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PRESS RELEASE: The Australian Government and the Royal Commonwealth Society announce funding to promote gender equality and youth leadership in the Commonwealth

The Australian Government and the Royal Commonwealth Society (RCS) today announced new funding to promote youth leadership and gender equality in the Commonwealth. The announcement was made by Natasha Stott Despoja, Australia's Ambassador for Women and Girls at the 11th Commonwealth Women's Ministerial Meeting (WAMM) in Apia, Samoa.

A portion of the £200,000 (A\$340,000) funding from the Australian Government will be used by the RCS to train young Commonwealth citizens as skilled advocates for gender equality in local, national and international politics. The RCS will also conduct research into young peoples' experiences of gender based violence and how young people can effectively address the issue. Much of this work will be carried out through the Commonwealth Youth Gender and Equality Network (CYGEN), convened and supported by the RCS.

The RCS has supported members of the CYGEN network from all five regions of the Commonwealth to participate in three major international gender equality events in the past year – the Women's Summit at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in 2015 in Malta, the UN's Youth Commission on the Status of Women in New York in March and the Women Leaders' Summit at the Commonwealth Secretariat in London in July.

Addressing the event at WAMM, Natasha Stott Despoja, Australia's Ambassador for Women and Girls, said: "Australia is a strong supporter of the empowerment and agency of young people. I am proud that Australian funding is enabling members of CYGEN to add a youth voice to contemporary discussions and decision making. No community, country or organisation can reach its full potential without drawing on the ideas and talent of its youth."

Michael Lake CBE, Director of the RCS, said: "The Royal Commonwealth Society is tremendously proud to be embarking on this next phase of important work in partnership with the Government of Australia to empower young people and make strides in realising gender equality right across the Commonwealth."

Tahere Siisilafia CYGEN's Representative for Samoa said: "Our voices as young people have the greatest potential to combat the damaging effects of gender prejudice and raise aloft the emancipation of women. This funding opportunity is a material means that could assist in channelling the voices of young people to be inclusive within planning, decision making and implementation on gender equality across all levels".

This is the second phase of funding provided by the Australian Government to support the CYGEN initiative, bringing Australia's contribution to A\$620,000.

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NOTES TO EDITORS:



The Commonwealth Youth Gender and Equality Network (CYGEN) is a youth-led advocacy group that works towards policy change that improves the lives of young people and promotes gender equality. First convened by the Royal Commonwealth Society, it is now the premier group of young experts on gender equality issues in the Commonwealth. www.thercs.org/youth-and-education/commonwealth-youth-gender-and-equality-network

The Royal Commonwealth Society (RCS), founded in 1868, is a network of individuals and organisations committed to improving the lives and prospects of Commonwealth citizens across the world. Through youth empowerment, education and advocacy, the RCS promotes the value and values of the Commonwealth. www.thercs.org

The Australian Government provided A\$280,000 in May 2015 to establish the Commonwealth Youth Gender and Equality Network, or CYGEN as the Network is known, across all Commonwealth member states. This new funding of A\$340,000 (£200,000) towards Phase II of the initiative will assist the RCS and CYGEN to continue work to integrate the Commonwealth youth voice into the advocacy agenda of international meetings.

The Commonwealth Women's Ministerial Meeting (WAMM) takes place from 7-8 September 2016 in Apia and is hosted by the Government of Samoa on the theme of 'Gender equality through sustainable development in an inclusive Commonwealth.' WAMM has been held triennially since 1985 and provides the opportunity for ministers, senior officials, civil society, private sector and partner agencies to discuss critical issues in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment. It also contributes to the setting of Commonwealth priorities and the global agenda for sustainable and inclusive development.

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