



**REPUBLIC OF GHANA
MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND
REGIONAL INTEGRATION**

Common Purpose for the Commonwealth

By Shirley Ayorkor Botchwey

LONDON – In March this year, foreign ministers from Commonwealth countries met at Marlborough House, in London, to develop joint responses to shared challenges, while the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group discussed the defense of shared values such as democracy, the rule of law, and human rights. Far from being abstract topics, these issues go to the heart of who we are as a global grouping.

Cynicism and discontent are buffeting the multilateral organizations that best represent the ideals of our common humanity. By numbers, the Commonwealth should be the second most consequential organization of states after the United Nations. Our demographics, political profiles, and economies' potential to build resilience against climate change and adapt to the future world of work give us many global advantages. Unfortunately, we have not yet made the most of them.

The Commonwealth comprises 56 member states with a combined population of 2.5 billion, of which 94% live in developing countries and 60% are 29 or younger. Moreover, the organization continues to grow, with Gabon and Togo joining last June, following Rwanda and Mozambique.

At the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Kigali, Rwanda, last June, then-Prince Charles expressed optimism that the Commonwealth family will “always share knowledge and experience for the betterment of all citizens,” even as he acknowledged the painful roots of “our contemporary association,” the enduring impact of slavery’s legacy, and growing republican sentiment in some member states. We should all embrace this spirit of optimism, so that we can move from the adversities of our history toward a new narrative of common endeavor and progress.

But this will require reforms and much more cross-border coordination. The Commonwealth was built around a cooperation and development model that no longer works. While our shared values still provide a standard for good governance, peace, and security, our common political system – liberal democracy – is threatened by many governments' failures to respond to people’s needs. Inequality is rising, and the fraying of social-protection systems has left our citizens more susceptible to the appeals of populists, ultra-nationalists, and – in some cases – violent extremists.

Although the prevailing economic orthodoxy was responsible for the greatest achievements since the Industrial Revolution, its flaws and shortcomings have been laid bare by pandemic supply-chain disruptions, the fallout from the war in Ukraine, and climate change. Social mobility has stalled, even as new technologies have fundamentally changed the future of work and education.

A future of jobless growth and higher living costs now looms over almost all our economies. To provide opportunities for young people entering the labor market, Commonwealth countries will need to create a combined total of more than 50,000 decent jobs each day from now until 2030. As the size of the labor force in Japan, China, and Europe shrinks, we will need to create three out of every five jobs worldwide to take advantage of this labour gap.

Across the Commonwealth, labor mobility does not correspond to the rigidities of our economies, which means that many markets are being denied the skills and resources needed to create ample goods and services. We have failed to draw the link between young tech workers, the ubiquity of services they provide, and anxiety over physical migration. We need to ensure that we produce remotely, or virtually, the best tech workers in the world while benefitting from cutting edge services from any part of the Commonwealth.

The Commonwealth is also quite vulnerable to climate change. Every year, extreme weather events wipe out infrastructure, cause devastating droughts, undermine food security, and impede other development gains. This is especially the case in Small Island Developing States, some of which are threatened with complete submersion in the future.

The Commonwealth's failure to develop a shared strategy concerning renewables has been staggering. A coordinated approach to industrialization and economic diversification would counter the stagnation that has set in across so many economies. Our citizens watch as we struggle to boost growth in isolation, through austerity and high taxes. This is a dead end. The pie simply will not be big enough to feed everyone unless we ensure that all of our 2.5 billion people can reach their potential.

With advances in information communications technology, automation, artificial intelligence, and remote learning, it is well within our capacity to build a Commonwealth-wide market of knowledge-intensive innovation and services, and to equip our labor forces for full participation within it. By taking advantage of best practices and proven models across the Commonwealth, we can design core curricula, set common standards, and ensure access to borderless financing to position ourselves as global innovation leaders.

For years, labor shortages and the lack of opportunity have fueled unsafe, disorderly, and unregulated migration toward richer parts of the Commonwealth, bedeviling policymakers in those countries. But with a Commonwealth-wide mobility compact, we could help countries meet labor and skills demand through safer, more orderly migration or digital, remote services that do not require relocation across borders.

This kind of future-looking Commonwealth will not be possible until we develop a robust strategy for climate adaptation. Though we have huge needs when it comes to developing and installing renewables, we also have some of the world's leading renewables producers. With credit and other financing from the richer parts of the Commonwealth, we can ensure that each member state benefits from the transition to a low-carbon economy.

Finally, to pursue a more ambitious agenda, the Commonwealth will need the same kind of funding that other major multilateral organizations receive. To that end, we should review the Commonwealth Secretariat's current budget and seek opportunities to direct resources back toward concrete programs.

We are in this together. Wealthier Commonwealth countries need the poorer ones as much as the poorer countries need the wealthier ones. Without an inclusive strategy for building resilience and transforming our economies, we will all be worse off.

Shirley Ayorkor Botchwey is Minister for Foreign Affairs for Ghana.