



Commonwealth honours Her Majesty, The Queen with a 'Commonwealth Canopy'

Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II, officially opening the 24th Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Malta today, said how delighted she was to receive a dedication of rainforests and other environmental projects for her service as Head of the Commonwealth over 60 years.

The Prime Minister of Malta, Dr. Joseph Muscat also welcomed the initiative in his speech at today's opening ceremony.

Commonwealth countries such as Singapore, the outgoing Chair in Office of the Commonwealth, Sri Lanka, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Australia, Zambia, and Belize have offered to dedicate and protect sensitive environmental areas in The Queen's name, in a project called 'The Queen's Commonwealth Canopy'. From vast areas of rainforest to projects in small island states, this is a collaborative and positive drive by Commonwealth countries to show united action on the environment.

Her Majesty thanked Commonwealth heads for the initiative:

"I have been especially touched by one such project, The Queen's Commonwealth Canopy, which has been proposed by Commonwealth countries wanting to harness their collective expertise and resources to protect the world's forests. This and other initiatives are a practical demonstration of the power of the Commonwealth, working as a group, to effect real change for generations to come."

The Queen's Commonwealth Canopy will be led by The Royal Commonwealth Society in partnership with NGO Cool Earth and The Commonwealth Forestry Association, with the aim of eventually linking all 53 Commonwealth countries in a canopy of sustainable forest conservation initiatives for future generations.

Just days before world leaders and 40,000 delegates from 195 countries meet at the 2015 Paris Climate Conference (COP21), this initiative from the Commonwealth to preserve rainforest has been welcomed by environmental groups and forestry organisations.

Singapore will dedicate six hectares of rainforest in the Singapore Botanic Gardens and 163 hectares of Singapore's Bukit Timah Nature Reserve forest to The Queen's Commonwealth Canopy.

The UK Government has announced that The National Forest Company is committed to supporting The Queen's Commonwealth Canopy and will play a leading role as an international exemplar for the QCC.

The National Forest Company leads the creation of The National Forest, a new, wooded landscape

for the nation across 200 square miles of central England. The National Forest Company was established by Government in April 1995. It is a non-departmental public body sponsored by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).

The National Memorial Arboretum has strong Commonwealth links and is located within the National Forest. In 2016, the National Forest marks its 25th anniversary and will use this opportunity to support the UK's contribution to The Queen's Commonwealth Canopy.

Also supporting The Queen's Commonwealth Canopy proposal, New Zealand is providing additional funding of \$1 million over three years to extend the network of QEII National Trust covenants. The QEII National Trust was established in 1977 to encourage and promote the preservation and protection of open space, including native forest remnants.

Australia will also join the QCC initiative by dedicating Commonwealth projects created through the development of the Asia-Pacific Rainforest Recovery Plan, which seeks to create a regional collective commitment to help slow, halt and reverse the loss of tropical rainforest.

Other dedications, including from Belize, Zambia and others are expected over the coming months.

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Notes to Editor

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

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B99sotFuWzoWWFdCelJaRmNrZXc/view?usp=sharing>

Video format: Quicktime H.264 1080i HD.

Contents:

-GVs of Queen's Commonwealth Canopy Press Conference

Interviews/Grabs:

-Matthew Owen, Director, Cool Earth

-Michael Lake, Director, Royal Commonwealth Society

Partners



THE ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY

The Royal Commonwealth Society is a network of individuals and organisations committed to improving the lives and prospects of Commonwealth citizens across the world – www.thercs.org



Cool Earth is a UK-based charity that works alongside indigenous villages to halt rainforest destruction – www.coolearth.org



The Commonwealth Forestry Association links foresters, scientists, students and policymakers throughout the Commonwealth to seek ways of wise forest management – www.cfa-international.org