

# Fostering future leaders

By **THE HON STEPHENSON KING**

PRIME MINISTER OF SAINT LUCIA



**STEPHENSON KING** started his public service career as a Caribbean Youth leader from 1984 -1992 when he served as Chairman of the Caribbean Youth Conference (CYC). He has also been extensively involved in health sector management having served as the Minister of Health from 1987 to 1992. The Prime Minister remains focused on the development of youth through service organisations and sporting and cultural clubs. He is also very interested in the issue of Climate Change and serves as the CARICOM Prime Minister with responsibility for Sustainable Development.

Right:  
St. Lucia's Twin Pitons

In most Commonwealth countries there is no formal welcoming of youth into the fold of the citizen. What we do instead is to take one of our most disenfranchised groups, and one day say to them that they are of age and must take their rightful place as responsible citizens, and trust that they will use their right to now vote in a manner that will strengthen and sustain our democracies.

Some may argue that the education system should have prepared them for assuming such a role. I posit however that in most Commonwealth countries, the education system is driven by the need to succeed at pre set examinations that will determine careers and future wealth. There is no time to examine, with our youth, the changing nature of our countries and their role in energizing countries and communities that have been ravaged by global financial crises, recessions, natural disasters, violence and discrimination.

Given the recent unrest in the Middle East and Africa, and the apparent ubiquitous use of social media, it is very evident that the youth will react and respond to those who can easily reach them with a message that they find appealing. Since that message might not always be the one that we would like them to embrace, it is incumbent on us as Commonwealth Heads of Government to forge that message, through all media, that will easily reach our youth. I applaud civil society groups for not allowing our youth to go unnoticed in the last two decades, but I firmly believe that democratically elected governments have a duty to give a voice to their youth and to give some legitimacy to youth organisations through meaningful engagement, decision making and joint implementation.

Our first step must be the realisation that there will be millions of seventeen year olds that will in their next year become enfranchised citizens, who have not been schooled in the need to retain or sustain our democracies, principles and values. I am not advocating keeping our youth steeped in models that are in need of revamping. Instead, I am suggesting that it is necessary to not simply make them aware of the historical context of their existence, but to equip them with the tools that will assist in the evolution of democracies that continue to hold steadfast the values of our Commonwealth community.

Global events and research has demonstrated that young people today have more power and potential to

create change than any previous generation of youth. We witnessed semblances of this power in the civil rights movement in the United States and in the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. Currently, our youth are showing that the injustices of one location can become the revolutions of a multitude of nations. The Commonwealth needs to harness this potential to ensure a peacefully creative revolution of the ideals that we espoused in 2009 in Trinidad and Tobago.

There in Port of Spain at our 60th anniversary celebrations we reaffirmed our commitment to the following:

- International peace and security;
- Democracy;
- Human rights;
- Tolerance, respect and understanding;
- Separation of powers;
- Rule of law;
- Freedom of expression;
- Development;
- Gender equality;
- Access to health and education;
- Good governance; and
- Civil society

In addition, we reiterated our commitment to the core principles of consensus and common action, mutual respect, inclusiveness, transparency, accountability, legitimacy, and responsiveness. The sustainability of these values cannot be left to our current generation of leaders. It must encompass our future leaders. I therefore urge all of us to think of ways in which we can teach our youth these values. Let us share examples of the ways in which we encouraged and fostered these values in our own communities and countries. **E**

