



THE ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY

Press Release

Peace-building is the theme for Commonwealth Day 2017

One week from today, on Monday 13 March, schools and communities in 52 countries will mark Commonwealth Day 2017. This year, the annual celebration of the Commonwealth's shared values is themed 'A Peace-building Commonwealth'. Highlights include:

- The Commonwealth Service at Westminster Abbey at 1445GMT
- The Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games Queen's Baton Relay launch at Buckingham Palace at 1130GMT
- A new Commonwealth Peace in the Home initiative to tackle domestic violence

The Head of the Commonwealth, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, will lead festivities with a special message issued to the two and a half billion people who live in Commonwealth countries.

The Commonwealth Service, the UK's largest inter-faith celebration at Westminster Abbey in London, will be attended by The Queen, accompanied by The Duke of Edinburgh, The Prince of Wales and The Duchess of Cornwall, Prince Harry, The Duke of York and The Earl of Wessex.

Broadcast live around the world by the BBC, the service will feature musical performances, testimonies and readings including an affirmation led by Commonwealth Secretary-General Patricia Scotland.

The 2018 Queen's Baton Relay - the longest in history and most accessible ever - will start its epic journey from Buckingham Palace, connecting communities throughout Africa, the Americas, Asia, the Caribbean, Europe and finally Oceania on its way to Australia for the Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games.



- 2 -



From its earliest hours in Pacific island nations such as Kiribati and Samoa, Commonwealth Day is a global citizen-led celebration of democracy and human rights, the values expressed in the Charter of the Commonwealth.

Commenting on the theme for 2017, 'A Peace-building Commonwealth', Secretary-General Scotland said: "The Commonwealth builds peace by bringing people together, and by mobilising mutual support among our member states to strengthen democracy and development.

"With respect and understanding we celebrate our rich diversity, and work alongside one another in practical ways to champion the needs of the marginalised and most vulnerable. Our theme this year reflects the shared determination of the whole Commonwealth family to deliver enduring peace for all."

In this spirit, the Secretary-General is this week launching a 'Peace in the Home' initiative to tackle domestic violence. Her aim is to build a coalition of governments, businesses, civil society, human rights institutions, and individual citizens committed to ending domestic violence.

At the Commonwealth Service, the Prime Minister of Malta and Chair-in-Office of the Commonwealth, Joseph Muscat, and Cameroonian peace advocate Achaleke Christian Leke, a former victim of radicalisation and violence, will reflect on 'A Peace-building Commonwealth'. Performers will include George the Poet, a British spoken word artist and social commentator of Ugandan heritage, Canadian soprano Measha Brueggergosman and Maltese poet and author Dr Immanuel Mifsud.

The Rt Hon Lord Howell of Guildford, Chairman of the Council of Commonwealth Societies and President of The Royal Commonwealth Society, said: "The Commonwealth Service held in the presence of Her Majesty The Queen, Head of the Commonwealth, focuses all our minds on the essential role the Commonwealth can play in the future and the work we all have to do to make this happen.

"Our celebratory event now spreads its message across the globe. It is matched by ceremonies, services and flag displays across the towns and cities of the United Kingdom, as well as in many great cities across the Commonwealth. All these events are a reminder of our common family purpose, of what together we can achieve and of the goals towards which, in the interests of all humanity, we must now strive."

Commonwealth Games Federation President Louise Martin CBE said: "Launching the Gold Coast 2018 Queen's Baton Relay on Commonwealth Day is a fitting start to an inspiring and inclusive event that connects our diverse global community in anticipation for the next Commonwealth Games.

"We passionately believe that the Games, and the level playing field of sport, should be a tool for building strong and peaceful communities and supporting journeys of reconciliation. In the spirit of 'A Peace-building Commonwealth', and for the first time ever as part of the Queen's Baton Relay launch, representatives of the Traditional Custodians of the land where the Commonwealth Games will be held, the Yugambeh People, will deliver a moving invitation to all First Nations peoples of the Commonwealth to join in the celebrations of the Games."



This year's increased programme of Commonwealth Day activities has been coordinated by the Commonwealth House - a collaborative approach that sees the Commonwealth Secretariat, The Royal Commonwealth Society, the Commonwealth Local Government Forum and the Commonwealth Games Federation join forces to support, promote and advance the values of the Commonwealth as never before.

Commonwealth Local Government Forum Chairperson Cllr Rev Mpho Moruakgomo said: "The theme of Commonwealth Day this year is very relevant to our work as effective local government makes conflict less likely whereas ineffective local government increases conflict risk."

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.

The Commonwealth Service will be broadcast live in the UK on BBC One from 1445-1615GMT. It will be relayed live on the BBC World Service and streamed live on www.bbc.co.uk and 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/commonwealhtube](https://www.youtube.com/user/commonwealhtube)

Messages and photos will be shared on Twitter and Facebook using the hashtags [#Commonwealth4Peace](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Commonwealth4Peace) and [#CommonwealthDay](https://twitter.com/hashtag/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 52 member countries.
- The year 2017 marks 40 years since Commonwealth Day became a global celebration marked on the same day every year: on the second Monday in March.
- At 0930GMT on 13 March schools around the world will take part in a [global online debate](#) as part of Commonwealth Class, an initiative of the Commonwealth Secretariat and British Council.
- Find out more: thecommonwealth.org/commonwealthday

The Commonwealth Service:

- The Commonwealth Service is the UK's largest multi-faith celebration and takes place annually on the second Monday in March, Commonwealth Day, at Westminster Abbey.
- The service is traditionally attended by Her Majesty The Queen, the Head of the Commonwealth, senior members of the Royal Family, the Secretary-General of the



- 4 -



Commonwealth, High Commissioners and Ambassadors, senior politicians, dignitaries from across the UK and the Commonwealth and 800 school children and young people.

- The Royal Commonwealth Society organises the service on behalf of a group of Commonwealth organisations, known as the Council of Commonwealth Societies.
- Find out more: thercs.org/our-work/commonwealth-service-2017

The Queen's Baton Relay: #QBR2018

- The Queen's Baton carries a message from Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II that calls the Commonwealth's athletes and communities to come together in peaceful and friendly competition.
- The Queen's Baton will travel through all nations and territories of the Commonwealth over 388 days. The Queen's Baton's final destination is the XXI Commonwealth Games Opening Ceremony on 4 April 2018, where Her Majesty The Queen, or Her representative, will remove the message from the Baton and read it aloud to officially declare the Games open.
- The Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games will be staged from 4-15 April 2018. More than 6,600 athletes and team officials from 70 Commonwealth nations and territories will compete.
- Find out more: gc2018.com/qbr

The Commonwealth: #Commonwealth

- The Commonwealth is a voluntary association of 52 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

A Peace-building Commonwealth: #Commonwealth4Peace

- At a time of increasing instability and uncertainty in the world, the Commonwealth family of nations in its rich diversity becomes an ever more-needed source of strength and hope for all its members.
- 'A Peace-building Commonwealth' reaffirms the Commonwealth Charter principle that international peace and security, sustainable economic growth and development and the rule of law are essential to the progress and prosperity of all.
- Young people, who make up 60% of the Commonwealth's population, have an important role in building stable, secure and prosperous societies.



- Many of the Commonwealth's 80 organisations, including the Commonwealth Secretariat, have programmes to support peace-building.
- The Commonwealth Secretariat supports democratic institutions, good governance, human rights, gender equality and counter extremism. It empowers young people and promotes sport as a tool for building peace.
- Commonwealth election observers have observed more than 140 elections in nearly 40 countries.

Commonwealth Peace in the Home Initiative:

- Commonwealth Secretary-General Patricia Scotland will on International Women's Day, 8 March 2017, launch a new Commonwealth-wide initiative called 'Peace in the Home' to end domestic violence. Her aim is to build a coalition of governments, businesses, civil society and citizens committed to achieving peace in the home.
- The initiative is expected to culminate in a Commonwealth accord in February 2018.
- Find out more: thecommonwealth.org/peaceinthehome

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