



Introduction by
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FIRST Advisory Council

It gives me great pleasure to introduce this official FIRST report on the Commonwealth to mark the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Perth, Western Australia. We are especially grateful to the Commonwealth Secretary General, H.E. Kamallesh Sharma for his help and assistance in the preparation of this publication.

The Commonwealth leaders meet at CHOGM at a time of significant global economic and political challenges. The theme of this meeting ‘Building National Resilience, Building Global Resilience’ is therefore especially apt. CHOGM represents an exceptional opportunity for Commonwealth leaders to discuss global and Commonwealth issues, and to agree on collective policies and initiatives.

Among the subjects to be discussed are international peace and security, democracy, good governance, sustainable development, debt management, education, the environment, gender equality, health, human rights, information and communication technology, law, multilateral trade issues, small states and youth affairs – a formidable and topical agenda.

The Commonwealth has a distinctive role to play in international affairs. We welcome the particular emphasis given to this role in the recent speeches of our Foreign Secretary, William Hague. Its objectives were outlined in the 1971 Singapore Declaration which committed the Commonwealth to instituting world peace, promoting representative democracy, individual liberty and free trade, pursuing equality and opposing racism as well as fighting poverty, ignorance and disease.

Further objectives were added by the Lusaka Declaration of 1979 (opposition to discrimination on the basis of gender) and the Langkawi Declaration of 1989 (environmental sustainability). These

objectives were reinforced by the Harare Declaration of 1991.

The Commonwealth represents an important trade bloc with over US\$3 trillion of trade undertaken every year. The Commonwealth’s combined GDP nearly doubled between 1990-2009 and the middle class of the Commonwealth has increased by nearly one billion people in the last two decades – constituting a very significant and growing consumer market. There is therefore an important economic dimension to the success of the Commonwealth and this will be the subject of the Commonwealth Business Forum taking place before CHOGM.

It was Lord Rosebery who in 1884, when visiting Australia, described the changing British Empire as a ‘Commonwealth of Nations’. One hundred and twenty seven years later, with Australia hosting the CHOGM meeting there is a great opportunity for the Commonwealth to assert and renew itself as a force for democracy and prosperity, and to speak out clearly on the issues of our time.

The Commonwealth’s connections, economic success and commitment to free trade and democracy can contribute significantly to the prosperity of its members. The British Government has made clear its hopes that the Commonwealth will take a leading role in the global economy – helping to liberalise trade, resist protectionism and contribute to the Doha Development Agenda.

This year’s CHOGM will give us all the opportunity to study developments in the Commonwealth and to understand better the wide range of opportunities offered by this unique gathering.

We hope that this official publication produced by FIRST will underline the great potential of the Commonwealth and help promote its key objectives at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting hosted by Australia. **E**