

Foreword

This publication records the authentic and authoritative voice of the Commonwealth collectively, as expressed by Commonwealth Heads of Government on behalf of the people – who make up our worldwide family, and for whose benefit our member countries confer and act together. It brings together documents from the previous five biennial Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings (CHOGMs), from 2007 to 2015, which tell an uplifting story, a narrative expressing the continuing evolution of a shared global vision of the Commonwealth. This development of ideas and thinking – both conceptual and practical – is made possible by the special sense of trust and shared purpose that is created by Commonwealth friendship and goodwill, and its bonds of affinity and kinship.

The Commonwealth at the Summit: Volume 4 continues a series reaching as far back as 1944, and brings up to date an impressive and inspiring record of solidarity in international cooperation, building on the unique diversity of the Commonwealth. It charts the many ways in which pioneering Commonwealth thought and practical intent add global value.

The collective advocacy and engagement of the Commonwealth was driven significantly by the Marlborough House Declaration of June 2008, an occasion on which a mini-summit of Heads was called for that purpose by the Secretary-General. The decisions of that gathering were endorsed when all our Heads met in New York later that year. Principles were laid down that would animate engagement by the Commonwealth in pursuing global goals with leading institutions and bodies. The evidence of this raised level of engagement in setting the global agenda on building resilience, notably in the areas of debt, trade and climate change, is reflected in subsequent documents in this compilation. The creation of the Trade Finance Facility for small states has been a significant and innovative initiative in Malta. The challenges and prospects of small states in diverse areas remain a continuing and special concern for our Heads. The creation of the Small State Centre of Excellence in Malta is a landmark decision.

This volume shows the consolidation of the Commonwealth as a values-based organisation through the Affirmation of Commonwealth Values and Principles at Port of Spain in 2009 and the watershed decision to adopt the Commonwealth Charter at Perth in 2011. It records progress on Millennium Development Goals, expressed in the words of Commonwealth leaders, leading up to the new phase of multilateral cooperation with the advent of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015.

We were the first to collectively raise our voice on the need for international climate action to combat global warming – in the Langkawi Declaration in 1989 – and on the special vulnerabilities of small states, and this engagement is continued in the chronicles of the 2007 Lake Victoria Commonwealth Climate Change Action Plan and the 2009 Port of Spain Commonwealth Climate Change Declaration. These statements have fed into international dialogues, particularly the 2009 Conference

of Parties in Copenhagen and, most recently – through the Leaders Statement on Climate Action made in Malta on the eve of the Paris conference – the Conference of Parties in Paris in December 2015 and its crucial decisions. We remain acutely conscious that climate change is growing as a threat to the very sustainability of some Commonwealth countries. Leaders have approved important practical measures in debt-for-nature swaps and capacity-building with regard to accessing finance to support this through the Climate Change Finance Access Hub.

The world has seen radical and extremist ideologies and unemployment rise, and young people have felt the full brunt of these shifting trends. Commonwealth leaders recognise that the future stability and prosperity of their societies are contingent on young people being positive, contributing and empowered agents of transformation in their communities. This has been particularly reinforced in the 2009 Declaration on Young People, ‘Investing in Young People’, and the 2013 Magampura Declaration, ‘Young People at the Centre of Sustainable Development’. Ensuring young people are supported and included in decision-making and national processes will be key to addressing our global challenges.

The role of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group has also been strengthened over successive Commonwealth summits, advancing the Commonwealth’s political values through the Heads’ endorsement of eight core goals to be safeguarded in the Commonwealth. Quiet yet persistent diplomacy is our enduring hallmark. We have strengthened our role in election management, separation of powers, the integrity of institutions, safeguarding rule of law and human rights, and fostering legitimate democratic space for opposition.

The Commonwealth Summit has changed over time too, condensing from a week-long meeting to two days, retaining at its core the interactive Retreat of Heads. From now on, we will see shorter, more focused communiqués and more interactive new forums as part of CHOGMs. We have the welcome addition of a Women’s Forum to those dedicated to business, young people and civil society. Peoples’ voices and ideas are now heard more at Commonwealth summits.

These communiqués and documents are a reflection of the world’s priorities, and they are more than that: they show that the Commonwealth’s work continues to be a global force for good. Being present at the birth of many of these documents and serving our Commonwealth Heads of Government has been a rare privilege and, as a worker in this vineyard, I am proud of the fruits of the direction given by them.

Kamalesh Sharma
Commonwealth Secretary-General (2008–2016)