



Foreword by
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I am delighted to be able to commend this Official Report on the Commonwealth to mark the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Malta. We at FIRST are grateful to all those Commonwealth leaders who have contributed to this report. It is especially fitting that the meeting be held, for the second time, in one of its smallest countries, the delightful island of Malta, which is known to so many of us as one of the jewels of the Mediterranean. It is particularly fitting too that the meeting should be opened by Her Majesty The Queen because Malta has a very special place in the affections of the Queen and of His Royal Highness Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh. For here, at the beginning of their long and happy marriage, they had a particularly joyful time when His Royal Highness was a serving naval officer.

Malta had great strategic importance during the Second World War and the bravery and resilience of the Maltese people was uniquely recognised by Her Majesty's father, King George VI when he bestowed the George Cross on the island. Malta today has no less strategic

importance, as was demonstrated only recently when the Heads of Government of the European Union met in Valletta to seek to resolve some of the problems caused by the greatest refugee crisis in Europe since the Second World War.

It is against this sombre background and recent events in Paris that the Heads of Commonwealth nations gather together now. There will be much on their agenda, not least the benefits which close association can bring culturally and commercially. But surely uppermost in their minds will be the ever greater need for nations to underline the importance of freedom, democracy and the rule of law – all of which are under a new and, in many ways, more insidious and difficult threat than ever before. The Commonwealth is uniquely well placed, because of its membership of countries from all over the globe, to work together to uphold the values which underpin civilisation itself: tolerance, mutual respect and understanding. We wish those who gather in Malta every possible success in their deliberations and we hope that this official publication will make a small but helpful contribution as they assemble together. **E**