



THE ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY  
CELEBRATING 150 YEARS



The Commonwealth

## Press Release

### **Her Majesty The Queen to lead Commonwealth Day celebrations in the United Kingdom**

Her Majesty The Queen, Head of the Commonwealth, accompanied by The Prince of Wales and The Duchess of Cornwall, The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, Prince Harry and Ms. Meghan Markle and other senior Members of The Royal Family will attend the Commonwealth Service at Westminster Abbey on Commonwealth Day – Monday 12th March 2018.

Organised by The Royal Commonwealth Society, the Commonwealth Service is the largest annual inter-faith gathering in the United Kingdom and provides an opportunity to focus attention on this voluntary association of 53 countries and their commitment to promoting democracy, human rights, the rule of law and equality for its 2.4 billion citizens.

The theme for this year's Service, 'Towards a Common Future', ties in with that of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting to be held in London in April, and seeks to ensure that the Commonwealth is responsive to global challenges and delivers a more prosperous, secure, sustainable and fair future for all citizens, particularly its young people.

Highlights of the Service will include a special performance by UK artist Liam Payne and a reflection by Dr Andrew Bastawrous, an eye surgeon who turned a smartphone into an examination tool that works to combat avoidable blindness in developing countries. The event will also feature performances by Jaspreet Kaur, an award-winning spoken word artist, the London-based collective of Ghanaian musicians and dancers, One-Drum, the Portsmouth Gospel Choir, finalists in BBC One's Pitch Battle television show, and the Ngāti Rānana London Maori Club.

Guests of honour among the 2,000 strong congregation will include the UK Prime Minister, The Rt. Hon Theresa May MP, the Prime Minister of Malta, The Hon Dr Joseph Muscat MP, the Commonwealth Secretary-General, the Rt. Hon Patricia Scotland QC, alongside senior politicians, dignitaries and diplomatic representatives from across the UK and Commonwealth, faith leaders and over 800 school children and young people.

The Service will be broadcast live on BBC One from 14:45 GMT, relayed live on the BBC World Service and streamed live on [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk) and [www.bbc.com/news](http://www.bbc.com/news).

Earlier that day, a wreath laying ceremony will be held at the Memorial Gates, Constitution Hill, to commemorate the actions of those service men and women, from across the Commonwealth, that fought alongside the United Kingdom during World Wars I and II. This year the event will honour the contribution of Caribbean service men and women during the First World War and will feature music provided by the Royal Gurkha Rifles, as well as a ride-past salute by The Queen's Life Guard.



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Later that evening, at Marlborough House, the home of the Commonwealth Secretariat, The Prince of Wales, The Duchess of Cornwall and The Duke of Cambridge will be guests of the Commonwealth Secretary-General at the Commonwealth Day Reception.

Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Patricia Scotland said: “Never before in the history of our family of nations has there been such a remarkable season of gatherings as that heralded by Commonwealth Day 2018.

“Over the coming weeks at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting and associated forums, leaders and representatives of the people in all 53 of our member countries will assemble to work and plan together. We will share and learn from one another, and be motivated to ever greater heights of endeavour and achievement.

“There will also be the Commonwealth Games, with compelling scenes of athletic prowess, tenacity and triumph. Huge new audiences worldwide will deepen in understanding of what the Commonwealth is, what it does, and how it brings positive change for the good of all.

“There are opportunities for each and every one of us as members of the worldwide Commonwealth family to become involved. With our fellow citizens, we live, learn, work and play in countries set in every continent and ocean – all 2.4 billion of us, representing a glorious spectrum of diversity and talent. It is by living and working for the good of one another, towards a common future, that we build our Commonwealth.”

This year, Commonwealth Day falls just two weeks before the start of the 2018 Gold Coast Commonwealth Games in Australia and five weeks before the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, which will take place in London from 16-20 April. This biennial Commonwealth summit will see the United Kingdom assume the role of Commonwealth Chair-in-Office from its current holder, Malta, which has held the position since November 2015.

Commenting on the increased exposure that the Commonwealth will be receiving over the next two months, Director of The Royal Commonwealth Society, Michael Lake said, ‘The Commonwealth Service marks the beginning of a period of six weeks during which the eyes of the world will be on the Commonwealth. Through the events of Commonwealth Day, the Commonwealth Games and the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, there will be a unique opportunity to demonstrate the relevance of the modern Commonwealth, to bring substance to its value to member countries, and to highlight the part it can play as a forum for building a fairer, more prosperous, more secure, and more sustainable world.’.

- ENDS -



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### Notes for Editors:

To request interviews with Commonwealth spokespeople and young leaders and to receive embargoed copies of the 2017 Commonwealth Affirmation and Messages from The Queen and the Commonwealth Secretary-General, please email [media@commonwealth.int](mailto:media@commonwealth.int)

The Commonwealth Service will be broadcast live in the UK on BBC One from 14:45-16:15 GMT. It will be relayed live on the BBC World Service and streamed live on [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk) and [www.bbc.com/news](http://www.bbc.com/news)

Photography from Commonwealth Day will be made available free-of-charge to download and republish from [flickr.com/photos/comsec](https://www.flickr.com/photos/comsec)

Videos will be made available for broadcasters free-of-charge via Dropbox at <http://bit.ly/2mUgrxQ> and loaded to the Commonwealth's Youtube channel: [youtube.com/user/commonwealthtube](https://www.youtube.com/user/commonwealthtube)

Messages and photos will be shared on Twitter and Facebook using the hashtags #OurCommonwealth and #CommonwealthDay.

### Background:

Commonwealth Day: #CommonwealthDay

- Commonwealth Day is an opportunity to promote the Commonwealth's shared values of peace, democracy and equality and to celebrate the rich diversity of the Commonwealth's 53 member countries.
- The year 2018 marks 41 years since Commonwealth Day became a global celebration marked on the same day every year: on the second Monday in March.
- Find out more: [thecommonwealth.org/commonwealthday](http://thecommonwealth.org/commonwealthday)

The Commonwealth: #Commonwealth

- The Commonwealth is a voluntary association of 53 independent and sovereign countries. Our members have agreed to pursue shared goals such as development, democracy and peace. These values are expressed in the Commonwealth Charter.
- The Commonwealth spans the globe, including both advanced economies and developing countries, in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and Americas, Europe and the Pacific. Our combined population is 2.4 billion, of which more than 60 per cent is aged under 30. Thirty members are small states, with a population under two million, of which 24 are island nations.
- Most countries have similar legal and governance systems and a shared language. Although they have much in common, every country is unique.
- A network of more than 80 intergovernmental, civil society, cultural and professional organisations help countries to put Commonwealth values and principles into action.
- Find out more: [thecommonwealth.org/fastfacts](http://thecommonwealth.org/fastfacts)



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#### The Royal Commonwealth Society (RCS) @TheRCSLondon

- The Royal Commonwealth Society is a network of individuals and organisations committed to improving the lives and prospects of Commonwealth citizens across the world.
- Founded in 1868, it is non-partisan, is independent of governments, and is supported by public generosity.
- This year marks the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Society's founding.
- The Society engages with youth, civil society, business, and governmental networks to address issues that matter to the citizens of the Commonwealth.

#### Towards a Common Future: #OurCommonwealth

- This year's theme is based on the values and principles of the Commonwealth Charter, which aims to leave no one behind.
- Building upon the 2017 theme of 'A Peace-Building Commonwealth', this year's theme explores how the Commonwealth can address global challenges and work to create a better future for all citizens through the sub-themes of sustainability, security, prosperity and fairness.
- This principle ties in with the four main themes that have been set out for the 2018 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting: Prosperity (boosting intra-Commonwealth trade and investment); Security (increasing cooperation across security challenges including global terrorism, organised crime, and cyber-attacks); Fairness (promoting democracy, fundamental freedoms and good governance across the Commonwealth); and Sustainability (building the resilience of small and vulnerable states to deal with the effects of climate change and other global crises).
- Young people, who make up 60% of the Commonwealth's population, have an important role in building sustainable, secure, fair and prosperous societies.

#### Memorial Gates:

- Her Majesty The Queen officially inaugurated the Memorial Gates, Constitution Hill, on the 6th November 2002.
- The Gates were erected as a lasting memorial to honour the five million men and women from the Indian subcontinent, Africa and the Caribbean who volunteered to serve with the Armed Forces during the First and Second World Wars.
- Find out more: <http://memorialgates.org/> or telephone Mr. Inderjeet Singh Nijhar, Chair of the Memorial Gates Council, on 07956 838369.

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