

VOICES



COMMONWEALTH DAY: CELEBRATING CONNECTED COMMUNITIES

 **THE MALDIVES**
Rejoins the Commonwealth family

 **COVID-19**
Communities tackle the pandemic

 **ESSAY COMPETITION**
Letter from HRH The Duchess of Cornwall



103 million young people are illiterate worldwide with girls disproportionately affected.

(UNDP Human Development Report 2015).

Credit: Erica Szlosek, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Help us to achieve global literacy and Sustainable Development Goal 4: Quality Education.

In order to provide **meaningful and impactful education opportunities** for young people across the Commonwealth, the Society will deliver a new, innovative programme aiming to improve child literacy skills, particularly those from disadvantaged or marginalised groups. This programme will build on the success of The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition, which serves as an excellent vehicle for introducing young people to the idea of writing for fun, developing key literacy skills and working to increase academic attainment.



ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY

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WELCOME



As an Associate Fellow of the Royal Commonwealth Society, I believe that there is little we can do or achieve on our own. As the world contends with the first modern pandemic, it is evident – perhaps now more than ever – that we need one another.

In 2014, Sierra Leone was almost brought to a standstill by the Ebola outbreak. At Lifeline Nehemiah Projects, my charity, our response was defined by community. Through working with existing structures like councillors, village chiefs, religious leaders and other charities, we delivered a response that not only served our community, but was also led by them.

Today, amidst a global crisis threatening the future of so many, I believe we must maintain emphasis on the importance of community. The cure for COVID-19 may be found in a laboratory, but solutions to this crisis will come from our communities (pp. 20-22). Through helping others we often tend to end up helping ourselves too.

The Commonwealth is a community like no other on earth, with each member having resources and expertise that can benefit another. There is so much we can offer to one another from within our communities, from local to global. The rich diversity of our global community will help us to overcome challenges and build a future for all.

As my friend from Trinidad and Tobago always tells me, “together we aspire, together we achieve”; this too shall pass.

PJ Cole

Associate Fellow and
Queen's Young Leader (2015)



ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY

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- [@RoyalCommonwealthSociety](https://www.instagram.com/RoyalCommonwealthSociety)



REUNITED WITH FAMILY: THE MALDIVES AND THE COMMONWEALTH

The Maldives' journey back into the Commonwealth was one of determination and perseverance to overcome any obstacle, break free from the shackles of authoritarianism, and to take our place as a responsible member of the international community.

President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih took the oath of office with a vow to strengthen our democratic system, foster a culture of respect for human rights and combat the adverse effects of climate change. These are areas that the Commonwealth and the Maldives has worked on closely together in the past, and undoubtedly will continue to do so in the future. This government assumed the responsibility of guiding the Maldivian people back into the Commonwealth, and with tremendous work from both sides, I am proud that we have fulfilled our pledge to the Maldivian people of re-joining the Commonwealth family.

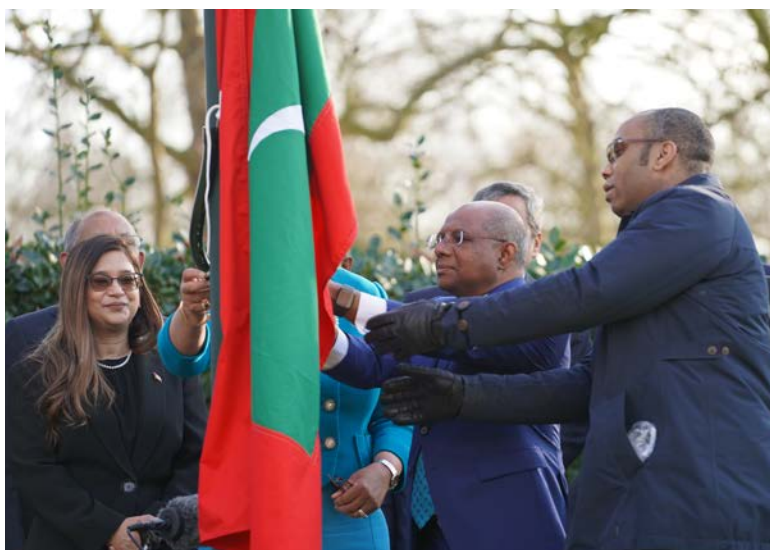
We could not have achieved this without the assistance from Commonwealth Member States, who remain amongst our most reliable international partners. Their support ensured that we remained true to the values and principles espoused in the Commonwealth Charter. When we abruptly left in 2016, the Secretary-General said she hoped that "this will be a temporary separation and that the Maldives will feel able to return to the Commonwealth family in due course". The people of Maldives never truly left the Commonwealth and most of us would still refer to ourselves as Commonwealth citizens. Since officially re-joining the Commonwealth on 1 February 2020, every Maldivian citizen felt a sense of belonging. The week following our re-accession, schools around the Maldives held special sessions on the Commonwealth, educating the next generation on what it means to be Commonwealth citizens and the fundamental values of the organisation.

↑ High Commissioners and Commonwealth officials pose alongside the Maldivian delegation to mark the return of the Maldives to the Commonwealth

The Commonwealth has played a major role in our development story. Many Maldivians have benefited from the Commonwealth scholarships and the Commonwealth Youth Programme. Following the 2004 tsunami, Commonwealth support ensured that our health system was better prepared for the post-tsunami recovery period. The Commonwealth also provided assistance to strengthen the Maldives electoral system ahead of the country's first democratic elections in 2008. In 1992, the Commonwealth Youth Ministers convened in Maldives for its inaugural meeting. On Climate Change, the Commonwealth funded the Small States Conference on Sea Level Rise, hosted in the Maldives in 1989. The outcome document of the Conference, the "Malé Declaration on Global Warming and Sea Level Rise", led to the formation of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), which is the foremost negotiating bloc for Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in multilateral fora. These are but a few examples of our shared history.

The four years that the Maldives was not a member of the Commonwealth were four years in which it was not a part of an organisation that had done so much, not only for our country, but for SIDS around the world. A large portion of the Commonwealth membership are SIDS, and it is one of the few international organisations that gives SIDS a voice on the same footing as our much bigger partners. Our former Minister of Foreign Affairs, the late H.E. Mr. Fathulla Jameel, contributed as one of the special panel experts set by the Commonwealth to conduct a study on small state security at the 1983 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Delhi. This eventually led to the adoption of the United Nations General Assembly Resolution entitled "Protection and Security of Small States" in 1989, a crucial step in the protection of SIDS from internal and external threats.

Now, more than ever, we need the Commonwealth to proactively advocate on behalf of SIDS. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought the vulnerabilities of SIDS to the forefront, threatening our economic security, human security and severely hindering our efforts to provide food, basic sustenance and necessities for our people.



↑ Minister Shahid hoisting the Maldivian flag at Marlborough House during a ceremony held to commemorate Maldives re-joining the Commonwealth

The global shutdown of tourism, the lifeline of our economy, has meant that our status as a Middle-Income Country threatens to change into "no-income country" status. The looming threats of climate change and natural disasters mean that SIDS like the Maldives are especially vulnerable, while we divert our resources to our health sector. I have no doubt that the efforts of the Secretary-General will help galvanise much-needed international support for us during these troubling times.

During times of crises, the Commonwealth and its Member States have always supported one another. The Maldives feels privileged to be part of such a family during a global crisis. We stand ready to work within the Commonwealth for the betterment of all Commonwealth citizens.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Honourable Abdulla Shahid started his career in 1983 as a Foreign Service Officer and rose through the ranks of the Executive. He held the post of Executive Secretary to the President since 1995, for over ten years. In 2005, he was appointed as the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, and two years later, the Minister of Foreign Affairs. He concurrently served as a Member of the Constitutional Assembly in 1994 and from the following year, as a Member of Parliament. In 2009, Hon. Shahid historically became the first elected Speaker of the People's Majlis. He served as a Member of Parliament for five terms and in 2018, was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs for a second time, under the new democratically elected government of President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih.

COMMONWEALTH TRACKER TO HELP COUNTRIES MONITOR CORONAVIRUS

The Commonwealth Secretariat has launched a tracker to help member countries respond to the coronavirus pandemic. **Abhik Sen**, Head of Innovation and Partnerships, describes how the tracker is designed to provide data-driven insights to help policymakers and key decision-makers in Commonwealth countries plan and respond to the pandemic.



The tracker collates, analyses and visualises data from the World Health Organisation (WHO) and other credible data sources to monitor the number of confirmed cases, fatalities and likely trajectory of COVID-19 by country and region on a daily basis. It also displays data and analysis on related socio-economic indicators that provide an insight into a country's capacity to cope with the crisis.

By mid-April, the Commonwealth fatality rate, i.e. number of deaths as a percentage of the total number of reported cases in all 54 Commonwealth countries, was nearly 9 percent. Europe was the worst affected region with a 13 percent fatality rate, whereas the Pacific region had a 0.9 percent fatality rate, the lowest among all regions.

A recent study by WHO shows only eight Commonwealth countries have self-assessed that they have sufficient capacity to deal with public health emergencies like COVID-19. Commonwealth analysis suggests access to hospital beds and ventilators is limited in many countries and could present a major challenge if coronavirus is not sufficiently contained. The Commonwealth Nurses and Midwives Federation have also reported inadequate access to personal protective equipment and a lack of access to testing for healthcare workers.

The Secretariat is disseminating the tracker's insights to all key stakeholders. The tracker is part of the Commonwealth Coronavirus Response Centre, a digital directory featuring useful information, advice and resources from the Commonwealth Secretariat and its family of 85 Commonwealth Accredited Organisations. The centre also features information from partner institutions such as the United Nations, made available for the benefit of governments and all those on the frontline who need guidance or assistance.

For example, contact details of the Royal Life Saving Society's volunteer networks across the Commonwealth can be found, as well as a wealth of online education tools and courses from the Commonwealth of Learning. Similarly, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association has shared a toolkit that can be adopted by parliaments in Commonwealth countries to ensure they continue functioning effectively during this challenging period.

The Coronavirus Response Centre is an innovation that was incubated in the Commonwealth Innovation Hub, which Secretary-General Patricia Scotland established in 2018. The Hub promotes cutting-edge ideas and innovations of the Commonwealth's 2.4 billion people in 54 member countries and 85 accredited organisations.

All Commonwealth organisations and networks are encouraged to share any helpful information or resources they have through the **Commonwealth Coronavirus Response Centre**.

MORE INFORMATION
partnerships@commonwealth.int
www.thecommonwealth.io/coronavirus-response-centre/

HYGIENE: THE FIRST LINE OF DEFENCE AGAINST COVID-19 IN THE COMMONWEALTH

WaterAid has been working with Commonwealth countries and institutions over the past months to build momentum towards CHOGM 2020. Now, of course, the world looks very different. But never have our collective efforts to expand hygiene services to the most vulnerable across the Commonwealth been more relevant or urgent.



COVID-19 and hygiene, water and sanitation

COVID-19 is a global health emergency demanding an urgent global response. This is about all of us, rich countries and poor, women and men, and our individual and collective ability to withstand a crisis and build back stronger and more resilient.

Good hygiene is the first line of defence against COVID-19 and essential to a resilient health system. Public health is impossible without clean water and soap, and an understanding of the importance of good hygiene.

Yet billions of people worldwide, and millions of health workers, lack the water and sanitation services they need to practice good hygiene. Across the Commonwealth, 236 million people do not have access to a basic water service, and 185 million have access to only unimproved sanitation. Globally, 40% of households don't have handwashing facilities with soap and water. Two in five health care facilities lack hand hygiene at the point of care where doctors, nurses and midwives are treating patients. These communities will be the worst affected by this pandemic, and are already struggling to endure the additional impact of climate change (worsening floods, droughts and damage to infrastructure). We urge the Commonwealth to take the lead in mobilizing a public health and hygiene revolution to address this.

→ Ludia Chilembwe, 29, a nurse midwife, washing hands before treating a patient, Chamwabvi Health Centre, Kasungu, Malawi, November 2017. ©WaterAid/Dennis Lupenga

WaterAid's response to COVID-19 and support to Commonwealth countries

WaterAid has been working with communities and governments for decades on hygiene promotion, and we are leveraging this expertise to provide urgent support to vulnerable countries. We are rapidly scaling up our support delivering nationwide hygiene campaigns and amplifying hygiene messages. In countries such as Bangladesh, Malawi, Pakistan and Rwanda, we are working to control and prevent the spread of COVID-19: from awareness through local TV, radio, posters and social media to installing handwashing devices in public toilets and at health care facilities. We are working as part of government-led COVID-19 Task Forces, and partnering with health ministries, multilateral organisations, researchers and supporting governments to ensure minimum standards of hygiene in COVID-19 quarantine and treatment centres.

WaterAid will continue to support Commonwealth countries, and we urge you all to invest now and for the future in sustainable and resilient water, sanitation and hygiene systems that prioritize the needs of the most vulnerable.

MORE INFORMATION
<https://washmatters.wateraid.org/handwashing-to-fight-coronavirus>

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE



Dr Linda Yueh, Chair of the Royal Commonwealth Society, provides an update on the Society's new five-year Strategic Plan (2020-2025) and outlines how our plan focuses on four areas of work that will best contribute to our vision: to improve the lives and prospects of all Commonwealth citizens.

↑ Flag bearers outside Westminster Abbey at the annual Commonwealth Service

Picture Partnership/ Westminster Abbey

Literacy

Since 1883, the Society has organised The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition, the world's oldest international schools' writing competition. This highly regarded programme has inspired hundreds of thousands of children across the Commonwealth to share their individual stories and analyse important global issues, whilst having their hard work celebrated and achievement recognised, most recently at an Awards Ceremony held at Buckingham Palace in the presence of our Vice-Patron HRH The Duchess of

Cornwall. With The Duchess's support, this competition has seen a significant increase in entries from across the Commonwealth.

In order to provide meaningful and impactful education opportunities for young people across the Commonwealth, the Society will deliver a new, innovative programme aiming to improve child literacy skills, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds or marginalised groups.

A more equal, more inclusive Commonwealth

Over the last ten years, we have built a reputation for our unique method and long-term commitment to advancing a Commonwealth approach to reforming discriminatory laws. For the past two years, we have been working as a member of the Equality & Justice Alliance, supporting Commonwealth governments and civil society organisations to reform laws that discriminate against women and girls, and those of diverse sexual orientations.

Our goal is a Commonwealth where all people are treated equally within their communities and before the law. To this aim, we act to empower youth leaders, through our role as the Secretariat for the Commonwealth Youth Gender & Equality Network (CYGEN), which is recognised by the UN as a leading voice for youth leadership in the area of gender equality.

We will continue to act as a trusted convener to build upon these successes, to train young leaders and build momentum to effectuate change at the community-level.

Conserving the environment

The Queen's Commonwealth Canopy (QCC) is a visionary project managed by the Society, with partners, and the first environmental initiative in Her Majesty The Queen's name. Already conserving over nine million hectares of indigenous forests, the QCC presents a unique opportunity to unite the Commonwealth family in marking The Queen's lifetime of service to the Commonwealth and conserve one of the world's most important natural habitats – forests.

The next phase of the QCC will be to engage communities across the Commonwealth to celebrate and conserve these precious environments at the local level.

Connected Communities

Throughout all of our work, we champion the power of Commonwealth connections to build a better world. In this uncertain and divided world, there has never been a greater need to promote shared values, such as democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

Across our global network of 60+ affiliated branches and Associate Fellows, we support the power of volunteerism, international cooperation and civic action to advance the values of the Commonwealth.

As a trusted convener we organize high-profile occasions that promote and celebrate the Commonwealth and its values, including the annual Commonwealth Service at Westminster Abbey, which is attended by The Queen and Members of The Royal Family, UK and Commonwealth political leaders and dignitaries and over 800 young people from across the UK. The Society also organises the annual High Commissioners' Banquet, recently in partnership with the City of London, which is a highlight of the Commonwealth diplomatic calendar. Finally, we serve as the Secretariat for the Council of Commonwealth Societies and the All Party Parliamentary Group on the Commonwealth, which allows us to bring together parliamentarians, civil society, and other stakeholders on important issues.

Our aim is to create strong and connected communities across the UK and the Commonwealth. Using our unparalleled network, we will convene more regional and youth events from dialogues to youth-led Model CHOGMs (Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting).

The next five years

We have an ambitious and concrete Strategic Plan to deliver for the people of the Commonwealth. To best achieve our aims, we will draw on our extensive branch and Associate Fellow networks, as well as continue to work with external partners.

It is through partnership that we will succeed – and make our society and the world a better place.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Dr Linda Yueh is Chair of the Royal Commonwealth Society.

Dr Yueh is an economist at Oxford University, London Business School and LSE IDEAS.

She is also a widely published author.

 **MORE INFORMATION**
www.thercs.org



HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN ATTENDS A SERVICE OF CELEBRATION

Her Majesty The Queen, Head of the Commonwealth, led the gathered guests at the annual Commonwealth Service at Westminster Abbey in London on Monday, 9 March 2020.

Her Majesty was joined by The Prince of Wales and The Duchess of Cornwall, The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, The Duke and Duchess of Sussex, and the Earl and Countess of Wessex.

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 54 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, 'Delivering a Common Future: Connecting, Innovating,

Transforming', sought to highlight the many ways in which the 54 diverse countries of the Commonwealth connect.

The 2,000 strong congregation included the British Prime Minister, Boris Johnson; the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Baroness Scotland; High Commissioners and Ambassadors; senior politicians from across the UK and the Commonwealth; faith leaders; and more than 700 schoolchildren and young people from across all four corners of the UK.

With the UK as Chair-in-Office of the Commonwealth, guests were welcomed to Westminster Abbey by the Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo, the renowned Scottish military and cultural act who are committed to celebrating and promoting Scottish art forms, such as piping and drumming, fiddle playing, and highland dance. On this occasion, they were represented by performers from Pipers Trail, Hjaltibonhoga, and Tattoo Dance Company.

↑ One-Drum perform 'Intore'

Once inside, schoolchildren within the Nave were entertained by Commonwealth Games Medallists, the Griffin Schools Commonwealth Choir, and the Purcell School's Brass Quintet who also played The Commonwealth Chorale to the Procession of the Flags. Each of the 54 Commonwealth member nations was represented by a young person nominated by either their High Commission, the Association of Commonwealth Universities, or the Pacific Islands Society of the UK and Ireland for contributions to their local communities.

Following the bidding by the Dean of Westminster, The Very Reverend Dr David Hoyle, One-Drum, a collective of London-based African master drummers, dancers, musicians and performers opened the Service with 'Intore' – a combination of Rwandan and African drumming as a nod to Rwanda's incoming period as Chair-in-Office of the Commonwealth.

Anthony Joshua OBE, British world heavyweight boxing champion and Olympic gold medallist, read a reflection in which he spoke of his Commonwealth heritage. Suli Breaks, spoken word poet, also delivered a reflection titled, '**All It Takes Is One Idea**', in which he sought to inspire achievement amongst the gathered youth, no matter their personal circumstance.

Attendees also experienced performances from Alexandra Burke, who sang 'Ain't No Mountain', from three-time Ivor Novello winner Craig David, who sang his song, 'Unbelievable', as well as the Melodians Steel Orchestra who played 'Commonwealth Melody'. In their 33-year history, the Melodians have performed in as many countries and have focused on providing opportunities for young people from diverse social and racial backgrounds to develop musical skills.

Faith leaders representing the Greek Orthodox Church, the Muslim Community, the Buddhist Community and Liberal Judaism, led the prayers during the Service. The Rt Hon. Boris Johnson MP, UK Prime Minister, gave the Bible Reading from Luke 10: 29-37, and Commonwealth Secretary-General, The Rt. Hon. Patricia Scotland QC, led the Commonwealth community in the Act of Affirmation to the Commonwealth.



"This year's service really connected with the children, I think having young figures... really helped this. Anthony being a successful sports personality and Suli, a poet from North London, where we are based, had an huge impact on them, supporting them in believing that they can achieve."

St Edmunds School

Commenting on the service, Chair of the Royal Commonwealth Society, Dr Linda Yueh, and President of the Society, The Right Honourable the Lord Howell of Guildford PC said in a joint welcome message:

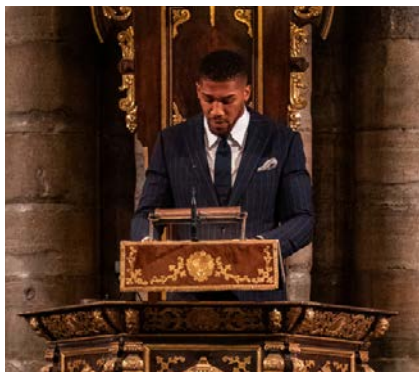
'The Royal Commonwealth Society is honoured to organise this great occasion in the Commonwealth calendar each year and is deeply grateful that, once again, the most dedicated and constant champion of the Commonwealth, Her Majesty The Queen, our Patron, is with us for today's service. By her presence, with many of her family, The Queen reminds us all of the unending readiness and dedication required to serve great causes, and the Commonwealth of peoples and nations in particular.'

The Service was broadcast live on BBC One and the BBC World Service, and is available to watch on the **BBC iPlayer** in the UK for one year and on the **BBC YouTube** channel in perpetuity.

↑ Suli Breaks reads 'All It Takes Is One Idea'

All photos: Picture Partnership/ Westminster Abbey

A REFLECTION BY ANTHONY JOSHUA OBE



“My name is Anthony Oluwafemi Olaseni Joshua and, like many of you here, I am a child of the Commonwealth. I was born in Watford and my heritage is Nigerian. I come from the Yoruba people who are the largest – and some might say the loudest ethnic group in the whole of Africa!

I am proudly British and Nigerian and I join a long line – perhaps too long to count – of UK citizens of Commonwealth origin who’ve made enormous contributions to this great, multi-cultural society of ours. In my world, that would include names such as Linford Christie, Raheem Sterling and Chris Eubank, but there are so many more great members of this Commonwealths family of ours; Including... David Adjaye, one of the UK’s greatest architects, the Imafidons – arguably our brainiest family – not to mention the countless nurses, teachers and doctors that have made the UK their home, strengthening the very fabric of our society.

All of these people, hailing from the farthest reaches of the globe, have had an amazing impact on our culture and sense of national identity, for which we should be thankful.

My own eyes were opened to this amazing ‘family’ for the first time when I travelled to Nigeria as a young child. Whilst I saw some

similarities between our two countries given our shared heritage as nations, there was a wealth of difference and a world of exciting possibilities. That realisation has stayed with me all my life. Like me, so many children of the Commonwealth have two homes and two identities, two cultures and two ways of viewing the world. Some have even more than two!

These days we hear so much about division and difference that some might be tempted to see that as a bad thing. But on the contrary, difference is a beautiful thing, a thing to be celebrated and cherished, and a great source of peace and stability. It is hard to lift one’s hands in anger against a friend.

In this world of extreme connectivity, who better to connect us and shape a common future than the children of the Commonwealth, who have feet in two camps and desperately want to see both sides succeed?

There are times when it is more important than ever to talk about values – our personal values and those that bind us together as a society – and this is one of those times. Fairness, determination, tolerance, respect, understanding; I learnt many of these values in the ring but they apply to everyday life. Our values define us and how we conduct ourselves. They are what we put out into the universe, and what we will receive in return.

Respect for the dignity of our Commonwealth cousins, indeed for all human beings, is critical to bringing our society and communities together and making them prosperous. Opportunity should be there for the taking with hard work, dedication and perseverance. It shouldn’t be unavailable because of where you were born, your race, gender, or

religious beliefs. We need to strive harder collectively to create unity. It takes a family to raise a child, and in the same vein it takes a whole community to act and stand together to tackle some of challenges we are confronted with today.

This unity, with its shared vision and common cause, will help improve the lives and prospects of our Commonwealth family. It will enable the untapped and enormous potential of the Commonwealth’s 1.4 billion young people to transform our world for the better.

In the same way boxing gave me the opportunity to become Olympic champion, then a Commonwealth Champion and now the heavyweight champion of the world.

But what does Commonwealth mean? The second part of that word is key for me. Our common wealth is our shared values and our amazing and diverse cultures. People like me – have to be a force for positive transformation, to forge connectivity, to create unity. I believe it is important to lead by example, so the future generations have positive footsteps to follow.

A united and common future will create opportunities for our Commonwealth cousins, whether they are growing up in Nigeria, Australia, Bangladesh or Jamaica, to enjoy the things that I took for granted growing up and helped me become the man I am today.

So... here’s to fish and chips and to Egusi soup, to the UK and Nigeria and to the children of the Commonwealth.

Thank you.”

 **MORE INFORMATION**
www.thercs.org/blog/
commonwealthservice2020



DELIVERING A COMMON FUTURE

Commonwealth Day Message from Her Majesty
The Queen, Head of the Commonwealth.

On Commonwealth occasions, it is always inspiring to be reminded of the diversity of the people and countries that make up our worldwide family. We are made aware of the many associations and influences that combine through Commonwealth connection, helping us to imagine and deliver a common future.

This is particularly striking when we see people from nations, large and small, gathering for the Commonwealth Games, for meetings of Commonwealth governments, and on Commonwealth Day. Such a blend of traditions serves to make us stronger, individually and collectively, by providing the ingredients needed for social, political and economic resilience.

Throughout my life, I have had the opportunity to see and hear how membership of the Commonwealth family means so much to those living in all parts

of the world, often in places that are quite remote. Advances in technology and modern media have now enabled many more people to witness and enjoy – with remarkable immediacy – this experience of Commonwealth connection, in areas such as education, medicine and conservation.

Looking to the future, this connectivity means we are also aware, perhaps as never before, that wherever we live, our choices and actions affect the well-being of people and communities living far away, and in very different circumstances. For many, this awareness awakens a desire to employ our planet's natural resources with greater care, and it is encouraging to see how the countries of the Commonwealth continue to devise new ways of working together to achieve prosperity, whilst protecting our planet.

As members of this very special community, on this Commonwealth Day, I hope that the people and countries of the Commonwealth will be inspired by all that we share, and move forward with fresh resolve to enhance the Commonwealth's influence for good in our world.

↑ Her Majesty The Queen departs the Commonwealth Service

Photo: Picture Partnership/
Westminster Abbey

 **MORE INFORMATION**
www.thercs.org/the-queens-commonwealth-day-message



THE CARIBBEAN IN THE TIME OF CORONA

Caribbean countries are amongst the most vulnerable on the planet, being particularly susceptible to shocks, including economic and those associated with natural hazards. Traditionally, the vulnerability of our Region has been seen through the lens of natural disasters.

Indeed, this has come to the forefront given their increasing intensity and frequency in recent years with the rapid onset of climate change. There are many examples including the unprecedented destruction caused by Hurricanes Maria and Irma in 2017. The former was responsible for Dominica losing 226% of GDP in a matter of hours. COVID-19, once more lays bare the vulnerability of the Caribbean.

The Caribbean, arguably the most tourism-dependent in the globe will see massive losses in this sector affecting millions of lives and livelihoods. This comes after a stellar performance last year when we had 31.5 million stay-over arrivals. The best performing market was the United States where 15.5 million visitors came from. The numbers are sure to decline the rest of the year because economies are closed and the countries from where our tourists come are seeing their economies battered.

The drastic reduction in tourism will have a major adverse impact. It not just about big business but the taxi drivers, small shop owners, artistes and the hundreds of thousands who work in hotels across the Caribbean who will be affected. There is a risk of a greater number of Caribbean people falling into poverty.

Given the scope and scale of the economic shock where entire countries in the Region are in some form of total shutdown, the road to recovery will be long and hard. For Caribbean countries with limited fiscal space, the challenge will be heightened since government revenues associated with the tourist sector will take a big hit. The current crisis is not only about the tourist dollar but other sectors such as oil where new producers such as Guyana have entered the market at a time of an almost complete collapse in oil prices.

Except for Haiti, Caribbean countries are largely ineligible for Overseas Development Assistance. Given our country classification where Caribbean states tend to be either mid or high-income countries, we are also ineligible for concessional financing from the international financial institutions. Our Region in addition to being one of the most vulnerable on the planet, is also one of the most indebted. The average debt-to-GDP ratio exceeds the international benchmark of 60% in 11 countries according to the Caribbean Development Bank.

A silver lining for us has been the flow of remittances from abroad. According to the World Bank, last year, Haiti received close to US\$3.2 billion; Jamaica, an estimated US\$2.3 billion; and Guyana approximately US\$300 million. However, given massive layoffs already taking place in key remittance countries, this steady stream of resources is no longer automatic. A sustained contraction in these economies could have a major impact on the flow of precious remittances for Caribbean families which would mean more families entering into poverty.

Notwithstanding the challenges, Governments in the Region have made efforts to address the ongoing threat posed by the coronavirus. Several countries have introduced some form of support to their economies and for their most vulnerable citizens. These include The Bahamas, Belize and Trinidad and Tobago. Based on a preliminary assessment done by the Overseas Development Institute, the average stimulus package for small countries like those in the Caribbean averaged 0.8% of GDP. The support packages for G20 countries or the world's wealthiest economies average around 8.1% of GDP.

“Notwithstanding the challenges, Governments in the Region have made efforts to address the ongoing threat posed by the coronavirus. Several countries have introduced some form of support to their economies and for their most vulnerable citizens.”

Going forward, accessing finance on affordable terms is critical for the Caribbean. To achieve this, the Region needs a country classification system where vulnerability is also a criterion on how countries are classified. This will enable the regions like the Caribbean to access financing on terms which reflect their reality. The Caribbean also needs to galvanize action on the issue of debt and propose a debt for resilience swap. The Commonwealth and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean have proposed variants of such an initiative. The high cost of remittances reduces the amount of finance that families get from their loved ones overseas. A 50% reduction in the cost of remittances will provide a major boost in financing for the Region. These are critical areas that must be addressed to help the Region recover from this pandemic and build resilience. The time to talk is over. The time to act is now.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Deodat Maharaj, a national of Trinidad and Tobago, is a Senior International Development Consultant. He is a former Deputy Secretary-General of the Commonwealth and staff member of the United Nations. He has also worked with business and at the Caribbean Development Bank. He has extensive experience in financing for development and provided leadership for efforts to mobilize resources in the Caribbean following Hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017 which resulted in \$3.2 billion in pledges and for Mozambique in 2019 where pledges amounted to \$1.3 billion.

He can be reached at: deodatmaharaj@gmail.com



CYGEN LAUNCH

#REFORM53 CAMPAIGN

“We are the leaders of today, the movement for change, the creators and authors of tomorrow.” Our voices resonated through the packed penthouse of the High Commission for New Zealand in London. The sounds of our campaign video filled the room and everyone was listening intently, focused on the projection screen. Our call to action for an equal Commonwealth for all reverberated off the walls. As the lights came back up, I felt myself well up. My colleagues – youth leaders from across the Commonwealth – moved in for a group hug, their faces beaming with pride. Our campaign had finally come to life.

Two months before the campaign launch event in January, twelve young activists from every region of the Commonwealth were brought together in Seychelles by the **Commonwealth Youth Gender and Equality Network (CYGEN)** to discuss how we could take our calls for legal reform to the leaders of the Commonwealth. The aim was to compel our leaders to commit to reforming laws that discriminate against women and girls and LGBT+ people.

Together, over the course of our week in Seychelles, we shaped an advocacy movement, which we named #Reform53 – Together for Legal Equality, as a tribute to the 53 countries forming the Commonwealth at the time. We shot six short films to underline the need for legal reform and designed our strategies for getting our message to high-profile individuals, and across traditional and social media.

In the lead up to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Rwanda, #Reform53 aims to spark conversations, commitments and actions towards our five key aims:

- 1. Decriminalising consensual same-sex relationships.**
- 2. Reforming consent laws on forced marriage and removing clauses that defer to customary laws.**
- 3. Ensuring provisions in law for abortion so that children are born by choice, not by chance.**
- 4. Ending workplace discrimination for women, girls and LGBT+ people.**
- 5. Increased political participation for women and LGBT+ people.**

The five days following our campaign launch were filled with a whirlwind of high-profile meetings. We collaborated with The Commonwealth Equality Network (TCEN) to present a unified voice and boost our chances of success. Working together, we then met several Commonwealth High Commissioners and the Youth, Rule of Law, and Human Rights divisions of the Commonwealth Secretariat to gain their support for our priority legal reforms at the upcoming CHOGM. We also hosted a roundtable consultation with representatives of likeminded NGOs and civil society organisations engaged in causes similar to ours. By identifying ways in which our partnerships could be mutually beneficial, we were able to refine our campaign strategies and the messages we wanted to use to influence the policymaking processes.



→ CYGEN meet with High Commissioners' in London during a week of advocacy

Upon our return to our respective countries, we kick-started our activities with a bang. From screening our campaign videos to distributing postcards with infographics, we left no stone unturned to encourage young people and civil society members to join our campaign. Since the campaign launched, promotional events and activities have been held in Bangladesh, Barbados, Mauritius, Papua New Guinea, Cameroon, Uganda, Kenya, and Botswana. The campaign has even been presented directly to the Heads of Government of Papua New Guinea and Seychelles. We requested supporters to paint their palms with the logo of our campaign, take pictures and share them with us on social media using our campaign hashtag. We reached out to journalists and garnered significant media coverage. Our highlight remains the **BBC One interview of Nafesha Richardson**, campaign lead for the Caribbean region, at the Commonwealth Service in March, which has been seen by more than 1.7 million people. Our promotional social media videos have now been seen by half a million people and counting.

Unfortunately, in April, our work came to an abrupt halt due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Our spirits were further dampened when travel restrictions prevented our delegate from attending the 64th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women. The postponement of CHOGM 2020 left us all a little disheartened. Nonetheless, we have continued to devise innovative methods to keep the campaign alive online and continue to reach more people across the Commonwealth. Undeterred, we are now concentrating on standing in solidarity with the minority groups we advocate for through the CYGEN accounts on **Facebook, Twitter** and **Instagram** – groups who we know will be disproportionately affected by the pandemic. While we acknowledge that legal equality will not be achieved overnight, we remain confident that our little strokes will ultimately fell the great oaks that discriminatory laws represent for us.

CYGEN's #Reform53 campaign is supported by the Royal Commonwealth Society, as part of the Equality & Justice Alliance programme. The Equality & Justice Alliance was generously funded by the UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office, in support of the commitments made at CHOGM 2018.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Based in Mauritius, **Nandini Tanya Lallmon** is the legal lead of the #Reform53 campaign of CYGEN. As a lawyer by profession and social activist by passion, she is an advisor to the Steering for Greatness Foundation, Global Peace Chain, International Human Rights Advisory Council, Agents of Peace Kenya and CIVICUS. She has won multiple awards for her humanitarian projects at local, regional and international level.

MORE INFORMATION
Campaign resources including videos, postcards and infographics.
www.thercs.org/reform53-resources



THE QUEEN'S
COMMONWEALTH ESSAY COMPETITION 2020

YOUNG COMMONWEALTH VOICES: LET'S HEAR THEM!

Gyles Brandreth, writer, broadcaster, former MP, is an enthusiastic supporter of The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition. Here he explains why.



As I write, across the Commonwealth, children are out of school and remote learning at home. Away from their friends and teachers, and with the stress and uncertainty of the current Covid-19 crisis, it can be easy for aspiring young writers to become demotivated and downhearted. However, taking time to write creatively can have a hugely positive impact on a young person. As well as helping to improve reading skills, creative writing can be a useful vehicle for processing difficult and stressful experiences, allowing children to quickly deal with their situation. I know all this because I have been a writer myself for fifty years, and two of my children are published authors, and all seven of my grandchildren would like to be.

During these times of social distancing and necessary restrictions on movement, we can ensure that children and young people do not miss out this important aspect of their education by offering a unique opportunity to inspire imagination, encourage creativity and ensure they continue to learn new skills, **The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition**.

I know about the Competition because for the last few years I have had the honour of acting as master of ceremonies at the special ceremony at Buckingham Palace where the international winners collect their certificates.

The Competition is a fun and engaging way to achieve so many benefits, with the added bonus of the opportunity to win a fully funded week of once-in-a-lifetime activities in London! Entries are accepted in any form of creative writing; from poems and plays to stories and speeches, and rewards originality and creativity in submissions.

Now, I believe, more than ever, we should be highlighting the importance of Commonwealth values, such as tolerance, respect and understanding and human rights. Through this competition, entrants are able to consider these important concepts in relation to their own lives, but also to the lives of people all across the 54 countries of the Commonwealth. By participating in the Competition, children are asked to explore these ideas and develop a wider, more empathetic world view – an important attribute in fostering positive change in our communities.

Recent years have seen a dramatic increase in young people engaging with current affairs, in particular with climate issues. The passion and urgency with which young people are calling for change is extraordinary, and the theme of this year's Competition, *Climate Action and the Commonwealth*, presents a unique opportunity for young people to share their thoughts, ideas and opinions on this topic with a global audience.

The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition is something very special and very exciting. I have met many of the past winners and been hugely impressed. They're the best. I am looking forward to discovering who this year's winner are going to be – and what they have got to say.

I am delighted to be adding my voice to that of HRH The Duchess of Cornwall, the Royal Commonwealth Society's Vice-Patron, calling upon young people across the Commonwealth to enter this wonderful Competition. As we all spend more time at

home, The Duchess of Cornwall has penned an encouraging message to young people taking part in The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition 2020, expressing how she looks forward to seeing some entrants at the Awards Ceremony later in the year.



BIRKHALL

7th April, 2020

As Vice-Patron of the Royal Commonwealth Society, I would like to encourage all aspiring young writers who may be stuck at home during this difficult and challenging time, to put on your thinking caps, put pen to paper and enter The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition 2020. Creative writing is a wonderful way to express your thoughts, ideas and opinions – and this competition can elevate those to a global platform. The theme for this year is 'Climate Action and the Commonwealth' – exploring the power of young people in calling for change and celebrating the environment around them.

Entries will be accepted online until 30th June and I look forward to seeing some of you at the Buckingham Palace Awards Ceremony later in the year

MORE INFORMATION

- The Royal Commonwealth Society has created **supporting materials** to assist children in writing their piece, and full details can be found on the Society's **website**.
- Entries will be accepted via the **online platform** until Tuesday, 30 June 2020.

STRIDES TOWARDS SECURING EQUALITY FOR ALL

In recent years, the Commonwealth has made amazing strides to secure equality. Thanks to the work of our connected community of leaders and activists, we have seen countries like Seychelles and Botswana reform outdated colonial laws, Barbados elect its first ever female Prime Minister, and a large increase in the number of female parliamentarians elected to national parliaments.

Two years ago, at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) 2018, UK Prime Minister Theresa May made an expression of 'deep regret' for colonial laws instituted by the British Empire that discriminate against women and girls and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT+) people. PM May also offered support to Commonwealth governments that wanted to change those laws.

Following this historic moment, the Society was delighted to launch the Equality & Justice Alliance (EJA) with our partners, the Human Dignity Trust, Kaleidoscope Trust and Sisters for Change. Generously funded by the UK Foreign and Commonwealth

Office in support of the Prime Minister's comments, this ground-breaking programme to reform discriminatory laws in the Commonwealth was the culmination of years of work by the RCS championing equality for all. Our work has focused on advancing our core mission of building and advancing a constructive conversation around why and how legal reform should take place, to equip and enable governments and civil society to take their ambitious reform projects forward. Two years later, as this hugely ambitious programme comes to an end, we are incredibly proud of the momentous achievements we have been able to deliver.

In the south Pacific, we brought together youth activists and parliamentarians to advance constructive dialogue on how laws can and should be reformed, with the Deputy Prime Minister of Samoa, HE Fiame Naomi Mata'afa, as our guest of honour. In the Caribbean, we held a high-level dialogue in Saint Lucia, which convened parliamentary, government and civil society stakeholders for two days of knowledge sharing and discussion around priority areas for reform in the Caribbean. With our partners at the Human Dignity Trust, we

→ HE Danny Faure opens the Commonwealth Equality & Justice Forum, February 2020
© Steven Nibourette

→→ Former Presidents of Botswana and Mozambique further intergenerational dialogue at the EJA Forum in Cape Town
© Steven Booth





← Activists and government representatives from Seychelles, Tonga, South Africa and St Vincent & the Grenadines discuss the future of equality in the Commonwealth
© Steven Nibourette

also led a learning exchange to Belize for a delegation from Saint Vincent & The Grenadines, who met with high-level figures to gain knowledge of how to overcome obstacles on the path to enacting reforms that can make a real difference to people's lives.

In southern Africa, the Society furthered our longstanding partnership with the Champions for an AIDS-Free Generation, a network of former Heads of Government from across Africa advocating to advance evidence-based solutions to ending the HIV pandemic. We were honoured to host the former presidents of Botswana and Mozambique at our EJA Forum in Cape Town, and to organise a breakfast meeting with Their Excellencies with youth activists from across the Commonwealth.

In Pakistan, we commissioned a **case study** on Pakistan's Transgender Rights Act, which has now been translated into Urdu to disseminate its important lessons ever more broadly. We are also proud to have supported our partners at the Kaleidoscope Trust to administer large grants to civil society coalitions in Namibia, Botswana, Mauritius, the Eastern Caribbean and the Pacific to launch their own legislative reform campaign activities to ensure their vital and difficult work can be sustained. We are perhaps most proud of our work supporting young people. This has included commissioning research on how political leaders can better engage with young people to support legal reform, and supporting the Commonwealth Youth Gender & Equality Network (CYGEN) of which we are Secretariat to launch their *#Reform53 – Together for Legal Equality* campaign (read more on pp. 14-15.).

These successes were evident at the Commonwealth Equality and Justice Forum 2020, organised by the RCS. The concluding event of the EJA programme, the conference brought together partners from government and civil society who have worked on the programme to share their experiences and learn from each other about how to advance equality. Speaking at the opening event of the Forum, our honoured guest His Excellency Danny Faure, President of the Republic of Seychelles said:

“With political will, the fostering of sensitive dialogue, and international cooperation, we can all lead change in our own countries and beyond. I hope that each one of us will... continue as Champions for equality and justice around the world.”

But the journey does not stop here. We have been overwhelmed by the enthusiasm and commitment of our partners across the Commonwealth to come together and secure the rights of all Commonwealth citizens, and we could not be more proud of the work we have done to advance equality in the Commonwealth. We cannot wait to launch the next phase of our exciting equality and inclusion work, to ensure that everybody in the Commonwealth can achieve their full potential, no matter who they are.

 **MORE INFORMATION**
www.thercs.org/Pages/Category/equality-and-inclusion

SAVING THE COMMONWEALTH'S HERITAGE

The Commonwealth has a unique shared history and built heritage, but until now there has been no focus for celebrating or promoting this, or for passing on an understanding of its remarkable shared legacy to future generations, says **Philip Davies**, Chair of the Commonwealth Heritage Forum.



On 11 March an innovative new membership charity – the Commonwealth Heritage Forum (CHF) – was launched at Australia House to help countries and communities fighting to save Commonwealth heritage at risk.

Many historic buildings and sites are at risk from neglect, poorly-conceived development or natural disasters such as earthquakes, fire, or hurricane damage. Often there is little awareness of what is at risk, why, or how to safeguard these irreplaceable assets for the future. Once an historic building is lost, it is lost forever.

These buildings represent a unique shared heritage of immense significance created by local peoples across the world over many generations – not only free artisans and craftsmen, but also the indentured and the enslaved. Yet it is little researched, little understood, and all too often disregarded. By harnessing expertise and best practice from around the globe, the CHF will support those working to save it and provide access to a valuable new resource.



→ HE Sir Rodney Williams addressing the launch reception

Encouraging a collective understanding of the economic, cultural and environmental potential of this legacy can foster conservation-led regeneration, a renaissance of traditional skills and opportunities for learning, jobs and prosperity for all.

With the vital support of its International Advisory Committee, the CHF will be working with universities, heritage agencies and other partners to draw up a register of heritage at risk for the Commonwealth. This will enable communities to identify priorities for action, improve resilience and help address the challenges of rapid urbanisation, climate change and sustainability requirements.

The founding patron of the CHF, His Excellency Sir Rodney Williams, the Governor-General of Antigua and Barbuda, explained:

'In small island states like Antigua and Barbuda...our capacity is limited. By providing specialist expertise and knowledge from across the Commonwealth, the CHF will provide much-needed know-how. It will enable young people to develop the talents needed to revitalise the places we all value and cherish.'

We are all the guardians of this unique shared heritage. We need to pass it on to the next generation in a better state than we found it. The Commonwealth Heritage Forum has a crucial role to play in enabling us all to do this.

 **MORE INFORMATION**
www.commonwealthheritage.org

OUR CONNECTED COMMUNITY

Across the Commonwealth, communities have been struck by the coronavirus pandemic. RCS Branches and Associate Fellows tell us how they are coming together to stay connected and help others in their communities deal with this crisis.

Alex Wallace, Mintridge Foundation



During this unprecedented time, there is more opportunity than before for young people to turn on their phone, computer or TV to see that the world is bombarded with the wrong sort of role models. Thanks to the technology and remote systems of Playwaze and FitSwarm, the Mintridge Foundation is able to continue our important work during this global pandemic by surrounding young people with positive role models and the "stardust" of some of the best sporting minds in the UK, to help them navigate this incredibly difficult time by building confidence and resilience are in reach as well as creating awareness of the importance of mental and physical wellbeing.

Our team of Ambassadors; Olympians, Paralympians and other sports stars from over 20 sports, provide one-on-one remote mentoring in a safeguarded environment, delivered via technology to build a lasting legacy for individuals. The athletes are applying their own experience to young people's school and home life which makes mentees sit up and listen. The impact of someone that has achieved so much telling you what they've been through and how that shaped their future, in a supportive way that encourages you and guides you on your own path is huge.

Our vision has offered hope, a route to a more positive life in this time!

Devanshi Rathi, Project Checkmate



Project Checkmate is the flagship initiative of the **Devanshi Rathi Foundation**, which is a registered non-profit, tax-exempt, company in New Delhi, India. The main aim of the work program is to use chess as a social tool to empower the underprivileged and disabled, in particular the visually impaired. Chess is one of the world's only games/sports where the disabled are able to compete with any abled person at an equal footing as the rules are not changed for anyone. So, it is a great leveller. Chess also builds upon logical and creative thinking, analytical abilities, memory and pattern recognition, and calculation. Through the project, over 50 students

have been trained individually and around 350 students have been impacted by tournament and event organising. The project is also affiliated as a partner with the All India Chess Federation for the Blind, which is the main regulatory body for Blind Chess in India. The classes are held both in-person as well as online through diverse social media and other online tools. A large number of chess players and supporters have come forward to encourage the growth of this project, including World Champion Magnus Carlsen, who was kind enough to donate a chessboard and t-shirt towards the project.

Ben Delo, RCS Hong Kong



Researchers from the University of Oxford have received generous support from Giving Pledge signatory Ben Delo (a Council Member of RCS Hong Kong Branch) to study the prevalence of COVID-19 in the UK community.

The project involves testing a cross-section of the non-symptomatic general public for COVID-19, in order to assess the true prevalence of the virus in the community. As the current crisis continues to escalate, knowing the true infection rates could prove vital for an informed and effective public health response, as well as providing accurate information on the risk to the public.

The researchers are also exploring the use of nanopore technology as a new diagnostic tool, and will compare this method with existing tests. If the technology proves potentially viable as a testing method, it has the advantage of being 'pathogen-blind'; meaning it could be used to spot future outbreaks of a virus, even if they involve a new and unknown pathogen.

Natalie Cargill, Ben Delo's philanthropic advisor, said: "Biosecurity has long been a focus area for our grantmaking, which is focussed on the most effective ways to positively influence the long-term future. Ben was especially keen to support work that can inform the public health response to COVID-19 now, as well as build capacity to better respond to (potentially even more extreme) pandemics in the future."

Commonwealth Community for CommonHealth



One of RCS Vancouver Island Branch's primary goals is to maintain its outreach to young participants. To do this RCS V.I has started a virtual chat group to maintain connection with the young people to reassure them that someone other than their friends and family is interested and cares about them. This 'common

endeavour' builds community. Asking for youth opinions on what is happening, and how they are seeing opportunities in this unprecedented scenario, gives them confidence and encouragement to imagine creative new options. The optimism of youthful perspectives is a 'healing boost' for everyone!

Khagrachari Relief Distribution, Bangladesh



The world is currently experiencing a shutdown but the human body can't shut down even at a tough time like this. Like many parts of the world, the Chittagong Hill Tracts is greatly impacted by this global pandemic. Families with no land and no source of income have nothing to eat. We, a group of local youth, decided to do something about it and raised funds to help these families living hand-to-mouth.

Youth volunteers came together to sort and distribute emergency aid packs for 84 of the poorest families across 15 villages in the Khagrachari area. These packs contained much needed supplies like rice, lentils, potatoes, salt, cooking oil, face masks and antibacterial soap. Each pack can last a family of five for two weeks.

We had to come up with a smart and safe solution for distribution. Amongst all the precautions we took, volunteers also had to wear face masks and gloves, supplies were repacked in a community center and distributed to the doorsteps of these families via contactless delivery.

We are actively looking to develop a sustainable solution to address the food crisis in these areas. Please do reach out if you would like to join us!

www.PTIBcxb.com

Kokulan Mahendiran, StudentsAgainstCorona



Seeing the worrying effects of the global pandemic facing us, some fellow students and I came together to create something that would allow people to stay connected and help one another. We created a platform that connects those who can help with those who need help.

Our volunteers are delivering groceries, medicines, walking dogs as well as helping out at food banks, hospitals and care homes.

The platform, StudentsAgainstCorona, is being used across 24 cities in 14 different countries. We have medical doctors, software engineers, diplomats, lawyers, teachers, people from all walks of life – making sure we don't do more harm than good in this difficult situation.

The heart-warming messages we receive from vulnerable and isolated members of our respective communities, appreciate the support offered and provided, makes all the work we put into this more than worth it!

Jack Wilkie-Jans, Australia



© Anthony Lowden

The COVID-19 pandemic is a shared human experience. It's a tremendous trial but also a great showcase of our resilience and compassion. A respectable and congenial middle power, Australia's done well in stemming the impact of COVID-19, although the threat prevails, wreaks tragedy and highlights social disadvantage.

COVID-19 highlights the health vulnerability of remote Aboriginal communities. In line with the sense of vigour that the Commonwealth is known for, Aboriginal communities across Cape York Peninsula swiftly moved to enact measures to close their borders and restrict the flow of risk to neighbouring ones.

Unlike incidents of COVID-19 presenting in the Kimberley region (where, due to a lack of permanent local health services, the virus was introduced by fly-in health workers), Cape York remains free from COVID-19 and the people continue to be safe on their ancestral and historic homelands. Cape York's local governments entrenched attitudes of the utmost seriousness around COVID-19 early on to residents and visitors. Their early efforts to restrict the spread of COVID-19 across their most vulnerable areas should be commended.

Andy Tay, Singapore



Andy Tay is an Assistant Professor at the National University of Singapore, a 2017 Queen's Young Leader Runner-Up and an advocate of evidence-based science communications. Andy is working with **bioRxiv** to communicate the latest science on the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. So far, his team has posted more than **1700 papers**. One challenge managing the current influx of information related to COVID-19 is having to deal with misinformation. Andy and his team has thus introduced more stringent paper screening processes to ensure that information disseminated through preprints are reliable.

Andy also recognizes that like himself, many scientists want to contribute and volunteer to help overcome the pandemic. As a freelance writer, Andy has written articles educating researchers about how they can join the fight beyond their research such as by creating WHO-recommended sanitizers and creating information cartoons to educate the public. Through his efforts, Andy hopes that science can be accurately communicated to everyone, and that with a well-informed society, humanity is closer to winning our battle against COVID-19!

MORE INFORMATION

If you would like to get in touch or find out more about any of these initiatives please contact info@thercs.org

#REFORM 53

Members of the Commonwealth Youth Gender & Equality Network (CYGEN) launch the #REFORM53 campaign across the Commonwealth.



Barbados



London



British High Commission, Bangladesh



Uganda



Cameroon



With the UN Deputy Secretary-General, Papua New Guinea



Kenya

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