

Projecting fundamental values

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PRIME MINISTER OF CANADA



STEPHEN HARPER obtained both a Bachelor's and a Master's degree in economics from the University of Calgary. He was first elected to the House of Commons in 1993 and 2002 became Leader of the Opposition after winning the leadership of the Canadian Alliance. In 2003, Mr Harper co-founded the Conservative Party of Canada and went on to become the new party's leader. The Party won the 2006 election and Mr Harper was sworn in as Prime Minister on February 6th 2006.

All of us arrive at this CHOGM at an exciting moment in the history of the Commonwealth. The Perth meeting provides a unique opportunity to modernize and re-launch the association, and in so doing, to reinforce the values and principles that its members hold in common.

The 2009 CHOGM, held in Port of Spain during the Commonwealth's 60th anniversary, saw leaders agree to a stand-alone "Trinidad and Tobago Affirmation on Commonwealth Values and Principles." It is the most recent and comprehensive reiteration of the Commonwealth's core beliefs. The Affirmation also contains two key mandates from leaders to pave the way for significant reform of Commonwealth activities and institutions in order to build a stronger, more resilient organization.

The first of these mandates was to call for the creation of an Eminent Persons Group, which was tasked with developing recommendations for a more effective and relevant Commonwealth. Canada is proud of the significant role Senator Hugh Segal played in the Group's work. Their final report is bold and forward-looking, and no doubt will be a focal point of deliberations in Perth.

The second key mandate from the 2009 CHOGM was to ask the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) to examine how its work could be further refined to make it more proactive and supportive in dealing with country situations where there are serious or persistent violations of Commonwealth values. The Group's final report proposes a number of refinements to CMAG procedures, ones that will make it less punitive and more constructive.

A good deal of hard work and deliberation is reflected in these two reports. Put into action, their recommendations are well positioned to significantly strengthen Commonwealth values and principles, and the mechanisms that encourage members to respect them. For this reason, Canada supports their adoption and implementation.

This is consistent with the Canadian tradition of supporting concrete, practical reform efforts in multilateral forums in order to ensure their effectiveness, relevancy and accountability.

Leaders at CHOGM will also have an important discussion of how members might celebrate the

upcoming Diamond Jubilee of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, to mark the 60th year of her service as Head of the Commonwealth. This remarkable anniversary will no doubt be warmly recognized by all.

The Commonwealth is unique as an association that is not based on common geography, economic status, or culture, but rather on shared fundamental values. Democracy, good governance, human rights, the rule of law – these are timeless cornerstones of the Commonwealth. Yet members must always be vigilant that the institutions and processes we have collectively created to protect and project these values and principles are kept up-to date, remain effective, and reflect our rapidly changing and increasingly interdependent world.

The title of the Eminent Persons Group report, *A Commonwealth of the People – Time for Urgent Reform*, underscores that ultimately it is in the common bonds of Commonwealth peoples that the wealth of the association lays.

Strengthening direct connections between citizens of the Commonwealth will help ensure the on-going vitality of this network, and continued dedication to its fundamental values.

That is why I am pleased that leading Canadian technology firm OpenText has been working closely with the Commonwealth Secretariat to develop and deploy a new web-based, multi-purpose Internet platform for the Commonwealth, entitled "Commonwealth Connects." Individuals will access information and resources on jobs, scholarships, funding and training from over seventy Commonwealth organisations and associations via the platform, which will also provide a secure area for professionals to collaborate and share best practices. This platform will serve as a valuable tool to engage digitally and represents a practical way to break down physical barriers amongst Commonwealth citizens, Governments, youth and businesses.

The Perth CHOGM provides a unique opportunity to reinvigorate the Commonwealth, to focus it upon its core competencies, and to reinforce its relevance in a world of competing organizations and profound challenges. It is with this hope that I look forward to participating in the 22nd Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting, and to lively and constructive discussions.