

Guidelines for Accreditation to the Commonwealth



The Commonwealth

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Contents

About the Guidelines for Accreditation to the Commonwealth	iv
Chapter A: Introduction	1
Chapter B: Criteria for Accreditation	2
Chapter C: Benefits of Accreditation to the Commonwealth	4
Chapter D: Responsibilities and Obligations	6
Chapter E: Conferral of Accreditation and Annual Activity Reporting	7
Chapter F: Re-accreditation	9
Chapter G: Suspension and Exit	10
Chapter H: Application Procedures	11
I. Pre-requisites	11
II. Requisites	12
Contact information	13
Appendix A : Annual Activity Report Template	14
Appendix B: The Commonwealth Charter	16

About the Guidelines for Accreditation to the Commonwealth

This document serves as a guide for organisations wishing to join the Commonwealth family as Accredited Organisations. It sets out the criteria for accreditation, benefits of accreditation to the Commonwealth, responsibilities and obligations, annual activity reporting, re-accreditation, suspension and exit, and application procedures. The Commonwealth Charter has been included in Appendix B for reference.

Chapter A: Introduction

1. Links and working relations between the Commonwealth intergovernmental organisations and other non-governmental organisations including civil society and associated organisations have existed for many years. The High Level Group (HLG) report of December 2018 recognised how the 'contributions of civil society and accredited organisations to promoting Commonwealth values and principles are enshrined in the Commonwealth Charter and other strategic documents of the Secretariat, and this is reaffirmed by repeat CHOGM Communiques, the Secretariat's Strategic Plan and also its Partnership Strategy'.
2. An Accreditation Committee (AC) was established, as a subcommittee of the Executive Committee of the Board of Governors (BOG) of the Commonwealth Secretariat in 2003. Terms of Reference for the Accreditation Committee describe its role and responsibilities.

Chapter B: Criteria for Accreditation

3. Organisations wishing to be accredited to the Commonwealth must meet the following criteria:
 - 3.1 **Commitment to the Commonwealth's fundamental values and principles**
 - 3.1.1 The Commonwealth values and principles are set out in the Commonwealth Charter, signed by Queen Elizabeth II, Head of the Commonwealth, on 11 March 2013. The Commonwealth's strong and abiding commitment to these values and principles was reaffirmed at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in 2022. **Organisations will therefore be required not only to confirm their commitment to these values and principles, but also to indicate what they do to promote and implement them.**
 - 3.2 **Representing the true diversity of Commonwealth countries**
 - 3.2.1 Organisations must recognise and respect the diversity of the Commonwealth's membership and be open to exchanging information and collaborating with like-minded organisations in all Commonwealth countries.
 - 3.2.2 Diversity will be demonstrated, inter-alia, by an organisation providing evidence that it has a physical presence, membership and activities across the Commonwealth regions¹ and that their governance structures manifest the true diversity of the Commonwealth. Regional organisations working across only one region are welcome to apply provided they undertake important functions aligned to the Commonwealth Charter and their objectives are pan-Commonwealth, replicable across the Commonwealth family. Engagement between the Commonwealth Secretariat and regional organisations is therefore encouraged, pursuant to the Partnerships Strategy.
 - 3.3 **Accountability and Transparency**
 - 3.3.1 Organisations seeking accreditation should demonstrate transparency in their Sustainability, Environmental, Social and Governance standards (SESG). They should show that they have systems to ensure accountability to their members, including by making the governing body's decisions visible to all members and by providing regular and reliable reports to the membership and other stakeholders on the organisation's activities and finances.
 - 3.3.2 Once accredited, organisations are expected to submit reports annually on their activities and audited accounts through the Secretariat's annual reporting platform. Appendix A provides detail on the required information for submission online. The Secretariat

¹ The Commonwealth regions are: Africa, Asia, the Americas (Caribbean-Canada), the Pacific and Europe.

may recommend changes to the questions on required information, for the approval of the Accreditation Committee. In any matter of urgency, the Secretariat may use its discretion to make necessary changes to these questions.

3.4 Open to all Commonwealth members

3.4.1 To be eligible for accreditation, all applicant organisations should be open to permitting eligible individuals, organisations or associations from other Commonwealth member countries to join or associate with them.

3.4.2 Organisations based in Commonwealth countries are eligible for accreditation and are strongly encouraged to apply if their work aligns with Commonwealth programmes and the values and principles set out in the Commonwealth Charter.

3.5 Activity track record

3.5.1 An organisation applying for accreditation should normally have been existent for at least two years and demonstrate a track record of activity that is consistent with the values and principles of the Commonwealth, during that period.

Chapter C: Benefits of Accreditation to the Commonwealth

4. The following benefits may be available to organisations accredited to the Commonwealth:

4.1 Visitor's access to Marlborough House

- 4.1.1 Access, upon request, to Marlborough House;
- 4.1.2 Accommodation for small meetings on work of direct relevance to the Commonwealth, subject to availability of space. Because of the very limited number of formal rooms in Marlborough House, access is limited, and priority is given to Commonwealth official meetings. A special small room (up to 25 people) is available to accommodate meetings of accredited organisations. A reduced charge may be levied; and
- 4.1.3 Use of the patented Commonwealth symbol, subject to restrictions.

4.2 Access to general information and library services

- 4.2.1 Access, upon request, to public information not already available on the internet;
- 4.2.2 Access to Commonwealth knowledge products and information materials as well as any archives and publications that are in the public domain. Wherever possible, this information will be made available electronically, although hard copies may be provided to organisations specifically requesting it; and
- 4.2.3 Access to Commonwealth Secretariat's library.

4.3 Access to Commonwealth Secretariat staff and participation in the consultation processes

- 4.3.1 Invitation to attend an annual consultation with the Commonwealth Secretary-General, including Commonwealth Secretariat policy staff from various divisions;
- 4.3.2 Invitation to attend informal consultations, on an ad-hoc basis, with Commonwealth Secretariat policy staff where there is strategic alignment between organisational priorities or implementation of CHOGM mandates; and
- 4.3.3 Invitation to attend other consultations convened from time to time by the Commonwealth Secretariat, consistent with the Commonwealth Secretariat Partnerships Strategy.

4.4 Access to official meetings

- 4.4.1 The Secretariat supports the convening of a Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) every two years, in addition to regular Commonwealth Ministerial Meetings on specific policy areas. Accredited organisations may be eligible to attend these, as well as other high-level meetings, as observers.
- 4.4.2 Commonwealth Ministerial Meetings
- 4.4.2.1 Accreditation to Commonwealth Ministerial Meetings is by invitation, and the benefits of being accredited vary according to the nature of the meeting. They range from access to documents and the opportunity to submit documents, to participation in discussions as an observer. Accreditation to meetings normally requires being accredited to the Commonwealth, plus working in areas of direct relevance to the Commonwealth and being known to the Commonwealth Secretariat, through programme collaboration.
- 4.4.2.1 In special circumstances, accreditation to individual Commonwealth Ministerial Meetings may sometimes be extended to an organisation if it has a working relationship with the Commonwealth, whether or not it is an accredited organisation.
- 4.4.3 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings (CHOGM)
- 4.4.3.1 All organisations accredited to the Commonwealth may apply to be registered to participate in certain events of CHOGM.
- 4.4.3.1 Benefits include:
- 4.4.3.1.1 Able to submit papers for the information of government delegations;
- 4.4.3.1.2 May receive reports approved by Heads of Government;
- 4.4.3.1.3 Invitation to the opening ceremony of the CHOGM and other social events, subject to limitations of the venue;
- 4.4.3.1.4 Invitation to attend official media events as well as use of the centre for media-related activities; and
- 4.4.3.1.5 Invitation to use the dedicated Commonwealth Organisations Lounge.
- 4.4.3.1.6 Participation in a roundtable with Foreign Ministers (for a limited number of accredited organisations making a significant contribution to a CHOGM theme).

Chapter D:

Responsibilities and Obligations

5. All accredited organisations have continuing responsibilities, to maintain the credibility that was exhibited at the initial application stage and to operate within the spirit and values of the Commonwealth Charter. Organisations must:

5.1 Promote and protect the good name of the Commonwealth

5.1.1 Accredited Organisations must promote the good name of the Commonwealth in their operations in Commonwealth countries and protect it from illegitimate use.

5.2 Contribute to the high reputation of the Commonwealth

5.2.1 Accredited Organisations must maintain the Commonwealth brand identity by aligning their values with the values set out in the Commonwealth Charter.

5.3 Implement and Promote Commonwealth Values and principles

5.3.1 Accredited Organisations must actively demonstrate how they promote Commonwealth values and principles through their activities, events, publications and conduct in accordance with the Commonwealth Charter.

5.4 Conduct themselves with integrity and to high professional standards

5.4.1 Accredited Organisations must keep the commitments they make upon gaining accreditation and achieve these by practising high standards of professionalism.

5.5 Submit annual activity reports and financial expenditure in the Commonwealth

5.5.1 Accredited Organisations must report their annual activities including financial expenditure in the Commonwealth as set out in Chapters B and E.

5.6 Notify the Secretariat of any significant changes in the organisation

5.6.1 Accredited Organisations must inform the Secretariat of any significant changes in governance structure, memberships, as well as Commonwealth countries where they have ceased operation or no longer have a physical presence.

5.7 Provide the Secretariat with a focal point of contact

5.7.1 Accredited Organisations must provide the Secretariat with a focal point of contact to whom correspondence and enquiries will be directed.

5.8 Respond to requests for information from the Secretariat

5.8.1 Organisations must respond promptly to any requests for information from the Secretariat.

Chapter E: Conferral of Accreditation and Annual Activity Reporting

6. Once accredited, organisations are required to submit annual activity reports including financial expenditure in the Commonwealth and notification of any significant changes in the organisation.

6.1 Conferral of Accreditation

- 6.1.1 Accreditation will be conferred initially for a period of three years.
- 6.1.2 Accredited organisations will be asked by the Partnerships Team to submit annual activity reports through the Commonwealth Secretariat's reporting platform (See section 6.2.)
- 6.1.3 Accredited organisations should use the template set out in Appendix A to complete an annual activity report which are to be submitted through the Commonwealth Secretariat's reporting platform. (See Section 6.2 and Chapter F). The function of annual activity reports is two-fold:
- 6.1.3.1 to ensure ongoing compliance by accredited organisations with the requirements of the Guidelines; and
 - 6.1.3.1 to understand the ongoing activities of accredited organisations, and where there may be opportunities for accredited organisations to work with the Commonwealth Secretariat or other accredited organisations, to promote and implement Commonwealth values and principles.

6.2 Annual reporting

- 6.2.1 Organisations must annually report their activities on the Commonwealth Secretariat's annual reporting platform by submitting reports that demonstrate physical presence and impact of their activities in Commonwealth countries.
- 6.2.2 Accredited Organisations are required to submit audited financial statements for the current reporting period. Accredited Organisations with regional and global presence must submit audited financial statements that reflect only their expenditure in Commonwealth countries.
- 6.2.3 The Secretariat's reporting period is August to September each year, after which the Accreditation Committee will review the presence, impact, expenditure, as well as validate the alignment of reported activities with the values and principles set out in the Commonwealth Charter. Accredited Organisations must ensure that their reporting is in accordance with the above criteria.

- 6.2.4 Accredited Organisations' reports must include any significant changes in their organisations, including changes in governance structure, memberships, as well as Commonwealth countries where they have ceased operation or no longer have a physical presence.
- 6.2.5 Annual reporting is a core requirement of Accredited Organisations. Failure to submit an Annual Activity Report within the prescribed timeframe at paragraph 6.2.3, may result in an accredited organisation being referred for re-accreditation and de-accreditation under Chapter F and H of these Guidelines.

Chapter F:

Re-accreditation

7. Accredited organisations will be required to submit annual activity reports on the Secretariat's annual reporting platform, which will be presented to the Accreditation Committee by the Secretary to the Governing Boards.
8. The Accreditation Committee will review the status of each accredited organisation every three years, from the date of initial accreditation. This review would include an appraisal of operations and especially the way the accredited organisation has promoted and implemented Commonwealth values and principles, and whether it continues to comply with the Guidelines.
9. The organisation will be required to submit requisite information to consider the re-accreditation application in accordance with Chapter H, Section II *Requisites*, Paragraph 19 of the Accreditation Guidelines.
10. Upon satisfactory completion of a periodic review, organisations will have their accreditation reaffirmed, or suspended or withdrawn by the Board of Governors in accordance with Chapter G with immediate effect.
11. Based on the consideration of the Accreditation Committee and Board of Governors, organisations will be re-accredited, or their accreditation suspended (de-accreditation) or withdrawn by the Board of Governors, if the organisation fails to comply with the accreditation criteria as stipulated in Chapters B, D, E and H. The Accreditation Committee reserves the right to advise the Board of Governors to withdraw accreditation status for an organisation which, after due notice, fails to meet its obligations.

Chapter G: Suspension and Exit

12. The Accreditation Committee reserves the right to review the status of any organisation at any time, including to undertake a re-accreditation process as set out in Section F, paragraph 9 of the Guidelines, if it considers the organisation to be in serious breach of the provisions of Chapters B, D and E above, or of the fundamental values and principles of the Commonwealth. The Accreditation Committee – will bring to the Board's attention any organisation in breach of the Accreditation Guidelines and recommend appropriate action including suspension or withdrawal.
13. If the Board of Governors agrees to suspend an organisation's accreditation it will then be asked to comply and reapply by invitation.
14. If the Board of Governors agrees to withdraw the accreditation of an organisation if in breach of the provisions of Chapters B, D and E, it will not receive an invitation to reapply.
15. If an accredited organisation becomes unsustainable due to financial or other grounds, and/or wishes to relinquish its accreditation to Commonwealth, it can do so by informing the Accreditation Committee, through the Commonwealth Secretariat.

Chapter H: Application Procedures

16. New applications for accreditation are reviewed by the Accreditation Committee at least twice every year. The Accreditation Committee may arrange to meet more often should the need arise.

I. Pre-requisites

17. Organisations wishing to become accredited should write an application letter on their letterhead setting out their request to become accredited. They should also submit the following information:
 - 17.1 A brief outline of why the organisation is seeking accreditation in line with SESG standards;
 - 17.2 Proof of registration of the organisation (such as a certificate of registration from a national charities commission, registration with a tax office, or proof of registration with a local council);
 - 17.3 The most recent (current) annual report;
 - 17.4 A track record of the activity of the organisation over at least the last two years, which must include how the organisations has promoted and implemented Commonwealth values and principles over that time;
 - 17.5 The most recent audited accounts
 - 17.6 The constitution or founding document of the organisation;
 - 17.7 Key internal policies such as data protection policy, safeguarding policy, anti-terrorism financing policy, anti-money laundering, bribery and corruption policy, and other relevant policies.
 - 17.8 A statement confirming the organisation's commitment to Commonwealth values and principles. A description of how the organisation promotes and implements these values should be accompanied by specific references to the Commonwealth Charter;
 - 17.9 A statement setting out any other intergovernmental organisations to which the organisation is accredited and/or affiliated, and whether your office bearers are affiliated to any other Commonwealth Accredited Organisation;
 - 17.10 A statement setting out how the organisation is governed, including a diagram/organogram of governance structures, and a full list of all office bearers, their designations and country of nationality; and
 - 17.11 A list of the countries in which the organisation is active and/or has members/affiliates.

II. Requisites

18. Applications that meet the pre-requisite stage will then be assessed by the Secretariat in respect to Governance, Credibility, Financial Sustainability and Programme Reach. Applicants may be required to provide additional documentation, i.e., an Annual Report, a Strategic Plan, Delivery Plan, a Budget covering at least 2 years, Audited Financial Statements and Evaluation Report to facilitate the review.

Scale of Assessment 1 (low) – 5 (high)	1	2	3	4	5	Total
Governance						
1. Are the Office Bearers of the Board of Trustees representative of the 4 regions of the Commonwealth?						
2. What is the Gender Balance on the Board of Trustees?						
3. Does the Organisational Structure reflect the outreach of the organisation and supports the delivery of programmes and activities?						
4. Does the Constitution specify the internal and external governance structures of the organisation? Does it specify the decision-making processes and mechanisms? Has an organogram been provided?						
Credibility						
1. Has the organisation partnered with other organisations of the same nature, civil society, institutions of higher learning or government?						
2. Has the organisation been featured in any publications or produces its own? If it produces its own, are their publications distributed across commonwealth regions or are recognised within their local region?						
3. Has the organisation been subjected to any reputational risks?						
Financial Sustainability						
1. How does the Organisation receive funding? What kind of expenditure obligations do you have? Does this income cover your expenditure commitments?						
2. Does the organisation engage in fundraising? If so, what method is used? What kind of due diligence have you applied to assess your donors?						

Scale of Assessment 1 (low) – 5 (high)	1	2	3	4	5	Total
3. Is your organisation bankrupt or is the subject of insolvency or winding-up proceedings, where your assets are being administered by a liquidator or by the court, where it is in an arrangement with creditors, where its business activities are suspended or it is in any analogous situation arising from a similar procedure under the laws and regulations of any State?						
4. Do you have any contingent liabilities? Is the organisation involved in any legal proceedings that could have a financial impact on the organisation?						
Programme Outreach						
1. What is the reach of the organisation's programmes across the 4 commonwealth regions?						
2. How relevant and coherent are the programmes? How effective and efficient is the delivery of the programmes?						
3. How sustainable are the programmes? What short term and long-term outcomes have been realised?						
						60

19. The Commonwealth Secretariat, to assist the Accreditation Committee to undertake its duties may request additional information from applicant organisations in order to consider an application. Organisations should provide such information as soon as possible, but no later than 4 weeks after the request for information. Should the information not be provided within that timeframe or the information be insufficient, the Commonwealth Secretariat may provide a further 2-week period within which to provide the information. Should the required information not be provided within this time period, the application for accreditation (or re-accreditation) will be refused and a stand-down period of six months imposed, before a fresh application for accreditation may be submitted.

Contact information

20. For more information on the accreditation process and related queries, please contact:

The Secretary, Accreditation Committee
Commonwealth Secretariat, Marlborough House, Pall Mall
London SW1Y 5HX, UK

E-mail: secretary.ac@commonwealth.int

Appendix A: Annual Activity Report Template

Annual Activity Report of Commonwealth Accredited Organisations

1 July 20XX–30 June 20XX

The below template sets out the information that accredited organisations will be asked to submit in their annual activity reports to the Commonwealth Secretariat. These reports should be submitted online via the Secretariat's reporting platform.

Name of organisation:

1. Activities

- a. Activity Name
- b. Activity Period
- c. Organisation Role
- d. Name of Partners
- e. Beneficiary Member Countries
- f. Charter Items
- g. Comments

2. Financial Information for Reporting Period

- a. Financial Reporting Period
- b. Estimated Expenditure
- c. Annual Financial Statement
- d. Comments

3. Significant Change to Management or Governance

- a. Management Structure
- b. Governance

4. Membership

- a. Organisation Membership
- b. Engagement and Frequency
- c. Any significant changes to membership

5. Contact Information

Primary

Name:.....
Job Title/Role:.....
Postal Address:
Telephone Number(s):
Email Address(es):

Secondary

Name:.....
Job Title/Role:.....
Postal Address:
Telephone Number(s):
Email Address(es):

6. Additional information

.....
Signature Date

Appendix B: The Commonwealth Charter

We the People of the Commonwealth:

Recognising that in an era of changing economic circumstances and uncertainty, new trade and economic patterns, unprecedented threats to peace and security, and a surge in popular demands for democracy, human rights and broadened economic opportunities, 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,

Recalling that the Commonwealth is a voluntary association of independent and equal sovereign states, each responsible for its own policies, consulting and co-operating in the common interests of our peoples and in the promotion of international understanding and world peace, and influencing international society to the benefit of all through the pursuit of common principles and values,

Affirming that the special strength of the Commonwealth lies in the combination of our diversity and our shared inheritance in language, culture and the rule of law; and bound together by shared history and tradition; by respect for all states and peoples; by shared values and principles and by concern for the vulnerable,

Affirming that the Commonwealth way is to seek consensus through consultation and the sharing of experience, especially through practical co-operation, and further affirming that the Commonwealth is uniquely placed to serve as a model and as a catalyst for new forms of friendship and co-operation in the spirit of the Charter of the United Nations,

Affirming the role of the Commonwealth as a recognised intergovernmental champion of small states, advocating for their special needs; providing policy advice on political, economic and social development issues; and delivering technical assistance,

Welcoming the valuable contribution of the network of the many intergovernmental, parliamentary, professional and civil society bodies which support the Commonwealth and which subscribe and adhere to its values and principles,

Affirming the validity of and our commitment to the values and principles of the Commonwealth as defined and strengthened over the years including: the Singapore Declaration of Commonwealth Principles, the Harare Commonwealth Declaration, the Langkawi Declaration on the Environment, the Millbrook Action Programme, the Latimer House Principles, the Aberdeen Agenda, the Trinidad and Tobago Affirmation of Commonwealth Values and Principles, the Munyonyo Statement on Respect and Understanding, the Lake Victoria Commonwealth Climate Change Action Plan, the Perth Declaration on Food Security Principles, and the Commonwealth Declaration on Investing in Young People,

Affirming our core Commonwealth principles of consensus and common action, mutual respect, inclusiveness, transparency, accountability, legitimacy, and responsiveness,

Reaffirming the core values and principles of the Commonwealth as declared by this Charter:

I. Democracy

We recognise the inalienable right of individuals to participate in democratic processes, in particular through free and fair elections in shaping the society in which they live. Governments, political parties and civil society are responsible for upholding and promoting democratic culture and practices and are accountable to the public in this regard. Parliaments and representative local governments and other forms of local governance are essential elements in the exercise of democratic governance.

We support the role of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group to address promptly and effectively all instances of serious or persistent violations of Commonwealth values without any fear or favour.

II. Human Rights

We are committed to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other relevant human rights covenants and international instruments. We are committed to equality and respect for the protection and promotion of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development, for all without discrimination on any grounds as the foundations of peaceful, just and stable societies. We note that these rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated and cannot be implemented selectively.

We are implacably opposed to all forms of discrimination, whether rooted in gender, race, colour, creed, political belief or other grounds.

III. International Peace and Security

We firmly believe that international peace and security, sustainable economic growth and development and the rule of law are essential to the progress and prosperity of all. We are committed to an effective multilateral system based on inclusiveness, equity, justice and international law as the best foundation for achieving consensus and progress on major global challenges including piracy and terrorism.

We support international efforts for peace and disarmament at the United Nations and other multilateral institutions. We will contribute to the promotion of international consensus on major global political, economic, and social issues. We will be guided by our commitment to the security, development and prosperity of every member state.

We reiterate our absolute condemnation of all acts of terrorism in whatever form or wherever they occur or by whomsoever perpetrated, with the consequent tragic loss of human life and severe damage to political, economic and social stability. We reaffirm our commitment to work together as a diverse community of nations, individually, and collectively under the auspices and authority of the United Nations, to take concerted and resolute action to eradicate terrorism.

IV. Tolerance, Respect and Understanding

We emphasise the need to promote tolerance, respect, understanding, moderation and religious freedom which are essential to the development of free and democratic societies, and recall that respect for the dignity of all human beings is critical to promoting peace and prosperity.

We accept that diversity and understanding the richness of our multiple identities are fundamental to the Commonwealth's principles and approach.

V. Freedom of Expression

We are committed to peaceful, open dialogue and the free flow of information, including through a free and responsible media, and to enhancing democratic traditions and strengthening democratic processes.

VI. Separation of Powers

We recognise the importance of maintaining the integrity of the roles of the Legislature, Executive and Judiciary. These are the guarantors in their respective spheres of the rule of law, the promotion and protection of fundamental human rights and adherence to good governance.

VII. Rule of Law

We believe in the rule of law as an essential protection for the people of the Commonwealth and as an assurance of limited and accountable government. In particular we support an independent, impartial, honest and competent judiciary and recognise that an independent, effective and competent legal system is integral to upholding the rule of law, engendering public confidence and dispensing justice.

VIII. Good Governance

We reiterate our commitment to promote good governance through the rule of law, to ensure transparency and accountability and to root out, both at national and international levels, systemic and systematic corruption.

IX. Sustainable Development

We recognise that sustainable development can help to eradicate poverty by pursuing inclusive growth whilst preserving and conserving natural ecosystems and promoting social equity.

We stress the importance of sustainable economic and social transformation to eliminate poverty and meet the basic needs of the vast majority of the people of the world and reiterate that economic and social progress enhances the sustainability of democracy.

We are committed to removing wide disparities and unequal living standards as guided by internationally agreed development goals. We are also committed to building economic resilience and promoting social equity, and we reiterate the value in technical assistance, capacity building and practical co-operation in promoting development.

We are committed to an effective, equitable, rules-based multilateral trading system, the freest possible flow of multilateral trade on terms fair and equitable to all, while taking into account the special requirements of small states and developing countries.

We also recognise the importance of information and communication technologies as powerful instruments of development; delivering savings, efficiencies and growth in our economies, as well as promoting education, learning and the sharing of culture. We are committed to strengthening its use while enhancing its security, for the purpose of advancing our societies.

X. Protecting the Environment

We recognise the importance of the protection and conservation of our natural ecosystems and affirm that sustainable management of the natural environment is the key to sustained human development. We recognise the importance of multilateral co-operation, sustained commitment and collective action, in particular by addressing the adaptation and mitigation challenges of climate change and facilitating the development, diffusion and deployment of affordable environmentally friendly technologies and renewable energy, and the prevention of illicit dumping of toxic and hazardous waste as well as the prevention and mitigation of erosion and desertification.

XI. Access to Health, Education, Food and Shelter

We recognise the necessity of access to affordable health care, education, clean drinking water, sanitation and housing for all citizens and emphasise the importance of promoting health and well-being in combating communicable and non-communicable diseases.

We recognise the right of everyone to have access to safe, sufficient and nutritious food, consistent with the progressive realisation of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security.

XII. Gender Equality

We recognise that gender equality and women's empowerment are essential components of human development and basic human rights. The advancement of women's rights and the education of girls are critical preconditions for effective and sustainable development.

XIII. Importance of Young People in the Commonwealth

We recognise the positive and active role and contributions of young people in promoting development, peace, democracy and in protecting and promoting other Commonwealth values, such as tolerance and understanding, including respect for other cultures. The future success of the Commonwealth rests with the continued commitment and contributions of young people in promoting and sustaining the Commonwealth and its values and principles, and we commit to investing in and promoting their development, particularly through the creation of opportunities for youth employment and entrepreneurship.

XIV. Recognition of the needs of Small States

We are committed to assisting small and developing states in the Commonwealth, including the particular needs of small island developing states, in tackling their particular economic, energy, climate change and security challenges, and in building their resilience for the future.

XV. Recognition of the needs of Vulnerable States

We are committed to collaborating to find ways to provide immediate help to the poorest and most vulnerable including least developed countries, and to develop responses to protect the people most at risk.

XVI. The Role of Civil Society

We recognise the important role that civil society plays in our communities and countries as partners in promoting and supporting Commonwealth values and principles, including the freedom of association and peaceful assembly, and in achieving development goals.

We are committed to ensuring that the Commonwealth is an effective association, responsive to members' needs, and capable of addressing the significant global challenges of the future.

We aspire to a Commonwealth that is a strong and respected voice in the world, speaking out on major issues; that strengthens and enlarges its networks; that has a global relevance and profile; and that is devoted to improving the lives of all peoples of the Commonwealth.



Signed by His Excellency Kamalesh Sharma, Commonwealth Secretary-General, 14 December 2012, on which day Commonwealth Heads of Government adopted the Charter of the Commonwealth



Signed by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Head of the Commonwealth, Commonwealth Day 2013

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