



**Press Release: High Commissioners' Banquet, St. James's Palace, Tuesday 11 March**

**High Commissioners gather to celebrate Commonwealth Week**

On Tuesday March 11<sup>th</sup>, His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales, accompanied by Her Royal Highness The Duchess of Cornwall, attended the Royal Commonwealth Society's annual High Commissioners' Banquet held at St. James's Palace.

The Right Honourable The Lord Howell of Guildford PC, as President of the RCS, addressed assembled guests, who included more than 40 High Commissioners representing every region of the Commonwealth.

Lord Howell described the Commonwealth as "a network of global trust, the like of which exists nowhere else...We are a family in the truest sense – not just a superficial layer of officialdom and formal inter-governmental relations."

"The information revolution", he said, "has given the countless arteries of the Commonwealth a veritable blood transfusion where other more top-heavy, over centralised institutions, are struggling and withering".

To view the transcript of Lord Howell's speech, click [here](#).

The Royal Commonwealth Society organises the High Commissioners' Banquet as part of Commonwealth Week celebrations taking place between 7<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> March. Commonwealth Week is an opportunity to celebrate the rich diversity of the modern Commonwealth, to promote international cooperation and understanding on global issues and to foster a greater understanding of the Commonwealth's role, particularly among young people.

The day before the High Commissioners' Banquet, on Monday 10<sup>th</sup> March, HRH The Prince of Wales, and other senior Royals, attended the Commonwealth Day Observance at Westminster Abbey.

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### Notes to Editors

**High Commissioners' Banquet:** In 1874, the Royal Commonwealth Society hosted its first annual 'conversazione'. This event consisted of music and an exhibition of objects of colonial interest, loaned for the evening. It was attended by many High Commissioners in London and quickly became a highlight of the London social scene. By 1882, over 2,000 people attended. The event ceased in the 1960s, but was revived in 2011.

Since 2011, the High Commissioners' Banquet has been held in partnership with Jaguar Land Rover. In 2014, the event is also supported by their parent company, Tata. Pol Roger sponsored the Champagne Reception.

Performers at the event included The Purcell School's String Quartet, hosted by 'Commonwealth Resounds!' and Young Commonwealth Music Ambassador for Malta and Cyprus, harpist Cecilia de Maria.

The Royal Commonwealth Society organises the annual High Commissioners' Banquet as an integral part of the **Commonwealth Week** celebrations taking place between 7-14<sup>th</sup> March. These events celebrate the unity, diversity and linkages of the modern Commonwealth and aim to foster a greater understanding of the Commonwealth's achievements and its role, particularly among young people. They are an opportunity to promote understanding on global issues, international cooperation and the work of Commonwealth civil society organisations.

In 2014, Commonwealth organisations are focusing on the theme '**Team Commonwealth**'. In the run-up to the 2014 Glasgow Commonwealth Games, this

theme expresses the spirit of friendship and motivation towards shared goals and values that characterises the modern Commonwealth.

[www.commonwealththeme.org](http://www.commonwealththeme.org)

**Commonwealth Day** is marked annually on the second Monday in March (10<sup>th</sup> March 2014). Celebrations to mark Commonwealth Day take place around the world. In London, an Observance took place at Westminster Abbey, organised by the Royal Commonwealth Society (on behalf of the Council of Commonwealth Societies). This event was attended by Her Majesty The Queen and Their Royal Highnesses The Duke of Edinburgh, The Prince of Wales, The Duchess of Cornwall, The Earl and The Countess of Wessex. Speakers included, campaigner Malala Yousafzai, Paralympian Baroness (Tanni) Grey-Thompson and Olympian, The Lord (Sebastian) Coe. Performers included Laura Mvula and Phillippa Yaa de Villiers. For more information and images from this event, please visit:

[www.thercs.org/events/past](http://www.thercs.org/events/past)

**The Royal Commonwealth Society** is the pre-eminent independent body working to promote the value and the values of the Commonwealth for the benefit of its peoples. An international network of individuals and organisations, the Royal Commonwealth Society is committed to improving the lives and prospects of Commonwealth citizens across the world. Founded in 1868, the Society is constituted by Royal Charter (most recently amended in 2013) and as a charity. It is non-partisan, is independent of governments and is supported by public generosity. The Society engages with its youth, civil society, business and governmental networks to address issues that matter to the citizens of the Commonwealth.

[www.thercs.org](http://www.thercs.org)

**The modern Commonwealth** was established with 8 members in 1949. In 2014, it has 53 members with a total population of 2.2 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 Queen is Head of the Commonwealth. For further information, see <http://www.royal.gov.uk/MonarchAndCommonwealth/Overview.aspx>

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