THE UNHEARD VOICE:
the continued struggle facing adolescent girls in the Commonwealth

MALALA YOUSAFZAI:
Nobel Prize winner on education and the empowerment of women

ESSAY COMPETITION:
Young writers receive awards at Buckingham Palace

YOUNG LEADERS:
An exceptional youth programme is launched
Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA)

The CPA is an Association of Commonwealth Parliamentarians who, irrespective of gender, race, religion or culture, are united by community of interest, respect for the rule of law and individual rights and freedoms, and by pursuit of the positive ideals of parliamentary democracy. It exists to connect, develop, promote and support Parliamentarians and their staff to identify benchmarks of good governance and the implementation of the enduring values of the Commonwealth.

The CPA was founded in 1911 as the Empire Parliamentary Association. In 1948, it adopted its present name, changed its rules to enable all Branches to participate in the Association’s management, and established a separate Secretariat to manage its affairs.

The CPA focuses on the Commonwealth’s commitment to fundamental political values, including: just and honest government, the alleviation of poverty, human rights, international peace and order, global economic development, the rule of law, equal rights and representation for all citizens of both genders, the separation of powers among the three branches of government and the right to participate in free and democratic political processes.

The Association’s core functions are to:
• Represent and promote parliamentary democracy, the Association and the values of the Commonwealth to both Commonwealth and non-Commonwealth worlds;
• Arrange a Plenary Conference of Commonwealth Parliamentarians to include the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians, the Small Branches Conference and a youth statement;
• Provide seminars, workshops, study groups and professional development opportunities, including gender and youth focused programmes, for Parliamentarians and parliamentary staff;
• Publish and disseminate parliamentary information; and
• Encourage, develop and co-ordinate the exchange of knowledge, skills and information among Members and among the constituent Branches, including representatives of Parliaments in emerging non-Commonwealth democracies which have had close links with Commonwealth countries.

The CPA currently has some 180 active national, state, provincial and territorial Parliaments, with a total membership of 17,000 Parliamentarians.

Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP)

Recognising the need to increase women’s representation in political institutions, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) established a structure and governance body to provide greater support to women in Parliament. Since its formation in 1989, the CWP has evolved into a body which seeks to achieve its aims and objectives from within the overall structure and functioning of the Association. It also works towards the incorporation of gender considerations in all CPA activities.

In 2004, the CWP was formally recognized in the CPA Constitution and its elected Chairperson added to the CPA Executive Committee. The Chairperson serves a term of three years and the President one year.

The CPA Secretariat Headquarters is based in London, United Kingdom. Further information on the Association can be found by visiting: www.cpahq.org
WELCOME

The Royal Commonwealth Society has been through a period of considerable change but our objective to champion the Commonwealth worldwide, remains constant.

The Commonwealth itself is experiencing an interesting period at this mid-way point between the 2013 CHOGM in Sri Lanka and the next in Malta in November 2015. There is great expectation and anticipation of what the Malta CHOGM will achieve in addressing the competing challenges of development and democracy.

In response to our friends and supporters who have expressed a desire for a Commonwealth focused publication, we are pleased to offer this first issue of our multimedia magazine. While our website is vibrant and contemporary and will host an electronic version of the journal, we understand that some of our supporters would like to receive a printed version, which we are pleased to provide.

We hope you will find it interesting and informative, and that it will reveal some of our activities and our focus in 2014, along with our objectives in 2015 and beyond. We welcome any comments and challenges to which it gives rise and above all, we hope you enjoy it.

Michael Lake
Director

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KEEP IN THE CONVERSATION

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EBOLA

The Ebola catastrophe in West Africa continues to terrify communities, and still remains one of the worst health and humanitarian disasters of modern times.

“I understand public anxiety, but you stop that through information. The best way to control this outbreak is through identifying the sick and then contact tracing. We can all be useful in our own ways, and particularly by reflecting positivity and support for the huge pool of workers who are volunteering to help,” he says.

The UK has taken responsibility for leading the international community’s medical response in Sierra Leone, the US in Liberia, and France is responding to the crisis in Guinea, but the situation is far from being under control.

A major drive and call for volunteers started in October in the UK, co-ordinated by The Sierra Leone Diaspora UK Task Force in collaboration with the Sierra Leone War Trust (SLWT) and The Organisation of Sierra Leonean Healthcare Professionals Abroad (TOSHPA).

Internationally, thousands of volunteers are needed, logisticians, engineers, water and sanitation experts, as well as nursing and hospital staff.

The Commonwealth Nurses and Midwives Federation is working to recruit volunteers across the Commonwealth: Executive Secretary, Jill liffe says human resources are the priority: “In addition to volunteers, the provision of infection prevention education to keep health workers safe is critically important. The Sierra Leone Department of Health and Sanitation funded the Sierra Leone Nurses Association to conduct multidisciplinary infection education in all districts but so much more needs to be done.”

FIND OUT MORE
More information at www.thercs.org and www.sierraleonennursesassociation.org
In the name of God, the most beneficent, the most merciful, Your Majesty, Your Royal Highnesses, Ladies and Gentlemen and my dear friends, it is a great honour for me to be here in the Commonwealth family, which is a family of people, no matter of what colour, religion or gender. The Commonwealth is a family of nations, and I feel very happy and excited that my school headmistress, my teachers and my friends are also here today. Dear sisters and brothers, in this world we are living as a family of nations, and it is necessary that each member of this family receives equal opportunities of economic, social and especially educational growth. If even one member is left behind, the rest can never go forward.

I would like to highlight two main issues on which we should take action and raise our voices. The first one is the lack of education. In many parts of the world – including within the Commonwealth family – access to education is denied to children, especially to girls who are the most affected. Children face challenges every day in their quest to be educated. In Pakistan, in India and in many parts of Africa there are many barriers to education such as poverty, lack of access, violence and cultural opposition.

It should be the top priority that every country in the Commonwealth, and all over the world, has a 100% school attendance rate of every student, whether girl or boy. It should be our goal that every child gets an education. We need to work more and invest more on education, to build a bright future and protect children suffering from terrorism, child labour, child trafficking, and gender abuse such as female genital mutilation.

The success of the Commonwealth – like the future success of any team – depends on the next generation. Today’s children will be tomorrow’s leaders; tomorrow’s politicians, tomorrow’s businesspeople, tomorrow’s doctors and tomorrow’s teachers.

Your Majesty, and dear sisters and brothers, the second important goal should be the empowerment of women. Some of you may know, and some of you may not, that women own only 1% of the total title land in the world. In some fields, women and men do the exact same job but women are paid less than men. Women get fewer opportunities in politics, businesses and other economic industries.

In my opinion, for a country’s successful development, it is essential that women are treated with equality. We should take action and fight for women’s rights, because we can never, ever succeed when half of us are held back.

Children and people are the most valuable resource of a nation. So we must work together to ensure that girls – and all children – are protected, respected and supported to flourish. We also need to work together to protect children from terrorism; if a new generation is not given pens, then they will be given guns by the terrorists.

Finally, let us promise ourselves that we will make our world a beautiful place; a place where there is peace, love, friendship, equality, justice, respect, tolerance and harmony. Thank you.
CHILD MARRIAGE IN THE COMMONWEALTH

Young women face high levels of violence, discrimination and marginalisation across the Commonwealth. We discuss the RCS’ ongoing work for young women’s rights – amplifying their voices, working to end child marriage, and advocating for young women’s empowerment.

Young Women – the unheard voice
The Commonwealth has a long tradition of prioritising youth participation – recognising that young people make up 50% of Commonwealth citizens. Young people have fought for this acknowledgement – and recognition of their crucial role in development. As leaders of today and tomorrow, they represent a proportion of society that is willing and able to effect societal, political and economic change. This is not to say that young people’s issues are promptly and wholly addressed – they are a group disproportionately affected by unemployment, they are under-represented in politics, and they do not often occupy positions of import within society. The Commonwealth aims to recognise and address this in its theme for 2015: A Young Commonwealth.

As the policy officer working for the Royal Commonwealth Society on gender equality issues, what the Commonwealth does not seem to prioritise is young women. If young people are 50% of the Commonwealth’s citizens, young women are 25%. And the issues that young people face are magnified and added to for young women – they are statistically even less likely to be represented politically, be employed, gain an education, or occupy a position of respect within society. They face high levels of violence, discrimination and marginalisation. One of the central, and most devastating, issues faced by adolescent girls is child, early and forced marriage. Globally, fifteen million girls are married before they reach the age of 18 each year: that is one girl every two seconds. The practice denies girls their rights to health, education, equality, non-discrimination and their right to live free from violence and exploitation.

Child Marriage – why it matters
Further to being a fundamental human rights violation, child marriage also undermines efforts to reduce global poverty and is thus a major challenge to development. There is a strong correlation between child marriage and girls dropping out of school. This denies them the education they need for their personal and professional development, and their preparation for adulthood. Child marriage is also linked to serious health implications: girls under 15 are five times more likely to die in childbirth; for girls in the developing world aged 15-19, complications during pregnancy is one of the leading causes of death; and still births and new-born deaths are 50% higher amongst this group. Child brides do not receive the economic and educational opportunities that help lift them and their families out of poverty. Ending child marriage will help to accelerate efforts to achieve a safe, healthy and prosperous future for girls around the world.

Child Marriage in numbers
This year has seen child marriage rise up the international agenda, with the UN General Assembly and the UN Human Rights Council both holding their first ever panel discussions on the issue, in September and June this year respectively. This year also saw a major international conference which aimed to end child marriage and female genital mutilation in a generation – the Girl Summit – organised by the UK Department for International Development. These moments represent great leaps forward in terms of recognition of the problem
– there is little denial from governments at international fora that child marriage is wrong. However, are these meetings, summits, conferences and resolutions translating into genuine action? UNICEF’s 2014 data suggests that while progress is being made, there is a long way to go.

**What the RCS is doing**

Since 2010, the Royal Commonwealth Society has undertaken significant research and advocacy work on child marriage in the Commonwealth. In 2011, in partnership with Plan UK, the RCS published a defining report on adolescent girls in the Commonwealth, *Because You’re a Girl: Growing Up in the Commonwealth*, and advocated for further action to end child marriage at both 2011 and 2013 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings. Utilising its convening role, the RCS has hosted two high-level, round-table discussions in London with support from Plan UK and the Commonwealth Secretariat. Attended by representatives from High Commissions and leading experts, these were followed by a second report – *Empowering Girls: What the Commonwealth can do to end Early and Forced Marriage*.

Supported by the Canadian Government, the RCS is currently researching a two-part report on child marriage in the Commonwealth: the preventative role of education; and the barriers to economic opportunity and empowerment. The reports will be published to coincide with the Commonwealth Conference of Education Ministers (The Bahamas, 2015) and the Malta CHOGM, 2015. The RCS is also now a member of Girls Not Brides, the global partnership of over 400 organisations working to end child marriage. This has improved the RCS’ ability to access information and share knowledge. On International Day of the Girl, the RCS wrote an open letter to the Commonwealth Secretary-General, urging the Secretariat to continue and further their work to end child marriage. Going forward, the RCS will continue to prioritise this, and to advocate both with and on behalf of young women in the Commonwealth.

**Globally, the practice is declining, especially marriage of girls under 15:** In 1985, 33% of women aged 20-24 were married before 18; in 2010 it was 26%. However, in real terms, the numbers are going up with increasing population – and will continue to do so without ACCELERATED progress.
THE QUEEN’S YOUNG LEADERS PROGRAMME

The Commonwealth of Nations may have been born in 1949, but today it is bursting with the young. It is dominated by a burgeoning youth population...1.3 billion youth out of a population of 2.2 billion; 60% of them are under 30. It is the youth of the Commonwealth who will inspire change, and leave their own legacies.

Launched at Buckingham Palace with a social media hub and google hangout on 9 July 2014, by Their Royal Highnesses The Duke of Cambridge and Prince Henry of Wales, on behalf of The Queen, the Programme aims to discover, celebrate and support young people from every Commonwealth nation. These young people will be chosen for having transformed their own lives and the lives of those around them, despite challenges they may have faced along the way.

Young people will help design the award process and the journey for the awardees, to ensure the programme is tailored for youth, by youth, to help shape the future of the Commonwealth.

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In honour of Her Majesty The Queen’s 60 years of service to the Commonwealth, an exceptional youth programme is underway to find the next generation of inspirational young leaders who can help transform their own communities. The Queen became leader of the Commonwealth at the young age of 25. She now puts her name to this award to find other young leaders who can make their own mark in the Commonwealth.

The Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Trust, in partnership with The Royal Commonwealth Society, has established The Queen’s Young Leaders Programmes each year for the next four years, to find 60 exceptional young people from across the Commonwealth.

ABOVE: Their Royal Highnesses the Duke of Cambridge and Prince Henry of Wales with Gemma Cairney, BBC Radio 1 DJ, and Jamal Edwards, Entrepreneur and film-maker, at the launch in the 1884 Room at Buckingham Palace.

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During the launch, Prince Harry commented on the power of the internet and social media in bringing social change:

“The world is more connected than ever in history. The young leaders of today have the greatest opportunity of any
in our history to reach out across the Commonwealth and to effect change on a global scale.” He said of the many inspirational young people that he’s met, each is unique in many ways, but, “they all hold the same belief that they can and will improve the lives of those around them. Where others see challenges, they see opportunity,” he said.

“Young people are the parents, the leaders and the adults of the future. We are the ones who can ultimately change society and make our world a better place to live.”

Prince William said that leadership expresses itself in many different ways, but two traits unite all leaders: “One is a clear purpose; a determination not to be detracted, to not give up. The second is to know you don’t have all of the answers, and to learn. The QYL programme will equip them with the tools to succeed.

The Commonwealth is uniquely placed to do this work with 53 societies having the chance to learn from each other,” he said.

One young Ambassador for the programme, Fahma Mohamed, is a 17-year old campaigner who aims to stop Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and gender based violence. Fahma said: “Young people are the parents, the leaders and the adults of the future. We are the ones who can ultimately change society and make our world a better place to live. We can influence values and priorities. We have the passion of the youth. Once we set our minds on something we don’t give up easily. We have energy, creativity and new ideas so if you want to invest in the future, invest in the youth and let us own our own future.”

An Awards Scheme celebrates the achievements of exceptional young people who have proved themselves to be inspiring leaders in their communities and may have overcome challenges in their lives to do so. Each year from 2014 to 2018, 60 inspirational young people will be selected to receive a Queen’s Young Leaders Award and become ‘Queen’s Young Leaders’ – one for every year that The Queen had served as Head of the Commonwealth at the time of her Diamond Jubilee.

The aspiration is that at least one young person from every Commonwealth country will receive a Queen’s Young Leaders Award over the course of the four-year programme.

A Grants Scheme supports organisations, in selected countries across the Commonwealth, that work with young people, to help solve the problems affecting their lives and the communities in which they live, with innovative, youth-focused solutions.

In the first year, grants will be available to organisations across all Commonwealth regions. Projects will be supported that are led by, or focused on, young people. They will provide opportunities for young people to learn new skills, enter employment or enterprise, or have a say in decisions affecting their future. Each project will place young people at the heart of their communities, working with them to help solve the issues that affect their lives.

Guided by the values of the Commonwealth Charter, this unique, life-changing programme has two parts:

Applications for The Queen’s Young Leaders Programme this year (2014) opened in September 2014 with the first Grants to be made in July 2015. The programme will run for the next four years. Visit www.queensyoungleaders.com for more information on how to nominate/apply.
The Commonwealth Essay Competition has experienced another year of extraordinary achievement. Inspired by this year’s ‘Team Commonwealth’ theme, the competition received entries from nearly 10,000 young writers.

The theme, which was also this year’s Commonwealth theme, touched upon the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games and the spirit of friendship between nations. More than 500 schools in 44 Commonwealth countries and territories responded, with students interpreting the contest’s focus through their own unique personal and cultural perspectives.

Run since 1883, the competition continues to go from strength to strength; its longevity and success a testament to young people’s creativity, talent and eagerness to share their views about the world.

In 2014, participants again demonstrated their ability to stimulate and provoke discussion, with both the quality and breadth of discourse impressing the judges. Composed of 56 writers, scholars and educators from across the Commonwealth, the judging team selected more than 2,000 entries to receive Gold, Silver, and Bronze Awards, before forwarding the very best entries to the final judging panels. Chaired by Vicki Wienand, a representative of competition sponsor Cambridge University Press, the Junior and Senior panels met and, after much discussion, selected the top winners.

Fifteen-year-old Raniya Hosain, a pupil at Lahore College of Arts and Sciences in Pakistan, was named the Senior Winner. Her winning entry, based on the topic ‘Describe what your Country has to offer other Members of the [Commonwealth] Team’, charmed judges with its heart-warming tale of an elderly and impoverished Pakistani fruit seller who inspires generosity and laughter in those he meets.

Ten-year-old Max de Bourcier, a pupil at St Michael’s Preparatory School in Jersey, was named the Junior Winner. His entry, ‘Being a Team Player’, is an honest and humorous account of his experiences of trying to be part of a team, which, in an unexpected twist, culminates in a visit to the Large Hadron Collider at CERN. You can read both entries on the following pages.

This year’s Runners-up come from Singapore and Canada. The Senior Runner-up, sixteen-year-old Selina Xu, a pupil at Nanyang Girls’ High School in Singapore, wrote a thought-provoking essay that made use of a local idiom to examine the culture of competition. The Junior Runner-up, thirteen-year-old Leah Annia Plante-Wiener, a pupil at The Study in Westmount, Canada, explored the theme of unity. She wrote an honest account of living with anxiety and the fight to overcome it.

Although diverse in subject matter, the winning entries are similar in their ability to grasp the reader’s attention, and the RCS is
grateful to sponsors Cambridge University Press and the Queen’s Trust, whose support this year has enabled the winners and thousands of other young people to sit at their keyboards or pick up a pen and share their stories, views and voices with us.

**Introducing The Queen’s Commonwealth Essay Competition**

For 2014, we were delighted to bring the Winners and Runners-up of the annual Commonwealth Essay Competition to London for a week of cultural and educational activities, culminating in a special Award Ceremony that took place at Buckingham Palace on the 19th of November.

The event was both an opportunity to recognise the achievement of the winners and an occasion to mark the launch of the 2015 competition, renamed ‘The Queen’s Commonwealth Essay Competition’, in honour of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II’s role as both Head of the Commonwealth and Patron of the Royal Commonwealth Society.

Joined by authors, diplomats and educationalists from across the Commonwealth, we welcomed HRH The Duchess of Cornwall, as Her Majesty’s representative, to present the young writers with their prizes.

Guests were invited to help launch the 2015 competition, as, for the first time in the competition’s one hundred and thirty-one year history, the Society put Her Majesty’s name to the competition, illustrating both the evolving nature of the contest, and the Head of the Commonwealth’s support for the promotion of literacy, expression and creativity among young people.

The theme of the 2015 competition, ‘A Young Commonwealth’, acknowledges that young people account for the majority of the Commonwealth’s population and play a vital role in the world that we live in, now and in years to come.

"This unique competition offers young people the exciting opportunity of exploring topics of current importance to the Commonwealth and the world, with winners being able to reach a global audience."

Chief Judge, Vicki Wienand, on behalf of Cambridge University Press

Through the competition, the RCS will be inviting young people to share their hopes and concerns for the future, thereby generating an important youth perspective as the international community gathers to set development goals for the next 15 years.

It is hoped the responses will help both to inform the trajectory of the Society’s work and to highlight to the wider international community the issues concerning young people across the globe.

**FIND OUT MORE**

For further information on The Queen’s Commonwealth Essay Competition 2015, please visit [www.thercs.org/youth](http://www.thercs.org/youth)
There is a little old man who sells fruit around the corner, with a bald head, and eyes that have a twinkle that even decades of tears for a son lost in a drone attack cannot extinguish. He sells fruit for the best prices and has more need for the money than the rest, so the faithful buyers staunchly ignore the fact that the apples are a little dried up, or that the oranges are smaller than those in the other sellers’ carts. He sits under a giant, paisley umbrella given to him by one of his older buyers, who declared that he looked utterly abysmal sitting in the pouring monsoon, his rough, cotton shawl wound around his head for protection. The buyer’s name was Rashid Abdullah and even though he harboured perhaps the greatest love and devotion for the fruit-seller he was not used to showing affection so he did it the only he knew how; with shared cigarettes, gruff criticism and occasional gifts. It was far from ideal for his wife who constantly harassed him about being more open and affectionate, but the old fruit-seller was perfectly content with this treatment. So, there he sat in his plastic chair under his paisley umbrella, with sun-browned cheeks that looked more like crumpled up paper than skin, eyes that were constantly darting around the busy traffic-jammed streets and a nimble hand that almost always had in it a toy for the beggar children who roamed around the alleys. Rashid had criticized him before for wasting money on those dumb toys but the fruit-seller had smiled his toothless smile and said that it was money well-spent and what use did an old man have for money anyway? Death, he would remark casually, was right around the corner and his son waited for him in heaven. Rashid would blow air out of his nose and turn away to hide the pain in his eyes at the thought of the fruit-seller dying and buy more fruit than he needed so that the fruit-seller could have more money to buy his stupid toys.

In the evenings, after the call to prayer had been echoed around the narrow street and the haze of smoke and dust had lifted somewhat, as most people had gone home, the fruit-seller would sit and tell stories of the wars and of the village. The children would sit wide-eyed waiting for his creaky voice to bring them back to the magic days of old and he would always comply. But one thing he refused to do, despite numerous requests from the children who crowded around him every night, was tell a story that was either scary or sad. Life was scary and sad all on its own, but the stories that came from it didn’t have to be. So every night the sounds of raucous, innocent, care free laughter would bounce around the street and bring smiles to the faces of all the people on it. ‘Fruit man is at it again. How he makes them laugh’ they would say via eye contact and shared smiles. There was always one person who was older than the rest present at these story times. Her name was Meena Khan, and she was a prostitute who would sit in her bedazzled clothes and listen to the old man. The first day the girl came, the fruit-seller asked her why she wanted to listen to his juvenile, childish stories. She had replied that she had never gotten the chance to be juvenile or childish and with him she could almost forget the fact. He had never questioned her again. Yet when she would throw her head back and laugh louder than all the children present his strange eyes would twinkle even brighter in triumph.

When the night comes crawling in the fruit-seller goes home on his old bicycle with wheels that creak and a handle bar that’s partially broken. He bikes for one hour every day, slowly and steadily making
his way back to his ramshackle hovel. He would always stop at the shop next door to buy toys for the little ones the next day, and the shop keeper would beam at him from behind his bushy beard and give him an extra toy for no money at all, for the old man was his most loyal customer. When he got home, he prayed. His aching bones screamed in protest as he prostrated before Allah, but he persevered. He finished his prayers before collapsing with exhaustion on his hard mattress. He slept fitfully, until the first rays of dawn lit the sky in pastel pink and orange hues. He shook himself awake, a task that got harder as time progressed, and went to work.

I didn’t know this man personally, and I don’t know anything about him but the exact shape of his gravestone, grey and worn. I heard of him, stories by the dozens, from all the fruit-sellers that remained. The people in the alley paid for the funeral. There were many tears at the funeral, none as long and loud as Rashid’s. The children mourned, for a veritable treasure trove of stories had died along with the old man. But there is always sadness and there are always tears. The reason that this man’s story stood out was that his life and the people who were a part of it ARE Pakistan. So if anyone ever asked me what Pakistan had to give to the Commonwealth, I would tell them this story: the story of dried up apples, toothless smiles, stupid toys, juvenile stories, raucous laughter and crystal tears. The story of our people, the story of our country.

Being a Team Player

I am not a team player. When you are ten years old, everyone tries to make you join a team because “It’s good for you”. You see every time I try to take part in a team it doesn’t go as planned.

I tried to join a brass band, it went well until we did a band trip. Last year, after the Easter holiday there was a three day band camp in the mountains. I really didn’t want to go but my mum forced me to. The drive there was terrifying as we had too many kids in a Land Rover. We went up and up the mountain on a windy road just wide enough for the car, with a sheer drop on the right hand side. We got to 8,000 feet and I was sick when we got out. We stayed in a cabin with no running water or electricity. We all had to share one room with mattresses in a row. There was an outside toilet. If this is what team playing is all about then it is definitely not for me. I absolutely hated the trumpet afterwards.

My mum sent me to a football club so that I could be a team player but I just enjoyed kicking the ball on my own and begged her not to go back. Why would you want to stand in a freezing field? If this is being a team player it’s definitely not for me!

My mum took me to the rugby club and I saw my friends playing but I said that I really didn’t want to do it. We had a bacon roll and then we went home.

I like doing things on my own. I have always liked computers. I have lots of computers and at the age of ten I can do some coding in Python, Basic and a bit of C++. Python is used for websites, apps and google play. Basic is one of the oldest computer languages. C++ is used for high-speed graphics.

My mum took me to Cern in Geneva to see the Large Hadron Collider. I saw how all the people worked and lived there and I thought that was a place that I would like to work in. Cern has everything you need all in one place. You can live and work there. There are restaurants and also vending machines where scientists can get everything they need to survive, such as food, drinks and shampoo.

I learnt how the Large Hadron Collider works and saw some experiments like what happens when you super cool a magnet and I made my own version of a particle detector and entered a competition. When I grow up I would like to be a particle physicist and discover dark matter.

Cern was full of people who work together on big projects like looking for the Higgs Boson so I suppose you could say that they are a type of team. I wonder how many of them were on the school football team?
Magna Carta turns 800 in 2015. Here’s why everyone in the Commonwealth should commemorate it.

Magna Carta matters. It is the foundation stone supporting the freedoms and liberties of almost two billion people in over 100 countries. The sealing of Magna Carta in June 1215 laid down the basis for English common law and since then it has become one of the most influential documents ever produced.

In 2009 the Magna Carta Trust established the Magna Carta 800th Anniversary
Committee to help co-ordinate the hundreds (and potentially thousands) of local, national and international events taking place this year and in 2015; to promote Magna Carta's importance today and to deliver a number of key aspirations. When Her Majesty The Queen agreed to become Patron of the Magna Carta Trust in recognition of this anniversary, it was stipulated that we must do what we can to involve the Commonwealth. And so, we want to make sure the 800th anniversary of the sealing of Magna Carta is an opportunity for all to understand its historical importance and its continuing relevance today.

Magna Carta began its life as a peace treaty between King John and his Barons in June 1215. History shows that in this narrow sense Magna Carta failed – the Pope annulled the ‘Great Charter’ just a few weeks after King John placed his seal on it and the failure of this agreement led to civil war. Yet the history of 13th century England – and then throughout predominantly the English speaking world – shows that Magna Carta became more than a temporary document to suit a particular constitutional crisis.

We only need to look at how others since 1215 have talked about and used Magna Carta to appreciate this. The newly-independent United States included many of Magna Carta’s concepts in the 1791 Bill of Rights. In 1870 Bishop William Stubbs asserted “the whole of the constitutional history of England is a commentary on this Charter.” In 1965 Lord Denning, one of the most celebrated English judges of the 20th century, described Magna Carta as “the greatest constitutional document of all times – the foundation of the freedom of the individual against the arbitrary authority of the despot.”

Another lasting legacy is seen in the UN Declaration of Human Rights adopted in 1948. Speaking at the UN General Assembly as she submitted the UN Declaration, Mrs Eleanor Roosevelt argued that “we stand today at the threshold of a great event both in the life of the United Nations and in the life of mankind. This declaration may well become the international Magna Carta for all men everywhere”.

There are many events in the next 12 months for people across the world to learn more about Magna Carta – from commemorative coins, to BBC programmes, new anthems and bell ringing, concerts, local community events, major national exhibitions, academic seminars and political debates.

Many of the key places throughout England with a link to Magna Carta will be holding special exhibitions. These include the British Library (hosting their largest ever exhibition next year, bringing discussion about the rule of law to the fore when the US Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights will stand alongside copies of the Magna Carta) and Salisbury, Durham, Hereford and Lincoln Cathedrals.

We are also really pleased to see many Commonwealth nations and organisations using next year to promote and commemorate Magna Carta. For example Magna Carta Canada plan to tour a special exhibition containing one of Durham’s three original Magna Carta across a number of cities in Canada in 2015. Our colleagues in Australia will use the fact that Canberra is one of only two cities outside of England to have an original Magna Carta to develop a wide ranging programme of events and activities.

In the Caribbean, the University of the West Indies is leading on a major programme of seminars, lectures and research looking at the influence and impact of Magna Carta in the Commonwealth Caribbean. And the Commonwealth Lawyers Association in conjunction with the Commonwealth Magistrates’ and Judges’ Association, and the Commonwealth Legal Education Association, will be developing and touring a special ‘Magna Carta to Commonwealth Charter’ exhibition across several countries in 2015.

Mark Gill, Executive Director of the Magna Carta 800th Commemoration Committee

FIND OUT ABOUT OTHER EVENTS BEING PLANNED
Visit the Events page at www.magnacarta800th.com or sign-up to our newsletter, www.magnacarta800th.com/newslettercom/newsletter
Each year a theme is chosen for Commonwealth Day, celebrated annually on the second Monday in March. It acts as a catalyst for activities undertaken during the year by Commonwealth organisations. The theme for 2015 will be ‘A Young Commonwealth’.

In Commonwealth Secretary-General H.E. Kamalesh Sharma’s words, the rationale is as follows:

“People aged twenty-five or under account for the majority of the Commonwealth’s population, and play a vital role at the heart of sustainable development and democracy. ‘A Young Commonwealth’ recognises the capacity, contribution and potential of young people, particularly in 2015 when the world will define a new global development framework.

The Commonwealth is also a family of dynamic countries at the forefront of innovation, growth and contributing global value. As a diverse and increasingly connected global network, we bring fresh perspectives and new ideas. We will always remain a contemporary and young Commonwealth.”

2015: A Watershed Year

2015 will be a watershed year for international development. It marks the culmination of two critical inter-governmental processes, involving ambitious new development goals and action on climate change. At the Post-2015 summit in New York in September, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) will expire and global leaders, through the United Nations General Assembly, will finalise the goals for the next 15 years. These will aim to tackle the big global issues of inequality, injustice, poverty and sustainability. Then three months later, at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change’s 21st session of the Conference of the Parties (known as ‘COP 21’) in Paris, a comprehensive climate change agreement will be signed.
The Commonwealth and Post-2015

The Commonwealth has been contributing to the debate concerning the Post-2015 Development Agenda. It has a broad reach and is able to consult at all levels from governments to professionals, and with citizens. In 2013 the Commonwealth Ministerial Working Group for Education outlined their vision for education in the new global goals. A report from the Commonwealth Foundation stressed the importance of the involvement of civil society. Then in September 2014, Commonwealth Heads of Government released a joint statement on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, welcoming “the inclusive inter-governmental process in the United Nations to achieve a concise, compelling, ambitious and balanced development agenda beyond 2015…” We recognise poverty eradication as the overarching focus of the Post-2015 Development Agenda and reaffirm our commitment to sustainable development. The new agenda must tackle the causes of poverty, exclusion and inequality.”

An Existential Threat to Nations

Days earlier at the UN Climate Summit 2014, Baron Waqa, the President of the Republic of Nauru and Chair of the Alliance of Small Island States, told delegates “Climate change and sea level rise is already threatening our existence as sovereign nations... No one better understands the grave risk posed by climate change than Small Island Developing States (SIDS).” 25 of the 53 members of the Commonwealth are SIDS, and this is a priority area for joint action. Indeed, in addressing the SIDS 2014 Conference, Commonwealth Deputy Secretary-General Deodat Maharaj said, “In shaping the new post-2015 global development agenda, the goals and targets set must recognise the particular and long term vulnerabilities of SIDS”.

Action/2015 Awareness Campaign

The involvement of civil society and citizens in the debate is crucial, in formulating the priority goals and in implementing them. Young people are especially important in respect of their role in development now and in the future. Recognising the significance of the upcoming year, the RCS has joined Action/2015, a movement calling for concrete actions and ambitious agreements in 2015. It is made up of thousands of organisations, coalitions and partnerships globally that reflect the diversity of activists working on a range of issues, from gender equality to sustainable development, poverty reduction to climate change. We hope to encourage RCS branches, partners, schools and youth groups to engage in debate within their countries.

A Young Commonwealth – Getting Involved

The RCS hopes that under the banner of ‘A Young Commonwealth’ young people across the Commonwealth will be encouraged to engage in some critical thinking about their countries, development priorities and what progress could look like in 15 years. Through the Queen’s Commonwealth Essay Competition, thousands of school children will have the opportunity to address these issues with their creative ‘thinking hats’ on (see page 8). Through our partnership in the Queen’s Young Leaders Awards, we will encourage young people to lead the way in creating a better future (see page 6). Through high-profile events like the Commonwealth Day Observance we will aim to highlight the importance of 2015 in a global context; and through our support for Action/2015 we will work with the thousands of other organisations and young adults globally.

The Commonwealth Charter recognises the importance of young people. It also states that “the potential of and need for the Commonwealth – as a compelling force for good and as an effective network for co-operation and for promoting development – has never been greater.” 2015 will be a defining moment for our world. Making up a third of the global population and a quarter the UN General Assembly, the Commonwealth and its citizenry have a massive role to play in ensuring that we do not miss the chance for this once in a generation chance for transformational change, leading to a fairer, healthier and more sustainable planet.

MORE INFORMATION

COMMONWEALTH CONCERN

WHY LGBT RIGHTS ARE A COMMONWEALTH ISSUE

As Acting Executive Director of the Kaleidoscope Trust, Alistair Stewart has sought to promote diversity and equality across the world. Here he discusses the problems and successes of advocating for the rights of LGBT people in the Commonwealth.

In many parts of the world, the rights of Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) people have been advancing at a rapid rate. Many LGBT people now enjoy a level of freedom and equality that would have been unthinkable even a decade ago. However, the rights of LGBT citizens within the Commonwealth remain particularly vulnerable to abuse. Across the Commonwealth, the vast majority of LGBT people face persecution, discrimination and criminalisation. However, at the Kaleidoscope Trust, we believe that the very nature of the Commonwealth offers an opportunity to address the issue of LGBT rights in a way that is not possible in other international fora.

The figures alone are shocking – 42 of the 53 Commonwealth member countries criminalise same sex activities, more than half of all the countries in the world who do so. More than 90% of Commonwealth citizens live in a jurisdiction that criminalises same sex conduct. Many of the most concerning setbacks faced by LGBT people over the last year have occurred in Commonwealth countries. Legislation proposed and passed in Nigeria, Uganda and Brunei has acted to imperil the rights, freedoms and lives of LGBT people. A decision by the Indian Supreme Court last December re-criminalising homosexuality effectively made millions of people criminals.

Upholding the rights of LGBT people, however, is a Commonwealth issue. The Commonwealth Charter, which sets out the values and aspirations which unite the Commonwealth, affirms an implacable opposition to all forms of discrimination, whether rooted in gender, race, colour, creed, political belief or other grounds. Over the past 40 years the Commonwealth has repeatedly reiterated its opposition to discrimination and oppression. The continued criminalisation and persecution faced by LGBT people is counter to the values that sit at the heart of the Commonwealth.

The Commonwealth has a vital role to play in ensuring the equal treatment of all its citizens. Indeed the institutions of the Commonwealth are particularly well suited to advance ‘an equality for all’ agenda. The voluntary nature of the association and its sense of family can make it a forum where serious disagreement about values and outlook is debated. The Commonwealth provides a valuable forum where a variety of actors – states, civil society, diplomats, policy-makers – can come together to discuss the issue of LGBT rights. If conducted with respect for its members’ history and experience, a better understanding can be achieved, with the greater tolerance that should follow in its wake.

This is why we are delighted to be working with the Royal Commonwealth Society to find innovative ways to facilitate productive conversations between a range of Commonwealth actors, that allows them to discuss the issue of LGBT rights, and to work together to find ways to ensure that the dignity of all Commonwealth citizens is protected. Over the last year, we have drawn together participants from criminalising and non-criminalising countries, from governments and civil society – to hold a series of private discussions about how the discrimination faced by LGBT people can be
countered and how the Commonwealth can act as a forum for positive change.

While the Commonwealth provides an important forum to debate the rights of LGBT people, the still fraught nature of the issue requires these discussions to be carried out within a carefully thought out framework. It has been important for us to be able to guarantee the privacy of participants in these discussions. This has allowed participants with a variety of perspectives to talk openly about their concerns and the challenges they face politically, domestically and within the wider international context. It has allowed us to engage with a number of actors that are not natural allies or would find it difficult to engage on this issue in a public forum.

Providing a private forum has been vital in building trust, between the participants and in the discussions themselves.

Though the programme of discussions is ongoing, we can already point to some early success. The range and commitment of participants in this process has been inspiring – drawing passionate voices from all sides of the debate. It has allowed participants to really hear each other’s perspectives, sometimes for the first time, and has gone some way to counter the misperceptions held by all sides.

This process has been complemented by other developments. The emerging Commonwealth Equality Network also draws on the co-operative international relations and respectful dialogue which characterise the Commonwealth to build a network of Commonwealth activists and organisations striving to protect the human rights of LGBT citizens. Like our private programme of discussions, the good relations of the Commonwealth allow for actors to come together to share knowledge and work towards a common problem.

Providing a private forum has been vital in building trust, between the participants and in the discussions themselves.

We feel that processes such as these represent the Commonwealth at its best. An organisation as large and diverse as the Commonwealth will inevitably have disagreements. However it is how we resolve those disagreements – and uphold the values that are central to the Commonwealth – that show the important role that the Commonwealth has to play in protecting the rights of all its citizens.

MORE ABOUT THE TRUST
To learn more about the Kaleidoscope Trust, visit www.kaleidoscopetrust.com, or follow them on twitter @Kaleidoscope_T
INTRODUCING OUR REGIONAL CO-ORDINATORS

The 53 countries of The Commonwealth are divided into five regions. Early in 2014, the Society appointed volunteer Regional Co-ordinators to engage with its network of branches, Commonwealth organisations and individuals within civil society, government and commerce.

AMERICAS Ato Augustine
Based in Trinidad, Ato has served as the Executive Member of the Trinidad Youth Council and with other national, community and youth organisations. He has a good understanding of the Commonwealth, gained during his tenure as Commonwealth Youth Ambassador and member of the Pan-Commonwealth Youth Caucus (Commonwealth Youth Programme). He has also served on many international steering and planning groups, including the Commonwealth Youth Forum (Trinidad and Tobago, 2009 and Perth, Australia, 2011). He brings extensive networks and contacts within the Caribbean and Commonwealth-wide.

Ato was awarded two national youth awards, one in 2002 for his contribution to community development and the other in 2009 for youth in leadership.

AMERICAS (CANADA) Fawzi Ghosn
A Political Science and Human Rights graduate, Fawzi currently holds the position of Director with RCS National (Canada) and the RCS Ottawa branch. He is a former delegate turned Co-chair of the Canadian National Student Commonwealth Forum.

In 2012, Fawzi co-founded MYCommonwealth (MYC), a national youth run organization representing Canadians aged 15-29. Fawzi is an alumnus of the RCS Leadership Programme, NKABOM, which took place in Kigali, Rwanda in 2010. He has also represented Canada in 2011 at CYF8 in Perth, Western Australia, helping to craft a communiqué, circulated at that year’s Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM).

PACIFIC Darryl Stevens
Darryl Stevens is President and Hon. Administrator of the Royal Commonwealth Society – Commonwealth Trust in Wellington, in addition to being Director for Commonwealth Youth New Zealand, the administrative arm for the national Student CHOGMs. He has been a key player in the Society for more than 30 years, including representing New Zealand at international conferences in Britain, Malaysia and Australia.

From his initial association with the RCS, he has taken a leading role in devising and managing the National Student Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, an annual conference for secondary school students.

In the Queen’s Birthday Honours 2013, he was appointed a Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit for services to youth and the Commonwealth.
**ASIA Shivani Wazir Pasrich**

Shivani is an Economics Honours & Law graduate and Chairperson of the Commonwealth Society of India. She helped to launch the television channel Lok Sabha (Parliament of India) as well as producing and directing documentaries on the Girl Child, Education and Dance. Her production house SWP Productions, works to raise awareness on issues that plague society; their conservation project, ‘I am the Tiger’ uses performance, art and sport to raise awareness of environmental concerns.

Shivani was awarded ‘Pride of the Nation’ in 2009 and in 2013 she received the Universal Humanity Award. She was also the recipient of the India Foundation award for excellence in her field and the Women Achievers recognition from The Indus Entrepreneurs (TiE).

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**AFRICA John Apea**

John is a Ghanaian national and CEO of The Entertainment Warehouse, a leading Communications organisation in Ghana. He is also an award-winning filmmaker whose projects have premiered at prestigious film festivals such as Durban and Rotterdam and at art galleries such as Tate Britain and ZKM. A judge of both the Commonwealth Vision awards and the Essay Competition, John was also a Steering Committee member for the Jubilee Time Capsule in 2012. He is a proud alumnus of the Presbyterian Boys Secondary School in Ghana and the Universities of Oxford and York in the United Kingdom.

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**EUROPE Godfrey Hall MA. Dip.Ed. F.Coll.P.**

Godfrey has an extensive and distinguished career in education. His work has included youth and educational projects often linked with the Commonwealth. He has written over 140 children’s non-fiction books for major publishers in the UK, US, Singapore and Hong Kong. Godfrey has been involved in the Royal Commonwealth Society for over 35 years. During this time he has taken on several roles including 30 years as an examiner and group convenor for the Commonwealth Essay Competition. He is currently a serving member of the RCS Board and Chair of the Bath and District Branch of the RCS.

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**BRANCH FOCUS: SINGAPORE**

The Regional Co-ordinators are involved with the numerous RCS branches in each region, some of which have been in place for nearly a century; others are more recent or are being revived.

It is an integral part of the Society’s policy to grow the number of branches as a way of strengthening the reach and practical value of the Commonwealth family. We are actively involved in the formation of a number of new branches and are pleased to report on the recent opening of a revived branch in Singapore.

**Royal Commonwealth Society of Singapore**

With a particular focus on fostering innovation-focused Commonwealth scholarships to the UK for Singaporeans, the revived branch will support Singapore’s ties to the Commonwealth and other related opportunities, as they arise.

“We warmly welcome the initiative to establish a branch devoted to Commonwealth interests in Singapore. We are also particularly pleased that the new branch will be building on the Commonwealth’s strong track record in education.”

Michael Lake, RCS Director
Legacies provide a vital source of income, allowing us to plan and expand our work, as well as to fund longer-term projects. Remembering us in your will is a way of ensuring that we can further promote democracy and human rights within the Commonwealth through our youth and educational programmes, while we continue to highlight issues of gender equality, empowerment of women and girls, peace-making and sustainability through our advocacy.

**How do I leave a legacy?**

Including a legacy to The Royal Commonwealth Society in your will is straightforward. You can make a gift of a specific sum of money or a proportion of your residual estate; if you have already made a will you can add a codicil which we can supply, or see ‘Support the RCS’ at www.thercs.org. Leaving a legacy to a charity such as the RCS can also be an effective way to reduce inheritance tax.
The CNMF is a federation of national nursing and midwifery associations in Commonwealth countries.

The CNMF was established in 1973 and is a Commonwealth accredited civil society organisation. The purpose of the CNMF is to contribute to the improved health of citizens of the Commonwealth by fostering access to nursing education, influencing health policy, developing nursing networks and strengthening nursing leadership through in-country education and training; capacity building with standards and regulation; a bi-annual journal; a monthly e-News; a biennial conference; and representing nurses and midwives in Commonwealth forums.

Commonwealth Nurses and Midwives Federation
http://www.commonwealthnurses.org

SAVE THE DATE
3rd Commonwealth Nurses and Midwives Conference
12–13 March 2016
London UK
- Toward 2020: Celebrating nursing and midwifery leadership
- The bicentennial of the birth of Florence Nightingale – The WHO decade for a healthy world.
JULY 2014
33/Fifty Youth Leadership Programme
The Queen’s Baton Relay, with Common Purpose, culminated at the XX Commonwealth Games in Glasgow

JULY 2014
Queen’s Young Leaders Programme
Co-launched the Queen’s Young Leaders Award with the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee Trust and Comic Relief

MARCH 2014
An Observence for Commonwealth Day
Commonwealth Day Observance at Westminster Abbey; key speaker Malala Yousafzai

JUNE 2014
Ending Sexual Violence in Conflict
Global Summit
Exhibited at the Summit Fringe; published research piece: ‘Hidden Violence in the Commonwealth’

Request a print copy
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