



THE ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY



The Commonwealth

Her Majesty The Queen celebrates Commonwealth Day at the Commonwealth Service at Westminster Abbey

Her Majesty The Queen, the Head of the Commonwealth for 64 years, attended the annual Commonwealth Service today at Westminster Abbey, the largest multi-faith service in the UK. Her Majesty was joined by The Duke of Edinburgh, The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, The Duke of York, and Prince Henry of Wales. The Commonwealth Service is the first major ceremonial event for Her Majesty in her 90th birthday year.

Guests of honour included UK Prime Minister David Cameron, the Prime Minister of Malta and new Chair-in-Office of the Commonwealth, Dr Joseph Muscat, diplomats, High Commissioners, and faith leaders. Highlights of the Service included a principal reflection from former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and a performance from singer-songwriter Ellie Goulding. The Service was also attended by almost 1,000 school children from across the UK.

The theme of this year's Commonwealth service is 'An Inclusive Commonwealth' and was broadcast live on BBC One for the first time. Previously broadcast on BBC World Service from 1989-2006, today's Service was also back on the BBC World Service and can be viewed on www.bbc.co.uk.

Spanning five continents, the Commonwealth is made up of the world's largest and smallest, richest and poorest countries, and is home to 2.4 billion people 60% of which are under 30 years of age. With a population of 1.25 billion, India is the largest country in the Commonwealth, while Tuvalu is the smallest with a population of around 10,000.

Although not a trading bloc, trade and investment within the Commonwealth are thriving. In 2013, intra-Commonwealth trade was estimated to be \$592 billion and projections suggest this will surpass \$1 trillion by 2020. Several factors unique to the Commonwealth may account for this, including historical links, shared values, common language and rule of law.

Kofi Annan said that, as a Ghanaian he felt very much part of the Commonwealth family: "It has never been more important for the Commonwealth to stress the bonds of human compassion and solidarity that unite us across the divides of race and religion, gender and geography."

Lord Howell, President of the Royal Commonwealth Society and Chairman of the Council of Commonwealth Societies said: "The Service at Westminster Abbey not only brings the great Commonwealth family together but gives us a glimpse of a future in which the Commonwealth network of nations and peoples, young and old, will be an increasing source of strength and reassurance to us all in an unsettled and uncertain world."

Lord Singh of Wimbledon CBE, representing the Sikh community at the Service said: "As a Sikh, brought up in the belief that, despite superficial differences of religion and culture, we are all members of the same human family, it is heartening to see this ethos becoming central to the working of the Commonwealth."

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Notes to Editors:

BROADCASTERS, AGENCIES AND ONLINE VIDEO SITES - A free-to-use Video News Release is available for download below:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B_yd9PWqhnmlZ3UxN1FMYUtmbkU/view?usp=sharing

Video format: Quicktime H.264 1080i HD.

Contents:

- GVs of Westminster Abbey
- GVs of Commonwealth Flags in Parliament Square
- Overlay of choir practice
- GVs of Queen, Duke of Edinburgh, Duke and Duchess of Cambridge and Prince Harry arriving
- GVs of Royal Party leaving

Interviews/Grabs:

- Kofi Annan, Former Secretary-General of the United Nations
- Dr Joseph Muscat, PM of Malta and Chair-in-Office of the Commonwealth
- Baroness Scotland, Commonwealth Secretary-General Designate

The Royal Commonwealth Society is the oldest Commonwealth civil society organisation, founded in 1868. Her Majesty The Queen is its Patron. The Royal Commonwealth Society organises the Commonwealth Service each year on Commonwealth Day, which has been attended by Her Majesty since 1966. It is the largest annual multi-faith service in the UK. www.thercs.org

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