

A longstanding partnership

By H.E. NORMAN HAMILTON

HIGH COMMISSIONER OF MALTA TO THE UNITED KINGDOM



NORMAN HAMILTON was appointed Malta's High Commissioner to the Court of St James' and took up his posting in London on 2 September 2013. In the run-up to Malta's hosting of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in November 2015, the High Commissioner has been serving as liaison between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the CHOgm Taskforce in Malta and the Commonwealth Secretariat in London.

Since September 2013, I have had the honour and pleasure to represent my country in the United Kingdom (UK) as High Commissioner to the Court of St James's. Only last year, we celebrated 50 years of excellent bilateral relations between Malta and the UK – in the political, economic, commercial, social, educational and cultural sectors. Since Malta's Independence in 1964, the two countries have over 30 bilateral arrangements in a number of fields as varied as health, education and defence. Since Malta's accession to the European Union, there has been even more scope for closer cooperation.

Malta and the UK enjoy a very good relationship and our peoples are as close as our governments are. The resident British population in Malta is estimated to be over 10,000, which is noteworthy, considering Malta's size. The Maltese community in the UK is much larger than that and has received a further boost in numbers in recent years. The UK is Malta's foremost tourism market and the UK remains the most popular destination for Maltese tourists. The multitude of areas of mutual interest to both peoples have strengthened our ties even further.

Our relations with the Commonwealth are similar in some respects. We joined the organisation soon after Independence and our interactions continue to be robust and vibrant to this very day. The absolute highlights of this relationship have of course been our hosting of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOgm). We first hosted CHOgm in 2005 and ten years later we shall be doing so again. This really is commensurate with Malta's commitment to the Commonwealth because, despite its size, Malta plays a comparatively large role in Commonwealth affairs. Over the years it has sought to bring a wealth of ideas and concepts towards enriching this important institution and towards ensuring that the Commonwealth is given the significant prominence it deserves.

One of the flagships of Malta-Commonwealth relations is the Malta-Commonwealth Third Country Training Programme, which was launched in 1995. Over the past twenty years, this programme has trained more than 1,400 officials from Commonwealth member countries. Course

areas have included diplomacy for small states, public administration and management, insurance regulation and supervision and banking, finance for small states and legal frameworks for ICTs.

Meanwhile, two of the most recent Malta-led initiatives which we have been working on with the Commonwealth Secretariat, and which we hope to see progress on at CHOgm 2015, are the Commonwealth Small States Centre of Excellence and the Commonwealth Trade Finance Facility. The former is geared towards imparting targeted capacity-building programmes and interventions in the areas of both democracy and development to small states while the latter is aimed at augmenting trade and investment finance, particularly for small and other developing economies with limited access to trade finance.

Besides these two specific initiatives, Malta is determined to ensure that CHOgm 2015 is a landmark event that will usher the Commonwealth into a new era. And it is with this in mind that the theme for this year's CHOgm was carefully chosen, directed as it is at a sense of unity among the diverse Commonwealth member countries. The theme is "The Commonwealth – Adding Global Value" and it will seek to promote a positive, active and forward-looking dialogue aimed at paving the way towards enhancing the Commonwealth as a relevant, important and global actor on the international stage. This theme will be woven into the discussions and outcome documents from CHOgm, highlighting the many advocacy and practical contributions of the Commonwealth to date, as well as identifying where the Commonwealth collectively can continue to be a force for positive global advance in the future.

Having seen the Commonwealth's often quiet and sometimes underappreciated work in the fields of democracy and development firsthand, I have a great appreciation for the unique role it continues to play both on the international plane as well as at the grassroots level. I consider the Commonwealth to be a natural family for Malta because despite the wonderful diversity of its 53 members, it brings together countries bound together by shared language, history and culture as well as common values and principles.

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