



Introduction by  
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Ever since I was appointed as the United Kingdom's Minister for the Commonwealth, I have asked those I have met, whether on my travels or in London why the Commonwealth is important. No one is more passionate about the Commonwealth than me, but at a time when all our countries are members of multiple multilateral organisations than ever before, is the Commonwealth still relevant? I am of the strong view that it is, and this is something we should shout about, or at least articulate more clearly.

What makes the Commonwealth different is our shared history, values, language, and similar legal systems. But we can do more than just celebrate this. Studies have suggested that these similarities make it 20 per cent cheaper to do business with another Commonwealth country: the 'Commonwealth Effect'. Intra-Commonwealth trade is clearly an area of huge – yet largely

untapped - potential. That is why I am a keen supporter of initiatives such as the Commonwealth Enterprise and Investment Council, who are working to help foster a world-leading network of business-friendly governments and companies committed to the principles of free and fair trade at a time of global economic strain. A third of the world's population lives in the Commonwealth, yet we only produce 17 per cent of the world's GDP. Among our members are some of the world's fastest growing economies: India, Nigeria, South Africa, Malaysia and Singapore. And our shared values mean the Commonwealth can set the global standard on transparency, anti-corruption measures, and the fair and clear regulations that business needs to thrive.

Trade is just one example of the many areas of untapped opportunity within the Commonwealth. Of the Commonwealth's 2.2 billion citizens, 60 per cent are under the age of 30. This generation will play an integral role in tackling

the big challenges of the 21st century: promoting sustainable development, building global prosperity, and countering the causes of extremism and radicalisation. We, the Commonwealth, need to harness the huge potential they offer and equip them for the road ahead.

The Manifesto on which my Government was elected made a commitment to “strengthen the Commonwealth’s focus on promoting democratic values and development”. We are determined to work with all members of the Commonwealth to do this. The United Kingdom already contributes over £2.2 billion per year in development aid to individual Commonwealth countries and £55 million to Commonwealth organisations. This week in Malta we will make announcements that will further demonstrate our belief in the Commonwealth and the influential role it will play in the 21st Century. Indeed, Malta’s theme for CHOGM 2015, *‘Adding*

*Global Value,*’ highlights too the focus we all have on the future of the Commonwealth. Valetta is a timely opportunity to discuss issues which affect us all – including climate change ahead of COP21 – and the issues of the moment, from the plight of refugees from Syria and North Africa to the recent attacks on the streets of Paris. Yet to maintain the Commonwealth’s relevance in the 21st Century, we must work beyond CHOGM to unlock its vast potential. In a crowded international arena, we must speak with one voice on the current challenges, from climate change and poverty, to human rights and tackling extremism. We must seize the opportunities open to us in the area of trade and investment and living standards for all citizens. And we must continue to make the most of our unique strengths – diversity, global reach, and shared language, legal systems and values. I can think of no better organisation to achieve all these things than the Commonwealth. **E**

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