

# Secretary-General's Remarks to the 2024 Commonwealth Law Ministers Meeting

4 March 2024

Zanzibar, United Republic of Tanzania

Following are the Commonwealth Secretary-General the Rt Hon Patricia Scotland KC's remarks to the Opening Ceremony of the 2024 Commonwealth Law Ministers Meeting in Zanzibar, United Republic of Tanzania

Madam President of the United Republic of Tanzania, Mr Vice President, Your Excellencies, Honourable Ministers, Senior Officials, Distinguished Delegates, Partners, Colleagues and Friends

And I am going to stand on the protocols already established by my new best friend, The Minister.

It is a privilege to be with you all, and to be back in Zanzibar again.

We gather for this meeting of Commonwealth Law Ministers with a noble purpose, but we do so at a time of great sadness for Zanzibar, and for the entire United Republic of Tanzania.

All of us here feel the loss of President Mwinyi.

I say to the Government and People of the United Republic Tanzania, to his family and friends - especially his son, the current President Hussein Mwinyi who is so graciously hosting us in Zanzibar - that Commonwealth is with you.

We mourn with you. We pray with you. And always - *always* - we stand with you.

The late President's contributions in delivering courageous economic reform, and calm regional diplomacy during a period of international turmoil, still resound today.

Yet his greatest legacy is perhaps the humility with which he approached his service of the people, as the third President of Zanzibar, the first Vice-President of the United Republic Tanzania, and the second President.

That humility is an example we would all do well to live by.

And as we join the United Republic of Tanzania in this period of national mourning, let that be the spirit with which we come together as one Commonwealth family in the days ahead.

It is fitting that we are here in Zanzibar, where the late President was a student, teacher and leader.

And it is so poignant that, as we mourn a reforming statesman who brought mobile phones and computers to Tanzania, we gather under the theme of technology and innovation - and specifically how we can harness them to enable access to justice for every citizen.

I think the second President's spirit breathes with us in this room tonight.

Throughout the days ahead, we will reflect on the progress we have made together towards the swift and full delivery of the mandate given to us by Heads of Government at CHOGM in Kigali through the Commonwealth Access to Justice Declaration.

And I am very proud to see that my brother and Minister from Rwanda is here tonight, keeping the light alive.

This is an extraordinary moment for us as we will consider the tools, resources and assistance developed and offered by the Secretariat at the request - and in support - of Commonwealth Member States.

We will share, we will listen, we will learn, and - I have no doubt - with ambition and resolve, together we will write the next dynamic chapter in the storied history of Commonwealth Law Ministers Meetings.

The timing and the content of this meeting are critically important.

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

These challenges are ferocious, interlinked and grave.

And it is in this crucible that the most profound and far-reaching technological advancement in the history of human civilisation is unfolding.

In all the years that I have been a lawyer, I have never seen such a time.

The world is changing before our eyes.

And in navigating this change - with all its dangers, and all its opportunities - the law, justice and the institutions which uphold them are essential strengths.

They are, at the same time, a fixed point - a cornerstone - which offer a common framework for both our minimum standards and our highest ideals.

And they are dynamic - because whilst our values and aspirations do not change, the tools we can use to realise them are ever-evolving.

Indeed, our capacity to meet the challenges of today, and seize the opportunities of tomorrow, depends on our ability to understand, master and harness the technological revolution.

This is true of our economies, of healthcare and education systems - but it is true for every sector.

And that includes access to, and the administration of, justice for all.

Our Commonwealth is a unique and special association.

We are 56 independent sovereign nations, home to almost one-third of humanity, with 1.5 billion people under the age of 30.

We are united by shared history, common interests, natural advantages and joint action.

Throughout the 75 years of extraordinary change and challenge, we have weathered countless storms together, and embraced a myriad of opportunities for growth and progress.

I am the sixth Secretary-General of the Commonwealth of Nations, and it has been the Secretariat's privilege to serve this family of nations for 60 years of that 75-year history.

But our very existence is due to three remarkable African statesmen.

One of whom was the great and the renowned President Julius Nyerere.

Without his foresight and without his determination to found an independent Secretariat, we would not be here and all these shared experiences that have constantly strengthened us.

They have helped to make us who we are, they continue to shape what we aspire to be, and they will sustain us for many many decades to come.

Yet the essential truth is even more powerful: we are the largest association of nations in the history of the world, which is bound, above all, by values to which we all aspire.

There is no treaty that binds us. There is no compulsion for us to be together. We choose to come together as a family for the common good and to make sure we serve those we love.

Justice and the rule of law are central to these values, and we, those of us here in this room in particular, are their custodians. We are the salt which flavours justice.

It is *our* responsibility to drive forward the paradigm shift agreed at our last meeting in Mauritius, to deliver the Access to Justice Declaration our Heads of Government mandated in Kigali, and to ensure that the people of the Commonwealth know they have access to justice *because they can taste it, see it and feel it*.

So we must work with energy, purpose and rigour, but we must also summon our courage, our heart and our thirst for justice, to ensure that the words of our charter and the terms of our mandates are not simply words on a page, but they are lived experience of all.

Even at a time of such sadness for our generous hosts, and for our whole Commonwealth, when I look around this room and see the Ministers and Officials gathered here, I have no doubt no doubt at all that we will succeed.

From the bottom of my heart, I offer you my heartfelt thanks for being with us.

Madam President, the warmth of the welcome you and your Government have given us, even at such a time, has been nothing short of remarkable. Many of us wondered whether at such a sad time, Tanzania, the great Republic, would be able to host us and you have not just hosted us - you are delighting us.

The preparations for this meeting have been meticulous and imaginative, and this is surely one of the most beautiful places ever to host a Commonwealth Ministerial Meeting. I thank everybody involved, from the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania, from the Island of Zanzibar, and from the Commonwealth Secretariat.

The platform for friendship and partnership which you have created for us, and which the Commonwealth continues to offer us, is a rare gift and a privilege.



They lie at the heart of our capacity to be a force for good in the world.

We should never take them for granted and, in the spirit of humble gratitude and solemn purpose, I am looking forward to working with you all in the days ahead.

I think we will never forget Zanzibar, but I have to tell you that we have not forgotten Sri Lanka and we have not forgotten Mauritius and we will not forget the ones that come after us. But Zanzibar that is going to be a standard that other people will follow.

So may God bless Zanzibar. May God bless every single person here.

I look forward to the miracle that you are all going to deliver, and I thank you in advance.

Thank you.