



COMMONWEALTH SECRETARY-GENERAL THE RT HON PATRICIA SCOTLAND KC

ADDRESS TO THE 19TH SUMMIT OF HEADS OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT OF THE  
NON-ALIGNED MOVEMENT (NAM)

Kampala, Uganda

20 January 2024

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Your Excellency Honourable Chair,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before anything else, let me thank His Excellency President Yoweri Museveni for his kind invitation, and for the wonderful Ugandan hospitality which has been extended to each of us.

This is a symbolic location for all of us in the Commonwealth as this was where the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting was held in 2007.

It is a privilege for me as the sixth Secretary General of the Commonwealth to address the 19th Summit of the NAM.

And Mr President, as I congratulate you on commencing your leadership of the NAM for the next 3 years, I pay tribute to His Excellency President Aliyev of Azerbaijan for his stewardship of NAM over the last four difficult years and commend his government for stepping forward to host the next COP29 in Baku later this year.



In welcoming your Excellency's tenure, President Museveni, I reiterate the Commonwealth's support in ensuring a successful delivery of the NAM's vision during your term.

My support does not simply stem from our duty as an official observer, but as a large stakeholder - 44 of the 56 nations of the Commonwealth family are also NAM members.

Your vision - for effective transformation towards our better common future, and the Bandung Principles which you reminded us of in your powerful opening speech - aligns with our vision, and with the values and aspirations of the Commonwealth Charter.

Since its inception NAM and the Commonwealth have demonstrated that Common cause and shared action deliver real change.

And as we gather at this seminal moment in history, the need for shared action - and for real change - is more urgent than ever.

The world is tightly bound by a tangled knot of crises spanning global economic, environmental and security systems.

These crises are serious, complex and increasingly entrenched.

Overcoming them will require a level of international political and economic cooperation which is unprecedented in this century.



In climate change, we see a cause, a consequence, and a multiplier.

All across the Commonwealth - home to one third of humanity - fertile lands turn to dust, wells run dry, storms and floods overwhelm communities, and the ocean rises.

The convergence of hardships faced by the most vulnerable nations of the Commonwealth and the world is exceptional.

The pressure on their economies and societies is immense - and the knock-on effects are profound.

Take for example Vanuatu - a member of the Commonwealth and NAM.

Late last year, that beautiful country was devastated by Category 5 Cyclone Lola, which hit seven months after twin cyclones Judy and Kevin wiped out 50% of the country's GDP, with recovery efforts priced at 80% of GDP.

Each of these shocks, the like of which so many of us have experienced, is exacerbated by the limited fiscal space and mounting debt which so many countries face.

In the face of these challenges, the structural limitations of the global financial mechanisms are laid bare.



With no alternative, many countries are forced to obtain financing on unfavourable terms, resulting in a higher debt burden, creating a vicious cycle where debt becomes unsustainable and access to finance becomes even more limited.

This is neither acceptable nor sustainable.

And without urgent, meaningful reform, we will fall behind the Sustainable Development Goals, with no prospect of achieving them.

The case for change is deep and wide.

We need to rewire the entire system, with action rooted in the sharpest honesty about where we are, driven by evidence, and flowing through every sector: from finance, energy and trade to health, education and digitalisation. We should change.

In all of this, we must work and act together.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, it became clear that although we were all tackling the same storm, we were not in the same boat.

NAM showed the power of unity - quickly galvanising efforts to address the crisis, calling for increased global solidarity to overcome the pandemic and its impacts.



And the Commonwealth's capacity for unity is tried and tested over 75 years of common action - on Apartheid, on Environmental Breakdown, on the needs of Small States, and on the power of innovation to build a better future - based on common values, common interests and common advantages.

The only way we can rise to the challenges of the moment is to rise to them together, to pursue the reform and change we need together, and to advance our shared vision together.

That will be my driving force as we approach the next Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Samoa in October, where so many of us will gather to demonstrate the power of unity between nations.

Together, we have the power to shift the balance of our fracturing world from mistrust and confrontation to dialogue and collaboration.

Your perspectives are essential, and your action is imperative.

And the Commonwealth will not rest until all our nations - from our largest and most connected countries to our smallest and most remote - have an equal say in the decisions which affect us all.

So, while I thank you all for the long relationship between NAM and the Commonwealth, I urge you all - whether you are part of our Family of Nations or not - to see the Commonwealth not only as your friend, but as your partner of choice as we strive together to build a better world for everyone.



I reiterate my deep appreciation to the government and people of Uganda, and I look forward to our continued discussions and partnership.

Thank you.