



Message from  
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Secretary General of  
the Commonwealth

Collectively the Commonwealth has always been forward-looking, fitting itself to the changing context of the contemporary world and preparing for challenges that lie ahead. The uplifting vision of the London Declaration, so soon after the desolation of the Second World War, shows how our leaders in 1949 embraced the new era of decolonisation and self-determination with confidence and enthusiasm.

Sixty years later, the Affirmation of Values and Principles agreed at the 2009 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) draws together aspirations expressed in various communiqués and declarations over the intervening decades. It shows how far the Commonwealth has come as a group representing one third of all humanity, how committed we are to ever raising our shared ambitions, and therefore remain a progressive influence for global good.

As Secretary-General, I have had the privilege of seeing from a unique vantage point the way in which those aspirations and that influence are translated into practical action. The range and extent of the Commonwealth's networks and intervention are remarkable by any standards, the more so given the modest size of our central administrative machinery and budget.

Meetings of Heads of Government and of ministers are the engines that drive us forward. Considering that our gatherings encompass vast geographical and cultural diversity, with enormous differences in size, population, endowment and

development, the remarkable feature of the Commonwealth is how rapidly it is able to engage gear.

This is partly because member countries have parliamentary, judicial, legal and educational systems with many shared characteristics. It is also helped by the fact that we are able to communicate in a common language. But above all there is a natural kinship and affinity in the Commonwealth that comes from our shared history and united ambition for the future. The Commonwealth, writ large, is truly about Democracy, Development and Diversity.

The determination to find ways of realising our ambitions, of seeing words put into action, is what drives the continuing process of reform and evolution – and evolution builds resilience.

CHOGM 2011 is likely to be remembered as the reforming CHOGM. In the Commonwealth, just as in our personal lives, change is constant and continuous. However, there are times when we review and reevaluate how we do things and take a conscious decision to revitalise our work. These occasions remain as landmarks in our memory and looking back we see them as particular moments of reinvigoration in the rolling process of reform and renewal.

An important item on the CHOGM agenda in Perth will be consideration of a report from the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group. It proposes reforms aimed at helping the Group attain new levels of support and at strengthening its ability to engage positively in upholding Commonwealth values.

Heads of Government will also consider the report and recommendations of the Eminent Persons Group which I convened at the direction of Heads to develop options for reform to sharpen the impact, raise the profile and strengthen the networks of the Commonwealth. The Group consulted widely among stakeholders and Commonwealth civil society while conducting its review.


The broad scope of Commonwealth engagement will be on display at Perth through the associated forums that have become customary and are now valued additions to CHOGM. The Commonwealth People's Forum, the Commonwealth Youth Forum and the Commonwealth Business Forum are each vibrant expressions of the Commonwealth family in action.

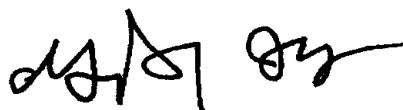
We tend to take our families for granted, barely noticing how members are growing and developing, and it is only on birthdays and special occasions that we have a party to celebrate and mark a milestone in their progress. It can be the same with the Commonwealth family, so CHOGM and the Commonwealth Forums provide the chance for a party – but they are working parties. And working together we make decisions, we plan for future action, and we find answers to contemporary questions; we craft solutions of which we can be justifiably proud particularly when, as is often the case, they are taken up as a template by the wider world at multilateral, regional or national level.

The consensus that is the hallmark of the Commonwealth, and the diversity and scope of our association, mean that what

works as a way forward for our members, and where we blaze a trail, works for the wider international community. This is part of what I have had in mind when I have spoken of the 'global wisdom function' of the Commonwealth.

I have also pointed out the serendipity that, when Heads of Government gather in Perth, they will be within sight of the Swan River. Western Australia was formerly known as Swan River Colony and the swan is still its state emblem, the black swan. Writing in the first century, Juvenal famously considered the black swan to be an impossibility. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, another thinker took up that theme and used the black swan as a symbol for the surprising and unexpected circumstances for which one needs to be prepared.

In a world beset by economic turmoil and considerable political upheaval, and in which the unexpected and surprising will continue to occur, the Commonwealth needs, more than ever, to bring its global wisdom to bear. Building national resilience, building global resilience, achieving reform - it will stand us all in good stead to keep the black swan in our mind's eye as we celebrate the Commonwealth and work together to shape its future. 



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**Building national  
resilience,  
building global  
resilience,  
achieving reform**