



THE ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY

Press Release: Commonwealth Day Observance, Monday 11th March 2013

Duke of Edinburgh celebrates Commonwealth Day at Westminster Abbey

On Monday 11th March, His Royal Highness The Duke of Edinburgh marked Commonwealth Day in Westminster Abbey. The Observance launched this year's Commonwealth theme 'Opportunity through Enterprise'.

Her Majesty The Queen's traditional Commonwealth Day message was played in the Abbey, in which The Queen celebrated the 2013 Commonwealth theme, 'Opportunity through Enterprise':

*We are all born with the desire to learn, to explore, to try new things...
Yet it still takes courage to launch into the unknown. Ambition and
curiosity open new avenues of opportunity.*

*That is what lies at the heart of our Commonwealth approach: individuals
and communities finding ways to strive together to create a better future
that is beneficial for all.*

*Our shared values of peace, democracy, development, justice and human
rights – which are found in our new 'Commonwealth Charter' – mean
that we place special emphasis on including everyone in this goal,
especially those who are vulnerable.*

Award-winning soul singer Beverley Knight, indie-rock favourites The Noisettes and dance group Living The Dream performed at the Observance, Britain's largest annual inter-faith gathering. Beverley sang a soulful cover of Sam Cook's 'A Change is Gonna Come', to 2,000 guests, which included Commonwealth Secretary-General Kamalesh Sharma, The Rt Hon The Lord Howell of Guilford and Commonwealth High Commissioners.

Entrepreneur and philanthropist Sir Richard Branson spoke, highlighting the role the Commonwealth has played in the expansion of many Virgin companies, he said: "*The Commonwealth is all about creating opportunities to spread good ideas across geographical barriers, nurturing talent and encouraging collaboration. It thrives through unity, but also encourages dynamism and diversity.*"

Founding President and Executive Director of Avaaz, Ricken Patel also spoke and children's poet, John Agard, read a poem specially commissioned for the event. The last lines of which, reminded listeners that opportunity is created through hard work and enterprise.

Each of the 1,000 students present in the Abbey – including the young poetry giver – won their tickets because of their involvement in enterprise, whether that was through this year's Commonwealth Essay Competition which focuses on enterprise or

through projects such as Young Enterprise or the 'Ladder for London' apprenticeship campaign.

Commonwealth Day also marks the launch of the Commonwealth School Enterprise Challenge; a business competition for young people who want to make a difference in the world. The attending schools and thousands of their peers across the Commonwealth will be invited to take part.

Commonwealth Week additionally sees the official launch of the Commonwealth Charter; a single document outlining the sixteen core values of the association, which the leaders of the Commonwealth have committed to upholding.

Notes to Editors

Commonwealth Day: In 2013, Commonwealth organisations are focusing on the theme 'Opportunity through Enterprise', celebrating talent and creativity and encouraging the 2.1 billion people of the Commonwealth to maximise innovative opportunities.

The theme is being celebrated on Commonwealth Day, Monday 11 March 2013. This annual event is an opportunity to promote understanding on global issues, international cooperation and the work of the Commonwealth's organisations which aim to improve the lives of its citizens. It also celebrates the Commonwealth through a thrilling mix of music, dance and personal testimonies.

To mark Commonwealth Day, the Royal Commonwealth Society (on behalf of the Council of Commonwealth Societies) organises an Observance at Westminster Abbey. www.commonwealththeme.org

The Commonwealth Essay Competition is the world's oldest and largest schools' writing competition. Run by the Royal Commonwealth Society, it celebrates and nurtures the creative talents of young people, providing a platform for students to compete with their peers in the Commonwealth's 54 nations.

The Royal Commonwealth Society is the oldest and largest civil society organisation devoted to the Commonwealth. Founded in 1868, it conducts a range of events and activities aimed at promoting international understanding. Its educational, youth and cultural programmes include one of the world's oldest and largest schools essay competitions, and an innovative international youth leadership programme. The RCS has some 4,000 members in the UK and a presence in over 40 Commonwealth countries through a network of branches and Commonwealth societies. The RCS is a registered charity in England and Wales. (226748). www.thercs.org

The modern Commonwealth was established with 8 members in 1949. In 2013, it has 54 members with a total population of 2.1 billion. It is a voluntary association of governments and peoples, built around shared language, institutions, challenges, aspirations and values. Commonwealth countries work together to promote common values: democracy, freedom, peace, the rule of law and opportunity for all.

The Commonwealth School Enterprise Challenge is a global competition run by UK charity Teach A Man To Fish in partnership with the Royal Commonwealth Society and Ashoka. The competition invites students to plan and start their own socially sustainable and

environmentally friendly business. These businesses generate income for the school or local community, and provide a fantastic learning platform for students to develop essential business skills.

The Queen is Head of the Commonwealth. For further information, see <http://www.royal.gov.uk/MonarchAndCommonwealth/Overview.aspx>

Press Contact:

Verity Sharp, Programmes Officer, Royal Commonwealth Society. T: +44 (0) 20 7766 9227 / E: verity.sharp@thercs.org