activity about the Heads of Government Meeting 2018 in the House of Lords. This includes a report published by the House of Lords International Relations Committee, and several debates and parliamentary questions.

2.1 House of Lords International Relations Committee Report

On 10 January 2018, the House of Lords International Relations Committee took evidence on the United Kingdom’s preparations and priorities ahead of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in April 2018 from the

⁶¹ Commonwealth website, ‘[Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 2015: Communique](#)’, 29 November 2015.

⁶² *ibid.*

⁶³ Owen Bowcott, ‘[Lady Scotland Vies to be Next Commonwealth Secretary General](#)’, *Guardian*, 24 November 2015.

⁶⁴ Commonwealth website, ‘[Commonwealth Secretary-General](#)’, accessed 5 March 2018.

Chief Executive of the Commonwealth Summit Unit at the Cabinet Office, Tim Hitchens. Mr Hitchens outlined that the UK's ambition was to "help rejuvenate the Commonwealth [...] so that [it] takes its place once more as one of the significant international organisations".⁶⁵ In addition, Mr Hitchens said that the UK would aim to ensure that what was agreed at the meeting was "not just words, but has money and commitments underneath it".⁶⁶

The Committee asked Mr Hitchens about the UK's role within the Commonwealth once the UK had left the EU. In response, Mr Hitchens confirmed the Government's commitment to ensuring that no Commonwealth country would be disadvantaged once the UK leaves the EU.⁶⁷

Conclusions and Recommendations

On 7 February 2018, the House of Lords International Relations Committee published its report, *Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 2018*.⁶⁸

The Committee welcomed the "strong priority" given by the Government to preparations for the meeting, in "contrast to less positive government attitudes" in past decades towards the Commonwealth.⁶⁹

The Committee hoped that the Commonwealth would, in the conclusions of the meeting, express its full support for the strengthening of the rules-based international system. In addition, the Committee recognised that the Commonwealth worked by consensus and, therefore, called on the Government to continue taking a "robust position" on all aspects of human rights, both at the meeting and in the future.⁷⁰

Lastly, the Committee stated that it would be "very welcome" for countries that had previously left the Commonwealth and were "willing and able" to re-join.⁷¹ However, in the case of Zimbabwe, the Committee stressed that it would "attach the greatest weight" to the country holding "free and fair" elections, with Commonwealth election observers allowed "unfettered" access.⁷²

⁶⁵ House of Lords International Relations Committee, [Uncorrected Oral Evidence: Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 2018](#), 10 January 2018.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*

⁶⁷ *ibid.*

⁶⁸ House of Lords International Relations Committee, '[Government Should Reinvigorate Ties with Commonwealth Network](#)', 7 February 2018.

⁶⁹ House of Lords International Relations Committee, [Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 2018](#), 7 February 2018, HL Paper 74 of session 2017–19, p 3.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, p 4.

⁷¹ *ibid.*

⁷² *ibid.*

Following the report's publication, the Chairman of the Committee, Lord Howell of Guildford (Conservative), stated that regardless of the UK leaving the EU, "Britain must re-shape its international relations in changed world circumstances".⁷³ In addition, Lord Howell contended that the upcoming meeting was:

[T]he perfect opportunity to reinvigorate relations with the Commonwealth members and to strengthen our diplomatic, trade, defence and security ties across the network.⁷⁴

2.2 Debates and Parliamentary Questions

In the past year, the Heads of Government Meeting 2018 has been raised in parliamentary debates and questions.

On 8 March 2018, a debate took place in the House of Lords on International Woman's Day and the progress made on global gender equality. Baroness Barker (Liberal Democrat) called on the Government to raise the issue of the criminalisation of homosexuality with other heads of government at the meeting. Baroness Barker contended that in 40 out of 53 Commonwealth states, homosexuality is criminalised, accounting for "more than half" of the world's nations where same-sex relations are illegal.⁷⁵ Responding on behalf of the Government, Baroness Vere of Norbiton, said that the Government was "committed" to ensuring LGBT issues were raised at the summit.⁷⁶

Paul Williams (Labour MP for Stockton South) also raised LGBT issues in an oral question in the House of Commons on 28 February 2018. In his question, Mr Williams asked the Secretary of State for International Development, Penny Mordaunt, what conversations she had had with her cabinet colleagues about championing LGBT rights at the Heads of Government Meeting. In response, Ms Mordaunt said that the Government would be taking the opportunity at the meeting, in sessions on civil society and in bilateral conversations at the summit to discuss such issues.⁷⁷

On 2 November 2017, the House of Lords debated the Government's programme for the Commonwealth meeting. Several Members noted that the meeting was an opportunity for the Government to raise global issues with other heads of government. Lord Chidgey (Liberal Democrat), who tabled the debate, said that the meeting was a "golden opportunity" for Parliament to be at the "centre of activities to reinforce parliamentary

⁷³ House of Lords International Relations Committee, '[Government Should Reinvigorate Ties with Commonwealth Network](#)', 7 February 2018.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*

⁷⁵ [HL Hansard, 8 March 2018, col 1279.](#)

⁷⁶ *ibid*, col 1311.

⁷⁷ [HC Hansard, 28 February 2018, col 807.](#)

democracy throughout the Commonwealth”.⁷⁸ This included Parliamentarians and members of civil society in the Commonwealth working together, prior to and after the summit, in “influencing, scrutinising and monitoring the implementation of the national strategies and policy decisions that evolve”.⁷⁹

Baroness Berridge (Conservative) called on the Government to ensure that freedom of religion or belief was in the summit communiqué as a priority for the Commonwealth, under the summit’s “fairer future” theme.⁸⁰ Lord Loomba (Crossbench) asked what strategies the Government would be forming to help impoverished and disadvantaged women and girls in the Commonwealth.⁸¹

In response, the Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, stated that the Government wanted the summit to be a “milestone event” in the history of the Commonwealth and a “chance to truly demonstrate how the Commonwealth can help mitigate the major challenges” such as climate change, security and equality.⁸² Regarding measures to tackle violations of freedom of religion and belief, Lord Ahmad stated that the fairness pillar within the Commonwealth summit, would allow heads of government to “to develop this [idea] further”.⁸³ Lord Ahmad also told Members that issues affecting women in the Commonwealth would be “front and centre” at the summit.⁸⁴

In November 2017, Philip Hollobone (Conservative MP for Kettering) asked a written question about the Government’s plans to set up a Commonwealth trade conference with the aim of increasing intra-commonwealth trade after the UK leaves the EU. Responding, Mark Garnier, the then Parliamentary Under Secretary at the Department for International Trade, said the Government was committed to “highlighting the value of and increasing intra-Commonwealth trade”.⁸⁵ In addition, Mr Garnier noted that the Business Forum preceding the meeting would help the Government “celebrate and grow intra-Commonwealth trade”.⁸⁶

⁷⁸ [HL Hansard, 2 November 2017, col 1544.](#)

⁷⁹ *ibid.*

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, col 1547.

⁸¹ *ibid.*, col 1554.

⁸² *ibid.*, col 1566.

⁸³ *ibid.*, col 1565.

⁸⁴ *ibid.*

⁸⁵ House of Commons, ‘[Written Question: Commonwealth: Overseas Trade](#)’, 24 November 2017, 114735. For more information on UK–Commonwealth trade, please read: House of Lords Library, [UK-Commonwealth Trade](#), 5 August 2016.

⁸⁶ House of Commons, ‘[Written Question: Commonwealth: Overseas Trade](#)’, 24 November 2017, 114735.

3. About the Commonwealth

The Commonwealth describes itself as a “voluntary association” comprising of 53 independent and equal sovereign states.⁸⁷ Its mission is to support member governments, partnering “with the broader Commonwealth family” and others, to improve the well-being of all Commonwealth citizens and to advance their shared interests globally.⁸⁸ The combined population of the Commonwealth is 2.4 billion, of which more than 60 percent of citizens are aged under 30. In addition, 30 Commonwealth members are smaller states, with a population under two million, and 25 are island nations.⁸⁹

Member states share values and principles, such as democracy, human rights and the rule of law, which are inscribed in the Commonwealth Charter. The Charter expresses the commitment of member states to the development of free and democratic societies and to the promotion of peace and prosperity to improve the lives of all peoples of the Commonwealth.⁹⁰

Since 1971, heads of government from all the Commonwealth member states have attempted to meet biennially to discuss global issues such as climate change and overpopulation. However, in some circumstances, such as host countries facing natural disasters, the summit has been delayed, for example, the damage in Vanuatu caused by Cyclone Pam in 2015 meant it was unable to host the 2017 meeting. The meetings are chaired by the respective head of government of the host country, with that role assigned following deliberations by leaders at previous summits.⁹¹

3.1 Membership Criteria and Eligibility

Commonwealth leaders agreed the following criteria for applicant countries at a meeting in Uganda in November 2007:

- An applicant country should, as a general rule, have had a historic constitutional association with an existing Commonwealth member, save in exceptional circumstances. In exceptional circumstances, applications should be considered on a case-by-case basis;
- An applicant country should accept and comply with Commonwealth fundamental values, principles, and priorities as set out in the [1971 Declaration of Commonwealth Principles](#) and contained in other subsequent Declarations;
- An applicant country must demonstrate commitment to: democracy and democratic processes, including free and fair

⁸⁷ Commonwealth website, ‘[About Us](#)’, accessed 5 March 2018.

⁸⁸ *ibid.*

⁸⁹ *ibid.*

⁹⁰ Commonwealth website, ‘[Our Charter](#)’, accessed 6 March 2018.

⁹¹ Commonwealth Network, ‘[CHOGM 2011](#)’, accessed 10 March 2018.

elections and representative legislatures; the rule of law and independence of the judiciary; good governance, including a well-trained public service and transparent public accounts; and protection of human rights, freedom of expression, and equality of opportunity;

- An applicant country should accept Commonwealth norms and conventions, such as the use of the English language as the medium of inter-Commonwealth relations, and acknowledge Queen Elizabeth II as the Head of the Commonwealth; and
- New members should be encouraged to join the Commonwealth Foundation, and to promote vigorous civil society and business organisations within their countries, and to foster participatory democracy through regular civil society consultations.⁹²

For countries that are seeking to join the Commonwealth, there is a membership process, which entails:

- An informal assessment undertaken by the Secretary-General following an expression of interest by an applicant country;
- Consultation by the Secretary-General with member states;
- Extending an invitation to the interested country to make a formal application; and
- The interested country then lodging a formal application, which should present evidence of the functioning of democratic processes and popular support in that country for joining the Commonwealth.⁹³

Following this process, Commonwealth heads of government would then consider the application at the next meeting. If a consensus is met, the applicant country would then be invited to join the Commonwealth and invited to subsequent meetings. The last country to join the Commonwealth was Rwanda in 2009.⁹⁴

Additionally, should a former member state that had previously withdrawn, or who had been expelled, wish to return to the association, it would need to re-apply for membership. Commonwealth heads of government have not set out any criteria for re-joining the association. However, it is expected that a country would need to “demonstrate that it continues to uphold the principles and values of the Commonwealth that it espoused when it first joined”.⁹⁵ The last country to re-join the Commonwealth was The Gambia in February 2018.⁹⁶

⁹² Commonwealth website, '[Frequently Asked Questions](#)', accessed 5 March 2018.

⁹³ *ibid.*

⁹⁴ Commonwealth website, '[About Us](#)', accessed 5 March 2018.

⁹⁵ Commonwealth website, '[Frequently Asked Questions](#)', accessed 5 March 2018.

⁹⁶ Commonwealth website, '[The Gambia Rejoins the Commonwealth](#)', 8 February 2018.

In October 2016, the Maldives withdrew from the Commonwealth, after accusing the association of treating the country “unjustly and unfairly [...] in the name of democracy promotion”.⁹⁷ In the previous month, the Maldives Government was asked by the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group to address concerns, including the detention and prosecution of opposition leaders and undermining democratic institutions.⁹⁸

3.2 Commonwealth Bodies

Commonwealth Secretariat

The Commonwealth Secretariat was established in 1965 and is tasked with supporting Commonwealth member states to achieve democracy and peace. The head of the Secretariat is the Secretary-General, currently Baroness Scotland of Asthal, who was elected to the role by heads of government at the last meeting in Malta in 2015.⁹⁹

A network of more than 80 intergovernmental, civil society, cultural and professional organisations support the Secretariat by helping member countries put values and principles into action.¹⁰⁰ This includes the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Commonwealth Foundation.

To support member states achieve democracy and peace, the work of the Secretariat:

- Strengthens governance, builds inclusive institutions and promotes justice and human rights;
- Helps economies to grow and boost trade, empowers young people, and addresses threats such as climate change, debt and inequality; and
- Provides training, technical assistance and support to decision-makers to draft legislation and deliver policies. This involves deploying experts and observers who offer impartial advice and solutions to national problems, and by providing technological systems, software and research for managing resources.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Michael Safi, [‘Maldives Quits Commonwealth Over Alleged Rights Abuses’](#), *Guardian*, 13 October 2016.

⁹⁸ Commonwealth website, [‘Concluding Statement of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group’](#), 23 September 2016.

⁹⁹ Commonwealth website, [‘Commonwealth Secretary-General’](#), accessed 5 March 2018.

¹⁰⁰ Commonwealth website, [‘About Us’](#), accessed 5 March 2018.

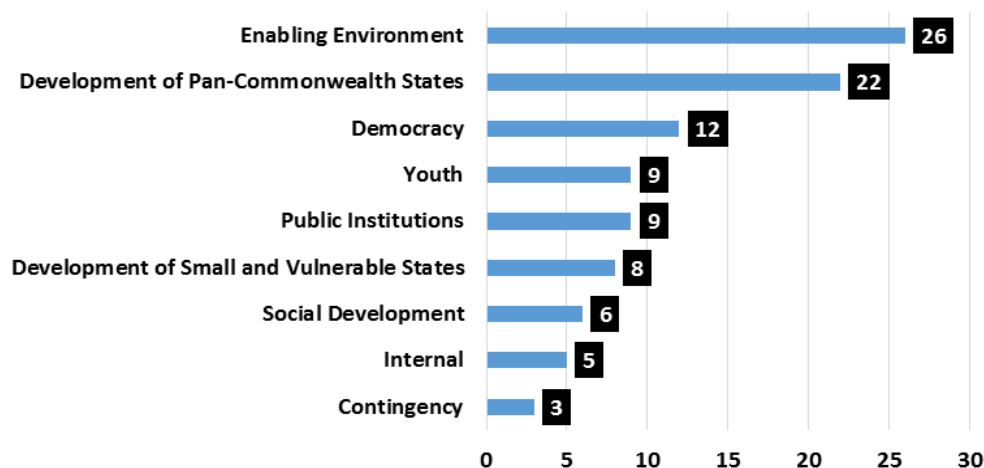
¹⁰¹ *ibid.*

The Secretariat's work is agreed biennially at Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings, and focuses on: governance and peace; trade oceans and natural resources; and economic, social and sustainable development.¹⁰²

The Secretariat is funded by three separate funds: the Commonwealth Secretariat Fund (ComSec); the Commonwealth Youth Programme Fund (CYP); and the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC). For 2015/16, the Secretariat's direct budget was £33.7 million, with £19.4 million funded from the CFTC, £11.1 million funded from ComSec, and £3.2 million from the CYP.¹⁰³ In 2015/16, the UK's contribution, through the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, to the Secretariat's budget was £5,469,640.¹⁰⁴ This was an increase on the 2014/15 financial year, where the UK contributed £5,455,484 towards the budget. The Government has explained that the Department for International Development "also makes voluntary contributions to the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation, and a number of other Commonwealth programmes".¹⁰⁵

Figure 1 outlines the overall direct budget and the distribution of it (expressed as a percentage) across all result areas of the Secretariat's latest annual report (for 2015/16).

Figure 1: Percentage Distribution of the Secretariat's Overall Direct Budget for 2015/16



(Source: Commonwealth Secretariat, [Annual Results Report 2015/2016](#), December 2016, p 32)

¹⁰² Commonwealth website, '[About Us](#)', accessed 5 March 2018.

¹⁰³ Commonwealth Secretariat, [Annual Results Report 2015/2016](#), December 2016, p 32.

¹⁰⁴ House of Lords, '[Written Question: Commonwealth Secretariat: Finance](#)', 23 February 2017, HL5384.

¹⁰⁵ House of Lords, '[Written Question: Commonwealth Secretariat](#)', 23 February 2017, HL5385. For 2016/17, the UK also made a pledged contribution of £8,000,000 to the CFTC and an assessed contribution of £1,028,151 to the CYP (See: Commonwealth, [Financial Statements of the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-Operation: Year Ended 30 June 2017](#), 8 December 2017, p 19, table 7(b)(i); and [Financial Statements of the Commonwealth Youth Programme: Year Ended 30 June 2017](#), 8 December 2017, p 18, table 6(a)(i).

Commonwealth Parliamentary Association

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association was formed in 1911 and is tasked with connecting, developing, promoting and supporting Parliamentarians and their staff to identify “benchmarks of good governance and the implementation of the enduring values” of the Commonwealth.¹⁰⁶ The Association comprises of over 180 branches formed in legislatures in Commonwealth countries “which subscribe to parliamentary democracy”.¹⁰⁷

The Association’s activities focus on the Commonwealth’s “commitment to its fundamental political values”, which includes: the alleviation of poverty; human rights; international peace and order; and equal rights and representation for all citizens of both genders.¹⁰⁸

Commonwealth Foundation

In 1966, the Commonwealth Foundation was established. It is the Commonwealth’s agency for civil society and it is funded by and reports to governments. The Foundation aims to increase political participation between citizens and governments, and focuses on people contributing to policy processes and governance accountability mechanisms.¹⁰⁹

The Foundation is principally funded by assessed contributions made by its members’ governments. The assessed contributions, in addition to other income such as project grants, provide the resources for the Foundation’s annual budget. For 2017/18, the Foundation will be invoicing member states for £3,097,852, which it contends is “consistent with the agreed scale” of assessed contributions.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, ‘[Statement of Purpose](#)’, accessed 6 March 2018.

¹⁰⁷ Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, ‘[Branches and Regions](#)’, accessed 7 March 2018.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Commonwealth Foundation, ‘[Programming Strategy](#)’, accessed 7 March 2018.

¹¹⁰ Commonwealth Foundation, ‘[Annual Work Plan and Budget 2017–18](#)’, April 2017.