

From ‘club’ to ‘network’

By THE RT HON FREUNDEL STUART, QC, MP

PRIME MINISTER OF BARBADOS



FREUNDEL STUART holds a Master's degree in Public International Law from the University of the West Indies (UWI). He was called to the Barbados Bar in 1984, where he practiced criminal and civil law. Mr Stuart entered elective politics in 1994 and served as Member of Parliament for the St Philip South Constituency from 1994-99. He was Acting Prime Minister from May to October 2010, after his predecessor became ill, and was sworn in as the seventh Prime Minister of Barbados on 23 October 2010.

Barbados' Prime Minister, Freundel Stuart receives a cricket bat, signed by the 1950s West Indies team, from Commonwealth Secretary General Kamallesh Sharma

Whether affirming the creativity of Commonwealth writers, the dedication of Commonwealth athletes, the brilliance of Commonwealth scholars, setting of the global agenda by Commonwealth Eminent Persons, or similar areas of activity, Barbados lays great store by its participation in the Commonwealth of Nations.

The Commonwealth has an immensely strong convening power. It represents nearly one third of the world's population, a quarter of the world's states including two G7 and four OECD members, and more than half of the small states of the world including several small island developing states (SIDS).

When Nehru described India's membership of the Commonwealth as bringing 'independence plus', the "plus" factor included friendly relations made and sustained by informal but substantial cooperation. The Commonwealth offers a framework for informal cooperation between its members, facilitates the mutual exercise of soft power, and is a unique vehicle through which the international system can take stock of itself.

The Commonwealth has also been a trail blazer. The creation of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG), established the practice of good governance at home as the quid pro quo for international cooperation from abroad.

Similarly, the Commonwealth has been the global champion for the cause of small states. The main value of the Commonwealth to small states lies in their access on equal terms to many of the more powerful actors on the world stage. The Commonwealth should be highly commended for the Open-Ended Ministerial Working Group on Small States, the development of the Commonwealth Resilience Framework, and the



establishment of the Small States Centre of Excellence in Malta.

As a small island developing state, Barbados is proud to be a member of the Commonwealth. We encourage the Commonwealth to continue its work on key small states issues, particularly the need to address debt, trade and climate financing, tax cooperation and international financial centres, and emerging areas related to sustainable development including ocean governance and the 'blue' economy. Speaking particularly as a vulnerable small state, Barbados welcomes the Commonwealth's continued support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Belize and Guyana in our region, as well as Cyprus.

We appreciate that, notwithstanding its unique role in supporting small states, there is the need to ensure that the Commonwealth also retains its relevance to its larger members. In that regard, the focus of the CHOGM on matters of migration, radicalisation, violent extremism and terrorism is welcomed. Similarly, we affirm the focus on key matters on the global agenda affecting all Commonwealth countries, regardless of size, including Climate Change, and the implementation of the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The role of the Commonwealth has become more relevant, as what was perceived as 'club diplomacy' has been replaced by 'network diplomacy'. Foreign policy and diplomacy now involve a delicate balancing of interests and pressures from a diverse array of actors, domestic and international, governmental and non-governmental. This development, coupled with an expanding agenda of international challenges ranging from climate change to terrorism, make the need for international collaboration and cooperation greater than ever before.

The family of Commonwealth organisations, including the gathering of parliamentarians, local government representatives, senior officials, academics, and civil society among others, to exchange best practices and mobilise support for common goals, remains an invaluable shared asset.

In this vein of cooperation, the recent establishment of the Commonwealth Enterprise and Investment Council to promote trade and investment in the Commonwealth should be commended. Similarly, the continuing success of the Commonwealth Games needs also to be recognised as the Games, along with international

cricket, are the known “face” of the Commonwealth.

It is however important to note that in order to remain relevant, focused and effective there is a need for a greater collaboration between Commonwealth Intergovernmental and Associated Organisations. I also want to encourage, in my role as Chair of the Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), Commonwealth cooperation with the United Nations, particularly its Specialised Agencies, as well as with relevant regional intergovernmental organisations, including CARICOM, given their complementary capacities. We need to promote synergies among these related organisations towards the realisation of enhanced outcomes within and across the Commonwealth.

Recognising that the Commonwealth has changed considerably since it was founded, being enriched in recent years by the presence of new members, and being aware that there is the need for a new vision, the election of a new Secretary-General is a critical task facing the CHOGM. We note that for the first time there is the opportunity to elect a female Secretary-General.

This task requires considerable attention by Heads

as the new Secretary-General will have to be a change-agent, thought-leader, motivator and manager. We need, as Heads, to elect someone with proven leadership skills who can develop a shared vision of the Commonwealth in order to ensure the continued commitment of, relevance to, and funding by its very diverse members.

I use this opportunity to thank the outgoing Secretary General for his dedicated service, to congratulate the Government of Malta and its people for their wonderful hospitality, and last, but by no means least, to commend and convey our best wishes to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II on the attainment of her recent milestones, and to pledge our continued support to her as the Head of the Commonwealth.

Allow me to end with this postscript of the adoption of the Commonwealth Charter, *“We aspire to a Commonwealth that is a strong and respected voice in the world, speaking out on major issues; that strengthens and enlarges its networks; that has a global relevance and profile; and that is devoted to improving the lives of all peoples of the Commonwealth.”* May this help to guide us as we meet under the theme “Adding Global Value”.

With best wishes for a successful Summit. ■

The value of the Commonwealth to small states lies in their access on equal terms to the more powerful actors on the world stage

A Brief History of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM)

Following the collapse of the West Indies Federation in 1962, the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago in July 1963 convened the first Caribbean Heads of Government Conference attended by the leaders of Barbados, Guyana and Jamaica. At this Conference, the leaders of the four Commonwealth Caribbean countries agreed on the need for close cooperation.

In July 1965, the leaders of Barbados and Guyana along with Antigua & Barbuda met and subsequently established a Free Trade Area in the Caribbean then known as the Caribbean Free Trade Association (CARIFTA). The new CARIFTA agreement came into effect on 1st May 1968, with the participation of Antigua & Barbuda, Barbados, Guyana, and Trinidad & Tobago.

The original idea for all Commonwealth Caribbean territories to participate in the Association was achieved later that year with the entry of Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica, Montserrat, St Kitts/Nevis/Anguilla, Saint Lucia and St Vincent and the Grenadines. Belize became a member in 1971.

At the Seventh Heads of Government Conference in October 1972, Caribbean Leaders transformed CARIFTA into a Common Market. At the Eighth Heads of Government Conference held in April 1973, the Caribbean Community was brought into fruition with the consideration of Heads of Government of the draft legal instruments and the subsequent signing of an Accord on 4th July 1973. The Common Market

would form part of the Community.

The Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM) was established by the Treaty of Chaguaramas, which was signed by Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica, and Trinidad & Tobago and came into effect on 1st August 1973. The other eight Commonwealth territories: Antigua, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Montserrat, Saint Lucia, St Kitts/Nevis and St Vincent and the Grenadines become full members of CARICOM on 1 May 1974. The Bahamas became the 13th Member on 4th July 1983 but is not a member of the Common Market.

In July 1991, the British Virgin Islands and the Turks and Caicos became Associated Members of CARICOM, followed by Anguilla in July 1999. The Cayman Islands became the fourth Associate Member on 16th May 2002, and Bermuda the fifth on 2nd July 2003. Suriname, a Dutch-speaking State, became the 14th Member on 4th July 1995. On 3rd July 2002, Haiti became the first French-speaking Caribbean State to become a full Member of CARICOM.

The Rt Hon Freundel Stuart, Prime Minister of Barbados, is the current Chairman of the Conference of Heads of Government, effective 1st July-31st December 2015. He assumed the role from the Outgoing Chairman, the Rt Hon Perry Christie, Prime Minister of the Bahamas, and will be succeeded on 1st January 2016 by the Prime Minister of Belize. ■