



**Press statement 13 May 2015**

**ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY LAUNCHES YOUTH GENDER NETWORK**

Youth advocates and specialists came together in Malta today at the Commonwealth Youth Gender and Equality Network launch forum to discuss a range of gender inequality issues, from violence against women, child marriage, and harmful practices such as female genital cutting, to issues around sexual orientation and gender identity, and discriminatory gender norms that exclude young women from education and employment opportunities. The five-day conference has been organised by the Royal Commonwealth Society with the support of the Australian Government, and the Commonwealth Heads of Government (CHOGM) Task Force in Malta.

Delegates have come to Malta from 22 Commonwealth countries, and from across all regions of the Commonwealth. They will take part in a range of discussions with experts, government and intergovernmental representatives and with their peers. The group also includes several young Maltese delegates. The outcomes of the meeting will feed into Commonwealth structures and meetings, including the first-ever Women's Forum at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Malta in November.

The Maltese President opened the conference which, it is hoped, will feed strong messages into the CHOGM as well as the associated Youth, People, Business and Women's Forums.

The President of the Royal Commonwealth Society, The Rt Hon. Lord Howell of Guildford, stressed that there can be no prosperity without equality:

"The link is obvious – or ought to be. Gender equality is the key to economic growth. A society in which women and girls have full equality of opportunity, equal access to education, to work, to all forms of training and personal development, to all positions in government, business and the professions is a healthy, balanced society".

Lack of access to education, to services and to economic opportunities for girls, young women and marginalised groups has a severe impact on development in Commonwealth Countries and it is cited as one of the main reasons for a lack of GDP growth, poor maternal health and increased poverty.

The forum will run until Sunday 17 May and will focus on the themes of child marriage, sexual and reproductive health and rights - including female genital cutting, access to education, employment and entrepreneurial opportunities, sexual orientation and gender identity, and governance and civic participation.

**BROADCASTERS, AGENCIES AND ONLINE VIDEO SITES**

A free-to-use Video News Release featuring conference highlights is available for download below.



[https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B7XVgx5S\\_NZWdHRfWFpzZXVxUIU/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B7XVgx5S_NZWdHRfWFpzZXVxUIU/view?usp=sharing)

Video format: Quicktime H.264 1080i HD.

Audio: Dual channel (L- Interviews, grabs. R- Natural sound)

Contents:

- Group shot of delegates in Malta
- Speech from Lord Howell, President of RCS
- Speech from HE Ms Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President of Malta
- Speech from John Loughton, Youth Chair of CYGEN Conference
- Overlay of Sister Fa, Senegalise Hip-Hop artist and anti-FGM campaigner
- Interview with Sister Fa
- General conference overlay, delegates in national dress.

## **NOTES TO EDITORS**

The Royal Commonwealth Society was founded in 1868 and is constituted by Royal Charter as a Charity. The RCS is committed to improving the lives of people across the Commonwealth. Through youth empowerment, education and advocacy, the Royal Commonwealth Society promotes the value and values of the modern Commonwealth, championing human rights, democracy and sustainable development across its 53 member states and its 2.2 billion people.

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