



REPUBLIC OF GHANA  
MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND  
REGIONAL INTEGRATION

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**THE COMMONWEALTH IN A CHANGING WORLD  
(A Vision of a New Commonwealth)**

Mr. Chairman

Excellencies,

Distinguished Members, both here and online,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am pleased and honoured to share my ideas with you on the Commonwealth, at a time of great strain for national economies, the

existential crisis of climate change and natural disasters and the enormous opportunity it presents us for building resilience through new ways of doing things.

Let me thank Chatham House for providing this very unique forum and Amitav Banerji, for chairing the event.

The Commonwealth provides a unique setting for international cooperation, with the ability to convene 56 countries from five different regions, including some of the largest and richest countries in the world, and some of the smallest and most vulnerable. The Commonwealth has a population of 2.5 billion. 60% of this population is aged 30 or younger. By numbers, demographic data, political profile, wealth and economic potential as well as re-profiling to build resilience in the face of climate change and the future world of work, the Commonwealth should be the second most consequential organisation of states globally. But the question we must ask ourselves is whether it is.

We must acknowledge the contributions of past Secretaries-General since 1965 from Arnold Smith, Shridath Ramphal, Emeka Anyaoku. Don Mckinnon, Kamalesh Sharma and our current SG Patricia Scotland KC. Each of these leaders faced challenges of their times and did deliver for the Commonwealth family, we must salute them!

Our Commonwealth does enable member countries in different regions of the world, consisting of a variety of races and representing a number of interests and points of view, to cooperate through the exchange of opinions in a friendly, informal, and intimate atmosphere. The Commonwealth Secretariat's purpose as articulated in the Revised Agreed Memorandum is to serve member states by facilitating and promoting consultation on matters of common concern and is also expected to expand and adapt pragmatically in the light of its experience to better carry out its functions. The Charter provides a strong framework for promoting prosperity; democracy and peace; justice and human rights; empowering women and young people, both boys and girls; amplifying the voices of small and vulnerable states; and advocating for

environmental protection in terms of the blue economy and climate change through its Blue Charter.

Since the Charter and the memorandum were adopted, the terrain for multilateralism has significantly altered. We, therefore, need to rethink the new Commonwealth by looking into the original impetus for its creation and the 2005 Revised Agreed MOU. As we do so, we must be inspired by the aspirations set in the Charter and the realities of our time.

We have witnessed the dramatic effects of climate change and natural disasters sweeping our blue Islands as well as flooding, droughts, change in distribution of rainfall, drying up of rivers, abnormal sea-walling, locust invasion, and energy poverty in poor member countries. Democracies are facing threats as Governments are overwhelmed in responding to the expectations of citizens. Inequality threatens our societies, while the fraying of social protection systems opens up our societies to threats from populists and ultra-nationalists, in some cases violent extremists. The economic orthodoxy, which is responsible for the greatest achievements since the industrial revolution, has been exposed by the supply chain impacts of COVID-19 with its resultant shrinking of economies, particularly in the productive sectors, the war in Ukraine and the worsening climate events associated with Climate Change. Social mobility has stalled, even though the future world of work, including climate adaptation, opens new possibilities through the way we teach our young, leverage innovation and services through ICT, social media, automation and AI. More now than ever, there is the need to build greater resilience and achieve sustainability, enabling us to reduce the risk of present and future shocks and accelerate progress towards the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals.

Jobless growth or wealth creation with high unemployment, and rising cost of living, characterizes nearly all our economies. Commonwealth countries need to create over 50, 000 decent jobs each day until 2030 to provide opportunities for young people entering the labour market. It is estimated that, together, Commonwealth countries need to create three in

every five jobs in the world as the labour force in countries such as Japan, China and Europe shrink. Within the Commonwealth itself, labour mobility does not correspond to the labour rigidities of our economies, denying markets the skills and resources needed to create goods and services needed to power greater inclusive growth and wealth creation. It is quite clear that we have failed to draw the link between young tech workers, the ubiquity of services they provide and anxiety over physical migration.

The Commonwealth has the world's greatest vulnerability to Climate Change with thirty-two of its members, being small states. As extreme weather events annually wipe out infrastructure, resulting in devastating droughts and food insecurity, and impede other development gains in many Commonwealth countries, most notably in Small Island Developing States, the scope of the strategic failure for a common strategy around renewables is mind-boggling.

If we are to meet the ambitions of the citizens of the Commonwealth, it is clear that we need a development cooperation framework that works for all the Commonwealth as a common community. Such a model would not be based on the assumptions of progress under which assistance from the rich donors to recipient nations leads to slow, incremental change in the developing countries and locks in financial and other inflows to the donor countries. Either way, this is a cooperation model that is not working for industrialized or developing parts of the Commonwealth.

I would like to propose six areas for repositioning the Commonwealth to transform the economies of the countries in the Commonwealth, enable inclusive development and climate resilience and respond to the expectations of the hundreds of millions across the Commonwealth for a good life. These are:

Trade and Investment

Youth, Education, Skills, Innovation and Start Ups

Mobility and Labour Markets

Climate Change,

Small states, and

Managing resources for an Effective Commonwealth Institution

### **Trade and Investment**

The largest number of citizens in the Commonwealth do not earn enough to power the production and market expansion needed to create economic security, whether in the industrialized or developing regions of the Commonwealth. We need to deliver a framework for Commonwealth trade to surpass the potential \$2 trillion trade within the Commonwealth.

Having a common Commonwealth strategy for industrialization, and economic diversification, strategically linked to Regional Integration Agreements and Economic Partnership Agreements within and beyond the Commonwealth, is a guarantee against the stagnation that is widespread across our countries. Our citizens watch as we struggle with policies to raise growth in isolation through austerity and high taxes. The pie is simply not capable of feeding everyone unless consumer-based market expansion considers the potential of our 2.5 billion population.

### **Youth, Education, Skills, Innovation and Start Ups**

Young people in the Commonwealth constitute a third of all young people in the world. With advances in ICT, automation and AI and the innovations of social media for distance learning, building the tech and other workers of the Twenty- first Century for a Commonwealth-wide market of high knowledge-intensive innovation and services is an achievable goal in the short term. Closing the Commonwealth's digital gap in health, education, and trade; building the digital infrastructure to boost connectivity within and between Commonwealth countries is an important way forward.

Taking advantage of the best practices and attainments across the Commonwealth, we can design core curriculum and common standards and facilitate access to borderless financing to ensure that we are the leaders in innovation, start-ups, and services in the world.

### **Mobility and Labour Markets**

Labour shortages, and other rigidities as well as the lack of opportunity drive unsafe, disorderly, and unregulated migration that bedevil policy and public sentiment in the richer parts of the Commonwealth. A Commonwealth-wide mobility compact can help redress labour and skills-demand through safe, orderly and regulated migration, while the ability to teach or train young people, wherever they live in the Commonwealth, as well as a common Commonwealth market, allows work and services to be exchanged without relocation of workers across borders.

### **Climate Change**

It is impossible to look at a future-looking Commonwealth, without a robust Commonwealth strategy on climate adaptation. We need to achieve a resilient Commonwealth by enhancing climate change leadership and technical assistance; unlocking vital finance for vulnerable countries; building blue and green economies across the Commonwealth; and helping members overcome external shocks.

Within the Commonwealth, we have huge needs for development and installation of renewables; we also have leaders in the production and servicing of renewables. With credit and other financing from the richer part of the Commonwealth, we will ensure that each Member of the Commonwealth benefits from the renewable revolution and low-carbon transition of their economies, and those concerned about the cost of transition, would be open to implementing the emission standards agreed

to at the Conference of Parties. This is the true win-win. No one loses, including those who provide financing at market rates.

### **Small states**

Small states face unique development challenges. These countries are particularly vulnerable to exogenous shocks, such as natural disasters and climate change. With limited economic opportunities and significant migration, they often face capacity constraints. Small states remain susceptible to external shocks because of their geographic positioning, inherent structural challenges, and deep integration into the global economy. On the other hand, we have seen the possibilities of small States taking advantage of the economies of scale the wider Commonwealth offers. Commonwealth should continue to put a special lens on small states, in support of building resilience and promoting inclusive development in these vulnerable economies.

We must prioritise small states to better access sustainable financing, build resilience, and have a voice on the global stage. This requires leveraging our convening power for consensus building and the formulation of Commonwealth positions in key global policy fora; and advocacy efforts to secure the uptake of Commonwealth ideas in strategic international decision-making bodies, to ensure that our small States achieve climate-resilience and economic development.

### **Managing resources for an Effective Commonwealth Institution**

An ambitious Commonwealth should be funded at comparative levels as other multilateral organizations. Together with a more credible Programme resource envelope, it is time to review the human resourcing and budget of the Secretariat. This would enable more resources to be ploughed back into programmes, as well as ensuring a resilient Secretariat with long-term stability, attracting, and retaining the best of the Commonwealth's talent in service of all members. Across the

organization, we need to make decisions on how we take advantage of the expertise of Member States, including from academia and research organizations as secondments to the Secretariat to enable the cross fertilization that would enrich the work of the Secretariat and transform the Commonwealth. The potential for tapping into the pool of experienced and retired Commonwealth professionals who want to offer their expertise pro bono to Commonwealth countries also remains to be exploited.

To conclude, we are in this together. We must acknowledge that the true value of our Commonwealth is linked to our common health, our common lives, and common values. We need to leverage our commonwealth and economic potential as well as the potential for re-profiling to build resilience in the face of our changing world.

The rich part of the Commonwealth needs the poorer part as much as the poorer part needs the richer part. Unless we strategize on how to make the developing country members of the Commonwealth, who constitute 94% of the organization, a vital part of an agenda of ensuring and promoting democracy and good governance, economic transformation, and resilience of all the Commonwealth, we shall all be the poorer for it.