

Fast Facts on Commonwealth Secretary-General

Mandate and Tenure

The Commonwealth Secretary-General promotes and protects the Commonwealth's values and principles as reflected in the Commonwealth Charter. The Secretary-General also represents the Commonwealth globally, and manages the Commonwealth Secretariat.

The Secretary-General maintains regular high-level contacts with Commonwealth governments as well as civil society and other leaders. In addition, he or she exercises a 'Good Offices for Peace' role to work with leaders when political tensions arise in member states.

The Secretary-General is selected by consensus by Commonwealth leaders and can serve a maximum of two four-year terms. The post was created together with the Commonwealth Secretariat at the 1965 Commonwealth Prime Ministers Conference in London, United Kingdom. Since then, there have been seven incumbents.

Hon Shirley Ayorkor Botchwey became Secretary-General on 1 April 2025, having been appointed by Heads of Government at their meeting in October 2024. She is the first woman from Africa - second African overall - to lead the association of 56 nations.

Hon Shirley Ayorkor Botchwey, Commonwealth Secretary-General

- Shirley Ayorkor Botchwey was born on 8 February 1963 in Accra, Ghana.
- Holds an LLB, a postgraduate qualification in legal practice, an MBA, and a master's degree in public communication.
- Qualified as a barrister and solicitor of the Supreme Court of Ghana.
- Fellow of the African Leadership Initiative and the Aspen Global Leadership Network.
- Member of the Ghana National Association of Alternative Dispute Resolution Practitioners.
- Served as Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, Information, and Trade and Industry (2001-2009).
- Elected as a Member of Parliament (2005-2021), representing two of Ghana's largest constituencies.
- Served as Ghana's Minister for Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration (2017-2024), leading key reforms in foreign policy and consular services with a focus on digitisation.

- Chaired the ECOWAS Council of Ministers (2020-2022), leading regional responses to democratic, security and institutional challenges.
- Represented Ghana at the United Nations General Assembly in 2023, promoting global peace and security.
- Played a key role in securing the UN resolution 2667, enabling UN funding for African Union-led peace missions.
- Helped secure UN Resolution 2634 on piracy and maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea.
- Shaped Ghana's high-profile 'Year of Return' and 'Beyond the Return' initiatives, promoting cultural and economic ties with the African diaspora.



Secretary-General Shirley Botchwey

Former Secretaries-General

- Patricia Scotland of Dominica (2016-2025)
- Kamalesh Sharma of India (2008-2016)
- Don McKinnon of New Zealand (2000-2008)
- Chief Emeka Anyaoku of Nigeria (1990- 2000)
- Sir Shridath 'Sonny' Ramphal of Guyana (1975-1990)
- Arnold Smith of Canada (1965-1975)

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