

Partnership for development

By **THE HON DR TIMOTHY HARRIS**

PRIME MINISTER OF ST KITTS AND NEVIS



TIMOTHY HARRIS holds a MSc degree in Accounting from the University of the West Indies and a Doctor of Philosophy in Administration from Concordia and McGill Universities in Montréal, Canada. He first won his parliamentary seat, as a member of the Labour Party, in 1995 and during a long career has served as Minister responsible for Agriculture, Education, Housing, Social Security and most recently, Foreign Affairs. In 2013 he set up a new party, the People's Labour Party, and in alliance with other parties won a majority in the 2015 general election, becoming Prime Minister on 16 February 2015.

The recent adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals and the Post-2015 Agenda by the United Nations is as much a Commonwealth call to action and responsibility as it is for the United Nations. I anticipate going forward a United Nations re-energised and retooled to advance these important targets for sustainable development. But I have a deeper faith that the Commonwealth can do more meaningful work in many of these critical areas. I say this because the Commonwealth understands its member states and their needs in ways that no other organisation does.

Hence, when we agreed the Strategic Plan, giving necessary and important guidance to the Organisation, our hope was that it would help to refine and better articulate its mandates for the future. Far from the misperception that certain areas were being prioritised at the expense of others, it was a call to action to improve upon the things we do well because we all want our people to do better. We want to provide them with better access to health care, improved standards and quality of education and lifestyles, and increased opportunities including better employment prospects. These are tall orders, I agree, but the Commonwealth we know has been adept at building bridges, at facilitating access, at promoting our core principles and values, and supporting our development.

This was the Commonwealth of the past and must be the Commonwealth of the future. In this organisation, we are all proponents of democracy, the rule of law and human rights protection even though we are at differing levels of democratic and economic development. It means therefore working together to perfect our democratic credentials and to fine-tune our capacities for achieving sustainable development. St Kitts and Nevis is committed to a path of economic resilience and sustainable development. We will continue our work to ensure that the wishes of the many always trump the ambition of the few, confident in the knowledge that real leadership is informed by commitment to service for the greater good. The Commonwealth must work and be seen to work for all the peoples of the Commonwealth – without fear or favour. This is essential.

As a bastion of democracy, it must leverage this fine pedigree by standing up for the less powerful,

improving the lives of the poor and downtrodden in order to fulfil the values and principles that has made it home to so many countries. It is instructive that despite a clamour for political independence, some six decades ago, so many of those very countries chose to remain within the Commonwealth family. Our Commonwealth must live out its creed; it must embrace transparency, good corporate governance, fair play and democracy in its deeds and interaction with member states. If it fails or is perceived as failing in this fundamental task, it extinguishes the hopes of our peoples and devalues the currency of this noble institution.

I fully appreciate the varying priorities and expectations of the Commonwealth. That we would disagree on procedures, processes and on how to achieve the goals we set ourselves should not come as a surprise to anyone. However, differences in approaches and outcome should not undermine faith in the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth is diverse and dynamic but it requires our proactive support. It will only be as effective, as strong and as productive as its membership's willingness and commitment to work in partnership to realise the fruits of democracy and development.

I am excited about participating in the next CHOGM in Malta, not only as the new Prime Minister of St Kitts and Nevis but as the envoy for the ideas, expectations and perspectives of my people. This year's theme 'The Commonwealth – Adding Global Value,' is indeed appropriate and I hope we use it as an opportunity to showcase the admirable work of the Commonwealth. We should also work to lift the relative and regrettable obscurity in which our Commonwealth labours, so the world will see our demand-driven organisation working in the foothills and byways and across towns and villages throughout our member states.

Adding global value also requires the organisation to do more at the national level. It needs to engage more with those involved in governance, human rights, rule of law, capacity building, resource mobilisation and technical support. The Commonwealth's value to its diverse membership resides in the fact that it really makes a difference to people's lives. We must therefore find innovative ways to strengthen it, to make it work more efficiently, to better leverage expertise, networks

and access in order to bring more and greater benefits for its member states.


I have recognised an unfortunate tendency to perceive such requests for partnership simply as a call for money. But if countries make this misperception a primary focus then they close the door to possibilities and opportunities for partnership, for greater collective action, or for this organisation to act as a conduit for even greater partnership and be better able to respond quickly and appropriately to the many challenges facing member states.

As members of the Commonwealth, it is in our common interest to work together for common prosperity. I say that prosperity is not limited to economics. If we work toward the sustainable development goals and targets we will be ensuring human rights protection, greater accountability, more civic society and better access to the levers of power, bringing benefits to all. That is the prosperity to which I refer. Any violations of a human rights in one region, or chronic unemployment in another and/or the denial of benefits anywhere eventually affects every one of us wherever we are.

Like all our Commonwealth developing countries, St Kitts and Nevis believes in democracy and is fully committed to its institutions. In St Kitts and Nevis, we are supportive of our national institutions, reinforcing regulatory frameworks and enabling

judicial and parliamentary oversight where necessary. This is part of our effort to ensure that our people-focused government delivers on justice, security and opportunity for all.

But this is not possible if people are hungry and unemployed. As the Commonwealth Secretariat and its Ministers of Finance have repeatedly stated, none of this is likely without international financing for sustainable development. To add global value, we must also find innovative strategies for financing development and help small, vulnerable developing states gain access to international sources of funding. They need support for international resource mobilisation and access to concessional finance. The international community must be urged to consider the inherent vulnerability of our small states when they allocate overseas development assistance and consider the issue of debt relief.

Our success in eliminating the “us versus them” dichotomy within the Commonwealth will be determined by how we address these challenges. We are fortunate to have in the Commonwealth family, members of the G7, G20 and G77. This rich diversity is our strength. But it can only be fully exploited by working genuinely in partnership for development which inevitably strengthens our democracies and institutions, adds global value and ensure people empowerment, justice, equity and prosperity for all. 

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Government buildings
in Basseterre, St Kitts