



Women's Forum calls for Commonwealth collaboration to end child marriage and for greater roles for women in business and politics.

Day four of pre-CHOGM events, and the last day of the Women's Forum focused on ending child marriage in the Commonwealth, women's political empowerment, gender and youth leadership and women and enterprise.

The first Commonwealth Women's Forum has taken place in Malta from the 22nd to 24th November with the theme 'Women Ahead: Be All That You Can Be'.

Delegates from the Royal Commonwealth Society's network, the Commonwealth Youth Gender Equality Network (CYGEN) met to discuss their youth activism across the Commonwealth with Australia's Ambassador for Women and Girls, Natasha Stott Despoja AM. Stott Despoja was appointed to the Senate at the age of 26, and was previously the youngest woman to sit in the Parliament of Australia. Australia has assisted in the creation and development of CYGEN to help facilitate change from a grassroots level on issues such as ending child marriage, Female Genital Mutilation and gender equality in society including the rights of LGBTI individuals.

The CYGEN members in their meeting with the Ambassador drew attention to the fact that many attempts to empower young people ignore aims to achieve gender equity. Only 9 of the 47 candidates for the Commonwealth Youth Council are young women. Concrete recommendations including urging youth councils and ministries to recruit gender advisers were presented to the Women's Forum.

Ms Despoja said:

"Some people are rejoicing and celebrating the fact we have a women's forum, other people are saying hang on, it's 2015, it's about time. Indeed it is."

"Not for a moment do I consider us a country that can lecture other nations, we work in partnership. There are things we learn from other nations. There are things we probably need a bit more progress on ourselves, things like violence against women, the gender pay gap. At the same time we have important initiatives we can share with other countries around the world."

Delegates have called for the Women's Forum to be a permanent feature preceding the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, but noted that it was being held concurrently with other fora including the Business Forum in which one of the major themes was women in enterprise and business. Prime Minister of Malta, Joseph Muscat had expressed his disappointment that there were not many women at the Business Forum.

The Women's Forum called for traditional leaders, politicians and governments to show greater leadership to eliminate forced and early child marriage and for gender studies to be introduced into national school curriculums.

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.

For further information on the aims of CYGEN see: [The Gender Agenda: Youth perspectives from across the Commonwealth](#)

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, the Society is constituted by Royal Charter (amended 2013) and is a charity in England and Wales (226748). The Society engages with its youth, civil society, business and governmental networks to address issues that matter to the citizens of the Commonwealth. Its primary focus is the promotion of young people throughout the Commonwealth. www.thercs.org

Recent reports include:

- [Preventing Child Marriage in the Commonwealth: the Role of Education](#)
- [Hidden Violence in the Commonwealth](#)
- [Collaboration and Consensus: Building a Constructive Commonwealth Approach to LGBT Rights](#)

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

Video format: Quicktime H.264 1080i HD.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B99sotFuWzoWRW44R3RfOGZrQkE/view?usp=sharing>

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Interviews/Grabs:

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- Fiona Mactaggart, British Labor MP
- Khadija Gbla, Anti FGM Campaigner

TOMORROW: A free to use VNR focusing on gender equality and LGBTIQ issues in the Commonwealth

Media Enquiries:

Carolyn Jack, Chief Operating Officer, The Royal Commonwealth Society
T: +44 (0)7718 476 233 | E: carolyn.jack@thercs.org

Broadcast Enquiries:

Ben Lewis, Broadcast Journalist
T: +44 (0)7527 411 856 | E: benlewismedia@gmail.com