

# VOICES

## THE QUEEN'S COMMONWEALTH CANOPY

Planting and conserving for future generations



 **THE MALDIVES**  
An opinion piece regarding  
the former member country

 **ESSAY COMPETITION:**  
Celebrating the 2016 Winners  
and Runners-Up

 **RCS INTERNATIONAL MEETING**  
Branch and youth representatives  
come together as a family



# Music is our passion

---

World-class exams, inspiring resources, creative partnerships – everything we do supports participation, progression and opportunities in music.

**ABRSM supports the teaching and learning of music in partnership with the Royal Schools of Music.**

[www.abrsm.org](http://www.abrsm.org)  [/abrsm](https://www.facebook.com/abrsm)  
 [@abrsm](https://twitter.com/abrsm)  [ABRSM YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/abrsm)

# WELCOME



It is a great pleasure to introduce this 7th edition of Commonwealth Voices; I am pleased with the quality of contributions and the interest that it now attracts, both in print and online.

This edition fully reflects the range of concerns and challenges routinely addressed by the Commonwealth and by the RCS. The new Minister, Baroness Anelay, reflects on the importance of strengthening the practical relevance of the Commonwealth; undoubtedly a vital aspiration.

Trinanjan Radhakrishnan writes with passion on the subject of the Maldives and takes a stance on applying international pressure to address concerns. Sadly, the Maldives is no longer a member country, however I do believe the Commonwealth is at its best when helping fellow members to address complex problems.

The subject of Brexit has, of course, a broader impact than simply on domestic politics and I think the establishment of a thriving branch of the RCS in the Republic of Ireland, and another in Brussels, is a significant indication of this. On the subject of branches, I am pleased that we are able to report on a most successful and valuable International Branches Meeting. The work of the Society is informed and leveraged through our devolved branch structure and youth networks and it is a priority for us to expand into countries where we are not currently represented.

We have uplifting reports on the extraordinary and rapid growth of The Queen's Commonwealth Canopy as it gathers momentum towards our target of participation by all 52 member countries in 2018. Also successful is the essay competition, now in its 134th year and with a record number of entries.

I look forward to 2017 with great optimism. This very modern association of the Commonwealth has the potential to offer its members an important card in their foreign policy hand.

**Michael Lake**  
Director



THE ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY

# CONTENTS

- 2 IN THE NEWS:** The 1 for 7 Billion campaign
- 3 SPOTLIGHT:** Baroness Anelay on A Relevant Commonwealth
- 4 COMMONWEALTH CONCERN:** A view of the Maldives
- 6 PROGRAMME IN PARTNERSHIP:** The Queen's Commonwealth Canopy
- 8 ESSAY COMPETITION:** The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition achieves a new record
- 12 COMMONWEALTH CONVERSATION:** Brexit – The Diplomatic Debate
- 13 COMMONWEALTH ACTION:** Unlocking Visa Reform
- 14 COMMONWEALTH CULTURE:** 400 years of Shakespeare reviewed
- 16 YOUTH REGION-WIDE:** RCS youth looks to the future
- 18 RCS REGION-WIDE:** RCS International Branches Meeting
- 20 COMING UP IN THE COMMONWEALTH**

## KEEP IN THE CONVERSATION

- [www.thercs.org](http://www.thercs.org)
- [/thercs](https://www.facebook.com/thercs)
- [@TheRCSLondon](https://twitter.com/TheRCSLondon)
- [Linkedin.com](https://www.linkedin.com/company/thercs)

# 1 FOR 7 BILLION

**Ben Donaldson** is Head of Campaigns at the United Nations Association – UK and on the steering committee of the 1 for 7 Billion campaign, a global campaign committed to getting the best UN Secretary-General.



Three years ago when we started the 1 for 7 Billion campaign for a fair, open and inclusive process to select the UN's leader, many were skeptical. There was not, and never had been, even the basics of a recruitment process. No job advertisement. No timetable. No selection criteria, and little accountability or transparency in the vetting process.

This suited the powerful states that could dominate the Security Council, where recommendations on candidates are made, but it hardly lent itself to recruiting a highly-qualified leader capable of addressing the defining global problems of our time. And it didn't look good either. The (lack of) process was a significant drain on the UN's credibility, stunting the Organisation and its leader irrespective of performance.

Over the next two years we built a broad coalition of NGOs and states. The results? A landmark decision in September 2015 providing the foundations of a recruitment process, including candidate hearings with questions from states and civil society in the General Assembly.

For the UN this was massive. Personalities competed to communicate aspirational visions for the Organisation. Candidates even went head to head at UNA-UK's hustings events. UN watchers and member states were pinching themselves – it just isn't normal to see the spotlight given to creative debate on the Organisation's future.

Following the hearings, closed deliberations began in the Security Council. But it wasn't quite business as usual. The secret straw polls were leaked and widely publicised.

Major powers had to weigh up the cost of ignoring the wider UN membership and public opinion. This time, putting politics above merit had consequences.

In October, earlier than expected, the Security Council reached consensus on Antonio Guterres, with US ambassador Samantha Power linking the outcome to the new process, saying his 'breakthrough' moment had come when he put in a strong performance at his Assembly hearing.

The reforms helped avert the type of 'race to the bottom' scenario we've seen in the past and facilitated the appointment of an experienced candidate, widely seen as a strong choice and with a good track record on gender equality.

## What next?

Having come through this process, Mr Guterres has greater legitimacy and mandate – much needed if he is to steer the UN's ambitious agreements on development and climate change. More pressing though will be fresh energy to improve big-power relations and with it the UN's ability to address conflict and humanitarian situations.

Capacity-wise we hope to see the proceeds also, as transparency and fairness are insisted upon for other senior appointments, both in the UN system and beyond.

Finally, there is the UN's credibility. In a time of Brexit and Trump, with policy makers in many parts of the world questioning collective action in favour of narrow self-interest, international institutions can't afford to look bad. The rules-based international system, that supports the vulnerable and that has brought stability and prosperity to many, is under threat. It is only as effective as the trust placed in it by peoples and governments and we must all do our bit to sustain it.

 **MORE INFORMATION**  
[www.1for7billion.org](http://www.1for7billion.org)  
[www.una.org.uk](http://www.una.org.uk)

# A RELEVANT COMMONWEALTH

**Baroness Anelay** was appointed Minister of State for the Commonwealth and the UN at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in July 2016. She is a Conservative member of the House of Lords.



At a time of unprecedented global challenges, the Commonwealth matters more than ever. It represents a quarter of the world's population, living in the tiniest islands and the largest countries on earth. Its shared values and common purpose, enshrined in the Commonwealth Charter, provide a strong foundation on which to build consensus on the issues that matter most in today's world. I was delighted when the Prime Minister appointed me as Minister for the Commonwealth in July because I see this as a pivotal time in the organisation's history. A time for it to step up and make a real difference.

The Commonwealth's soft power network is one of its most important assets. I believe it could bring them to bear in tackling some of the world's greatest challenges, from climate change and the protection of the environment to the threat posed by violent extremism as well as the global economy. The strong statement on climate change adopted by Heads of Government at CHOGM 2015, on the eve of the COP21 summit in Paris, is a good example of where the Commonwealth can encourage consensus on international issues. I want to see it doing even more.

Since July, I have already travelled to Jamaica, Barbados and Sri Lanka, and consulted a range of experts in Commonwealth affairs. It is clear that the organisation has enormous potential but also that reform is needed if it is to meet 21st century challenges. I know Secretary-General Patricia Scotland shares

this view. I welcome her early instigation of a reform process to modernise and revitalise the Commonwealth Secretariat, and ensure that the focus is firmly on where it can add real and distinctive value: from tackling inequality to protecting the environment; from disaster risk planning to anti-corruption initiatives.

Trade is another area where member states do more together. Our common language and legal systems contribute to the 'Commonwealth effect', meaning that trade is 19% cheaper within the organisation than outside it. We see a huge opportunity to increase co-operation, build networks, break down trade barriers and improve trading environments. We will take this forward in March next year when the UK co-hosts with Malta the first ever meeting of Commonwealth Trade Ministers.

The UK also looks forward to hosting the next CHOGM in 2018. Work has already begun to identify the policy priorities which will best support development and the Commonwealth's core values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. We are consulting all our Commonwealth partners to ensure that all 52 voices are heard as we develop our planning for this pivotal meeting.

We live in an increasingly networked world. A plethora of institutions, organisations and groups compete for attention and support. It is therefore crucial that the Commonwealth focuses on its core ambition, as enshrined in the Charter: to create 'a Commonwealth that has a global relevance and profile'. I believe that remains a worthy ambition. Working together as member states, I also believe it is achievable.

 **MORE INFORMATION**  
[bit.ly/BaronessAnelay](http://bit.ly/BaronessAnelay)

# THE MALDIVES



**Trinanjan Radhakrishnan** is a Programme Officer (Human Rights Advocacy) at Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI), New Delhi. His particular interest and expertise is in human rights, culture and conflict, transitional justice and post-conflict democratisation, in Sri Lanka, Maldives and South Asia.



The Maldives' departure from the Commonwealth leaves no doubt that the government is not committed to upholding the values of democracy and respect for human rights. In a classic case of playground politics, the Government of the Maldives chose to quit before it could be suspended from the Commonwealth.

Since the beginning of this year the Commonwealth has been deeply concerned with the developments in the Maldives. The Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG), tasked with addressing serious or persistent violations of

Commonwealth political values, met three times over the course of the year to discuss the deteriorating standards of democracy and human rights in the country. The group of ministers, representing the geographical span of the Commonwealth, met in February to agree upon six priority areas for improving the country's democratic quotient.

Its subsequent meetings in April and September found no improvements in the priority areas. Against the clamour for action by human rights organisations, the CMAG handed another six months to the Government of the Maldives to demonstrate its commitment to Commonwealth values. Thus the spectre of suspension loomed over the Maldives as the next CMAG meeting approached in March 2017, simply because the promised progress was far from being achieved.

The UN's senior advisor on political affairs, Tamrat Samuels, could not resolve the protracted crisis between the government and the opposition over the summer. After

his second visit in July, he left the Maldives with no sign of meaningful progress. The Commonwealth's Special Envoy, Willy Mutunga, also lamented over the breakdown of political and constitutional administration in the Maldives. But the Government of the Maldives remained unmoved.

In August 2016, the Maldivian Parliament – where President Abdulla Yameen's Progressive Party of Maldives commands a majority – passed a law restricting protests and gatherings to designated areas. It then went a step further by amending the Political Parties Act which drastically reduced the number of registered members of political parties by making fingerprint re-registration mandatory. In an archipelago geography with scattered islands, this has proved to be a herculean task. To tighten the chokehold, the government has not released state-sanctioned funds for political parties and has therefore further restricted opposition parties' efforts for fingerprint registrations. In a country where 3,000 registrations are required to form a political party, the number of parties has thus reduced from 16 to 6. Interestingly, this amendment did not inconvenience the ruling party.

However, the death knell for democratic freedoms sounded when the Maldivian Parliament passed the Defamation Act. Despite being de-criminalised in 2009, the Act reintroduced libel as a criminal act and imposed hefty penalties on a wide range of issues. In contravention of Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which the Maldives has signed and ratified, the Act has elicited widespread condemnation from the international community and civil society groups across the world.

Ironically, the law was touted as a measure to secure human rights by protecting individuals from their reputation being tarnished. In reality, it is a straitjacket against the fundamental democratic rights of its citizens. Indeed, when viewed through a crooked lens, it allows the government to make fallacious claims that under Mr Yameen's presidency, 69 legislations were passed 'specifically designed to promote human rights, strengthen democratic governance, and to reinforce the separation of powers'.



State-led intimidation of journalists for participating in the Al-Jazeera documentary exposing widespread corruption in the highest echelons of the administration; former president Mohamed Nasheed's trial and conviction with total disregard for established legal procedures and against international standards of fair trial; the arrest of political leaders under the country's anti-terror laws; these are merely a few stark instances and do not depict the entire breadth of the grievous violations in the Maldives. However they certainly raise doubts over the government's claims of being treated 'unjustly and unfairly' by the Commonwealth.

The Maldives, quitting the Commonwealth should be seen as a smokescreen to prevent further scrutiny and deter the possibility of suspension. But despite its departure, the Maldives cannot discharge its international obligations and its commitment to democracy and rule of law. Although the Commonwealth's leverage may have ceased for now, UN and bilateral diplomatic channels must continue their pressure on the government to reverse the steady slide towards the authoritarianism of its past.

**MORE INFORMATION**  
 @trinanjan\_  
 CHRI Submission to the Commonwealth  
 Ministerial Action Group on Maldives  
[bit.ly/MaldivesSubmission](http://bit.ly/MaldivesSubmission)



# THE QUEEN'S COMMONWEALTH CANOPY ONE YEAR ON

On 15th November, Commonwealth dignitaries and representatives of the forestry, academic and corporate sectors joined Her Majesty The Queen at Buckingham Palace to celebrate the one year anniversary of The Queen's Commonwealth Canopy (QCC).

↑ **The Central Forest Reserve, St Christopher (Kitts) and Nevis**

The reception was attended by high-profile guests, including Sir David Attenborough; the UK Secretary of State for Foreign & Commonwealth Affairs, the Rt. Hon. Boris Johnson MP and the Deputy Prime Minister of Saint Kitts and Nevis, the Hon. Shawn Richards.

From its launch at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Malta in November 2015, with just seven committed countries and three projects dedicated to the initiative, the QCC has received commitment from 20 countries, with 38 projects now dedicated to this pan-Commonwealth project just one year on.

From Antigua and Barbuda to Zambia, all five Commonwealth regions are now represented in the QCC, with dedications as diverse in nature and size as the Commonwealth family itself.

Some projects, while small in scale as the countries that made them, are significant through their very dedication. Singapore boldly dedicated six, precious hectares of its first and only UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Singapore Botanical Gardens, to the QCC, while Mauritius committed the oldest botanical garden in the Southern Hemisphere, the 37ha Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam Botanical Garden, as one of its five dedications. The Commonwealth's Chair in Office, Malta, will be revitalising a small natural woodland with the local Scouts movement and reintroducing locally extinct flora such as the Moon Spider Orchid, while Fiji has committed the 92 hectare Colo-i-Suva Forest Park, which contains many tree species that are critical to the survival of the endemic Fiji Tree Frog.

Other projects are as vast in scale and vision as the countries themselves. Australia has committed to planting 20 million trees by 2020 to re-establish green corridors and urban forests on public and private land, and Canada has dedicated the 6.4 million hectare Great Bear Rainforest, an iconic and globally significant tract of forest along the central and north coast of British Columbia, which is home to a quarter of the earth's temperate rainforest and 26 separate First Nations. St Christopher (Kitts) and Nevis, has committed the Central Forest Reserve





National Park, which consists of the entire area of St. Kitts that sits above the 1,000 foot contour, some 25% of the total land area of the island, while the United Kingdom has dedicated the National Forest, an area of 200 square miles covering parts of Derbyshire, Leicestershire and Staffordshire.

As an alternative to dedicating existing forests to the QCC and conserving them for future generations, a number of countries have established programmes within their local communities to plant new trees. The Seychelles has created a programme to plant 20,000 trees within the next two years to help restore and rehabilitate degraded forest areas which have resulted from numerous forest fires and the impact of invasive alien species. Namibia's N/a'an ku sê Foundation has established, and dedicated, the N/a'an ku sê Forest Conservation Revegetation Project, which seeks to collect and propagate indigenous seedlings in a nursery using recycled water, before planting the seedlings to reverse long term land degradation and restore indigenous forests.

Following the success of the Buckingham Palace Reception, the QCC Management Committee is now working towards securing commitment to the initiative from the remaining 32 Commonwealth members. A high-profile presence at the Commonwealth Forestry Conference, to be held in India in April 2017, will contribute significantly to this goal.

It is anticipated that, by the next Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, all 52 members of the Commonwealth family will have committed to this visionary project to conserve our

forests for future generations and to honour The Queen's leadership of the Commonwealth for over six decades. The next CHOGM will be held in the United Kingdom in 2018.

#### MORE INFORMATION

The QCC is led by the Royal Commonwealth Society, in partnership with the NGO, Cool Earth, and the Commonwealth Forestry Association. [www.queenscommonwealthcanopy.org](http://www.queenscommonwealthcanopy.org)

← HM the Queen with Sir David Attenborough and Lalatiana Accouche, Principle Counsellor of the High Commission of the Seychelles

↖ Locally extinct Moon Spider Orchid to be reintroduced in Malta. © Amata Ciro

↑ Endemic Fiji Tree Frog

“

*Preserving the world's green corridors, forests, jungles and botanic gardens is the simplest and most effective way to keep breathing life into planet earth. Over my nine decades, I have witnessed the devastating effect of the destruction of our forests and disregard for the importance of trees. I do believe that we have an obligation to nurture and replenish our natural environment for the benefit of our children and grandchildren. I am immensely grateful to Your Majesty for showing great leadership by putting your name to this initiative. I am also pleased to see so many governments here tonight responding to the call. We all have a role to play. And, in your 90th year Your Majesty, we are fortunate that you are still thinking about the future and how to make this a better world.*”

Sir David Attenborough



THE QUEEN'S  
COMMONWEALTH ESSAY COMPETITION 2016

# A COMMONWEALTH OF TALENT

October saw the culmination of The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition 2016, the Royal Commonwealth Society's flagship programme. Thousands of young people took part, expressing their views on *An Inclusive Commonwealth*.

The Commonwealth is home to 52 countries, 2.2 billion people, and it would seem, a wealth of young talent waiting for an outlet. The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition 2016 provided this necessary platform for the voice of the young Commonwealth to be heard, read and enjoyed by individuals across the family of nations.

The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition is the Royal Commonwealth Society's flagship programme and has been running since 1883. This year the competition saw the largest and most diverse body of entries to date. Entries, which were written in a variety of forms, focused on *An Inclusive Commonwealth*, the 2016 theme for the Commonwealth.

Nearly every Commonwealth country took part in the competition, with young people from all walks of life putting pen to paper and fingers to keyboards to express their views on equality, diversity, community, tolerance and inclusivity. Their pieces

tackled topics such as 'Let them in', 'My ideal community' and 'Are we really so different?'

Approximately 13,500 young people entered their pieces before the competition deadline of 1 May 2016. Once the competition closed, 133 volunteer judges set to work reading their allocation of essays. Each judge selected a top gold essay, which was passed to the esteemed Final Panel of Judges who met in August to decide the pan-Commonwealth winners. It was a difficult choice for the writers, academics and professionals who made up the Panel, but ultimately, Inessa Rajah, Esther Mungalaba, Gauri Kumar and Tan Wan Gee were selected as Winners and Runners-up in their respective categories.

All of the Winners and Runners-up were invited to London for a week-long series of educational and cultural activities, culminating in a special Award Ceremony at Buckingham Palace, attended by HRH the Duchess of Cornwall. Though Inessa was unfortunately unable to join her fellow winners due to her examination timetable, Winners' Week was a huge success.

As the Essay Competition continues to grow from year to year, the talent of the young Commonwealth is given the platform it deserves. The RCS is proud of all of the young people who take part, and encourages all Commonwealth citizens and residents aged 18 and under to voice their thoughts on the theme, *A Commonwealth for Peace*, in 2017.

“

*We're thrilled to be sponsoring The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition once again. We were astounded by the exceptional standard of entries in last year's competition and are looking forward to celebrating exciting new work and to finding new voices from across the Commonwealth in 2017.*”

Rod Smith, Managing Director of Education at Cambridge University Press



### Winners' Week

The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition 2016 culminated in Winners' Week, which took place from 24-27 October. During this week, Gauri, Esther and Wan Gee visited the city, exploring, learning, and sharing their work with a variety of audiences.

Day one of Winners' Week saw the group take a boat tour on the Thames, London's central river, followed by a writing workshop facilitated by educational author Alison Milford. Alison has delivered this workshop for a number of years, and it continues to be a popular and bonding element of the week.

Monday afternoon brought with it a recording session at Marlborough House, home of the Commonwealth Secretariat. These recordings can be viewed on the RCS website. As it was Zambia's National Day, the group was treated to a view of Esther's home flag flown proudly on the roof of Marlborough House.

Day Two of Winners' Week saw a trip to the British Library, a tour of the Evening Standard offices (one of London's popular newspapers) and a visit to the Houses of Parliament with Mark Williams MP. Mr Williams is a former teacher and co-chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Global Education for All, making his reputation and experience hugely relevant to the winners.

The highlight of the week, however, was undoubtedly Day Three, which saw the group visit Westminster Abbey (the location of the annual Commonwealth Service) and the special Award Ceremony at Buckingham Palace in the presence of

HRH The Duchess of Cornwall. At the Ceremony, Gauri, Esther and Wan Gee were presented with signed certificates and pens commemorating their achievement in the competition. The day concluded with a formal dinner, provided by the High Commission of Singapore and attended by Deputy High Commissioner Weiwen Chia.

The final day of Winners' Week consisted of a trip to Cambridge, organised and facilitated by the competition's sponsors, Cambridge University Press. After a visit to the Press Museum and a trip along the River Cam in a punt, the group visited the Royal Commonwealth Society Archives in the Cambridge University Library. Here, they saw treasures from India, Zambia and Singapore, and explored their heritage through historical artefacts.

“

*It was amazing to be able to take in such incredible sights, and be brought to places which I would never have dared dream I would be able to go to... Winner's Week was an experience that will remain in my heart and my memory forever, and will always be an experience extremely dear to me.*”

Tan Wan Gee, Junior Runner-up

Winners' Week continues to be a highlight of the competition, allowing the Winners and Runners-up to learn about literature and culture past and present as a reward for their skill in writing.

↑ Gauri, Wan Gee and Esther were treated to a tour of Marlborough House, the Commonwealth Secretariat headquarters, during Winners' Week 2016.

↖ Wan Gee, Esther and Gauri met HRH The Duchess of Cornwall at a special Award Ceremony at Buckingham Palace in recognition of their success in the competition.

 **MORE INFORMATION**  
 [bit.ly/EssayCompResult2016](http://bit.ly/EssayCompResult2016)



Extract from Senior Winner



**Inessa Rajah's Story Dr. Congo-man**

'...I live in a democratic South Africa. A country praised for its diversity, famous for its ability to mend the wounds of the past with tolerance. The rainbow nation. We flaunt Madiba's name on our chest like it is our right. And then – this.

I am ashamed that I do not know the car guard's name. All I know is the bright smiling face, the colour of dark chocolate, and the strong hands that help my mother with her shopping bags every Friday. All I know is the kind manner in which he bends to greet Bobby – seriously, like he is a man – and how, when he high-fives him, Bobby giggles with glee. My mother – a studious,

protective woman – does not so much as blink during these interactions. She trusts this car guard – instinctively, as if his goodness exudes from his skin. None of us know his name. I like to think it is because of the language barrier, but I am not delusional. I do not know his name because I have never asked what it is. Bobby has, but the man did not seem to understand the question. I have never heard him speak English. I don't even know if he really is Congolese or if I merely assumed this to be so. He would always accept the change my mother handed him with a sincere "Merci beaucoup", hands clasped over the few, loose coins as if he were praying...'

Extract from Junior Winner



**Gauri Kumar's Untitled Essay**

'...Can you love someone you cannot understand?

Language barriers are more than they seem, as anyone who has ever tried to relate to their relatives can attest to. Words are the foundations of culture, and when you can't use them, your validity as a 'true' member of your country is a house made of straws, painstaking to create and all too easy to break. Explaining a word which has no equivalent in English is akin to describing colours to the blind or music to the deaf. Idioms and metaphors are crucial to the spoken word, but nonsensical

to the non-speaker. Even learning something as a third language could leave you rather clueless to colloquial terms and slang. This marks a significant difference between you, the foreigner, and the authentic locals. Portmanteaus and puns are lost on a foreigner. Hearing your relatives crack jokes in a distant language, only to be unable to explain the punchline when you ask them to translate is a common occurrence in not-quite bilingual families. There is an (ironically) unspoken divide between you and your family when their childhoods centred around an alphabet which looks like gibberish to you...'

→ Winners' Week brought with it trips to the Houses of Parliament and the RCS archives at Cambridge University Library



“

*It was eye opening. And I feel it was everything it was ever organised to be: an experience that inspires and encourages and honours young aspiring writers.”*

Esther Mungalaba, Senior Runner-up

“

*I can safely say that it was the best week of my life, and I thoroughly enjoyed every second.”*

Gauri Kumar, Junior Winner

Extract from Senior Runner-up



**Esther Mungalaba’s Essay Let Them In**

‘...Yes, the plight of most of the migrants is a dire one. Almost literally stuck between the devil and the deep blue sea, a trip across the Mediterranean in unsafe rubber dinghies and tiny fishing boats becomes the far better evil for many of these men and women. Despite the fact that once they cross those treacherous waters into foreign land they become nameless and faceless numbers on a “Europe’s Migrant Crisis” statistics sheet, these people leave all and sail on anyway. Because anything, it would seem, is better than the thick despondency that now enshrouds the places they once called home...

But it would be extremely unfair to go on and on about the migrants and ignore the overwhelming position that the host countries have been forced into. The entire world is generally of the opinion that Europe should just let the migrants in. But I found this difficult to agree with because to me it felt like everyone was overlooking how hard it actually is to just let people in. Many of the countries that initially reacted to this crisis by increasing border security and putting up obstacles to block the entrance of the migrants were quickly condemned by the global community...’

Extract from Junior Runner-up



**Tan Wan-Gee’s poem Dear Santa**

‘All we want for Christmas,/is equality./  
Equality/for those deemed inferior,/for those deemed unworthy,/for those deemed shameful,/for those deemed loathsome,/just because they do not match society’s expectations./Difference is a/mere/construct/of our intolerance/and/fear/of what we do not find/familiar./At the end of the day,/we all share/the same blood/the same flesh/the same origins,/the same

term of/human./Are we really that different after all?...

...All we want for Christmas,/is equality. /Not because difference is something /associated with shame,/but because/it is our right/ to be treated equally./It is this right/that empowers us to call for change./For true/equality./For liberation,/because we aren’t so /different/after all.’



**The Queen’s Commonwealth Essay Competition 2017: A Commonwealth for Peace**

The 2017 essay competition is now open for submissions. This year’s theme explores *A Commonwealth for Peace*, building on the 2016 theme and highlighting the principles of international peace and security, outlined in the Commonwealth Charter. Details of the competition can be found at [thercs.org/youth/competitions](http://thercs.org/youth/competitions).

If you are interested in being a judge for the 2017 competition, email [education@thercs.org](mailto:education@thercs.org) for details.

# BREXIT

## THE DIPLOMATIC DEBATE

While 'Brexit' continues to dominate the debate in the UK, many other Commonwealth governments are also discussing preparations for globally significant political realignment.



“  
*Optimism,  
collaboration  
and realism*  
”

For at least the next two and a half years nothing is likely to be more pressing on the political agenda in the UK than its exit from the European Union (EU).

The formal process to negotiate a withdrawal from the EU has already been thrown into further complexity by an ongoing legal struggle over whether it is the Government or Parliament that can trigger the process to leave. As part of the RCS' ongoing 'Commonwealth Conversation' on 'Brexit' it has hosted a number of discussions for Commonwealth and non-Commonwealth diplomats.

In September, Sir Andrew Cahn, former CEO of UK Trade and Investment, opened an RCS roundtable discussion for High Commissioners by arguing that the UK would need its friends in the Commonwealth to support it through a lengthy process of negotiation. These sentiments were supported by Commonwealth diplomats from outside the UK. One called for 'optimism, collaboration and realism' and urged fellow Commonwealth countries to be optimistic about new opportunities and to support the UK, both of which were in their own interests as much as Britain's.

Elements of these discussions were mirrored in a debate convened by the RCS for London-based Ambassadors. This provided an opportunity to update non-Commonwealth countries on Commonwealth developments. It also gave a guest High Commissioner a platform to warn attending European Ambassadors that any attempts by the EU to 'punish' the UK for its decision in

Brexit negotiations would not be well received by other allies. Assurances were swiftly made by one EU Ambassador that their country had no intention of following such a course of action.

Unsurprisingly, Commonwealth influence in the EU and post-Brexit trade have remained salient features of diplomatic debate. Without the UK as an allied influence it is the concern of some that EU development assistance may be targeted away from Commonwealth countries. This was both highlighted by our expert contributors in the September edition of *Commonwealth Voices* and a question reiterated by the diplomatic community.

Meanwhile bilateral trade agreements are seen as the big opportunity for Commonwealth countries. Some Commonwealth diplomats have expressed hopes that the UK will re-join efforts to support free trade as an independent member of the World Trade Organisation, an influence described by one High Commissioner as 'much missed'. However, the UK should not take Commonwealth trade for granted. A recent trip to India by Prime Minister Theresa May was accompanied by calls for a more liberalised visa regime for Indians in return for a favourable trade deal.

The Commonwealth has a stake in the foreign relations of all of its member states, but the UK's withdrawal from the EU is one of the most seismic foreign policy changes for any member in recent times. As one Commonwealth High Commissioner concluded at the RCS roundtable, there is an advantage to be had in allied nations presenting a united front in articulating collective concerns and negotiating positions for co-operation with the UK. His co-Chair urged fellow Commonwealth diplomats to move beyond debate and position themselves ready to tackle the issues raised by Brexit. We certainly hope that Commonwealth governments take up this call.

 **MORE INFORMATION**  
[www.thercs.org/our-work/events/  
brexit-high-commissioners-round-table](http://www.thercs.org/our-work/events/brexit-high-commissioners-round-table)

# UNLOCKING VISA REFORM

This year, the RCS has taken its policy work in a new direction, looking at improving visa access. Early research has focused on Indian and South African visitors to the UK.



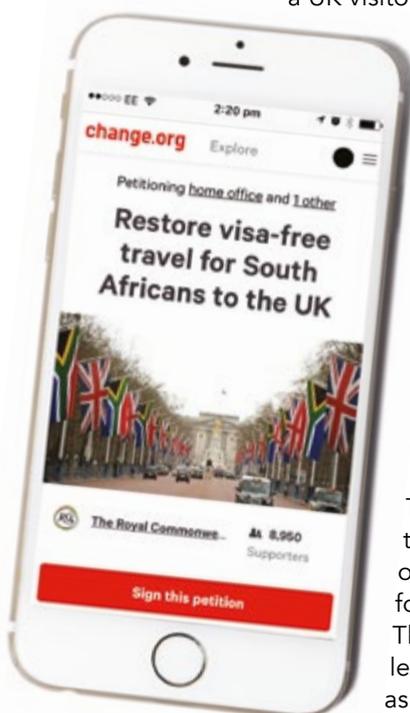
## South Africa campaign

In November, the RCS and its partners launched a new campaign to restore visa-free travel for South African visitors to the UK.

Part of the campaign is a public petition through Change.org. Within three weeks there were over 8,500 signatures with a target of 10,000 within sight. The campaign was covered by a number of South African media outlets such as SABC and over 250 signatures were also gathered from Springbok supporters during the recent England vs South Africa rugby match at Twickenham in London.

Since 2008, South Africans have needed a UK visitor visa. This has caused great pressure on reuniting families and friends as a six-month visa now costs £87 (1,477 ZAR). A knock-on effect has seen the number of visitors to the UK drop by a third from 351,000 to 231,000 over the last decade. In 2015, these visitors spent £246m – had the UK retained its 2006 market share it would have meant an extra £128m p.a. to the UK economy and an extra 2,370 tourism-related jobs.

These signatures should signal to both Governments the mood of the public and the desire for a return of visa-free travel. The campaign is supported by leaders across professions such as anti-apartheid campaigner



Lord Peter Hain and South Africa's Shadow Home Affairs Minister, Haniff Hoosen MP.

Next year presents an opportunity as the UK-SA Bilateral Forum takes place in South Africa and we will campaign to ensure this issue is high on the agenda. Play a part by signing the petition and spreading the word to your South African friends.

## India visa report update

On the back of the RCS' latest report, *A Passage from India*, which called for a cheaper UK visitor visa for Indian nationals in line with Chinese visitors, the RCS proceeded to raise further support with the publication of a letter in the Daily Telegraph, signed by over 50 individuals backing its recommendation.

The original support, which came from companies such as British Airways, Heathrow Airport, Emirates, and Virgin Atlantic, was built on to include leaders from Tata Consultancy Services, Air India, the Taj Hotel Group, professors from the University of Delhi and the Leeds Business School as well as numerous British Parliamentarians. A copy was sent to the UK's Immigration Minister to highlight the growing calls for reform.

In November, the UK's new Prime Minister, Theresa May, visited India where visa issues were in the media, particularly those for students. Lord Bilimoria, one of the signatories of our letter, told a leading British political TV show: "PM Modi came [to the UK] within a month after [the Chinese Premier] – no such concession for India... And now here we are – this was an ideal opportunity for the Prime Minister to say: 'Here in India, you can have exactly the same as we're offering China.'"

Next year is the UK-India Year of Culture with its programme of activities; introducing a cheaper visa will help to boost its aims. The Society will continue its campaign, which will help the 1.4m strong Indian community in the UK and will stimulate more business trips creating increased revenue and jobs for the British economy.

**MORE INFORMATION**  
[Change.org/p/home-office-restore-visa-free-travel-for-south-africans-to-the-uk](https://change.org/p/home-office-restore-visa-free-travel-for-south-africans-to-the-uk)

# SHAKESPEARE AND THE COMMONWEALTH

This year marks the 400th anniversary of William Shakespeare's death. His work and influence have reached all parts of the globe since then, both in the printed word and on the stage. His work has been translated into many languages and there is now such a phenomenon as 'global Shakespeare'.

Originally an export from Britain, many countries have made him their own. As the scholar Sonia Massai writes Shakespeare is 'the world's most famous 'local' playwright, speaking to world audiences and readers in their own languages and through local theatrical traditions and conventions'. Whether you have had too much of Shakespeare or not enough this year, here are some quotations, facts and observations about him and his work that have a Commonwealth focus:

'The word 'commonwealth' is used 28 times in Shakespeare's plays.

Shakespeare was born in 1564 on 23rd April and died in 1616 on 23rd April, St. George's Day, probably.

Every Commonwealth country was visited during The Globe theatre's Globe to Globe two year tour of possibly Shakespeare's most famous play, *Hamlet*. In fact the play toured to every country in the world. They set off on 23rd April 2014. Have a look at [globetoglobehamlet.culturalspot.org](http://globetoglobehamlet.culturalspot.org) to see photos and footage of the performances in Nauru, Tuvalu, Rwanda and Cyprus.

Fact or fiction? Was *Hamlet* performed by English sailors off the coast of Sierra Leone in 1607? An independent transcript exists of an entry in the journal of the ship's captain, William Keeling, detailing the production in honour of an important guest. Another transcript records a second performance of *Hamlet* off the coast of East Africa this time, in 1608. This performance was to keep those on board 'from idleness and unlawful games or sleep' as food and water were in short supply and the ship stationary. The original journal no longer exists and scholars have questioned whether the transcripts are genuine, but it is an intriguing thought, nonetheless.

↓ *Twelfth Night* from the Globe to Globe Festival 2012. Photographer: Simon Annand

↘ *All's Well that Ends Well* from the Globe to Globe Festival 2012. Photographer: Ellie Kurttz



The first play put on at Prasanna Kumar Tagore's Hindu Theatre in Kolkata in 1831 was *Julius Caesar*, part of what Poonam Trivedi of the University of Delhi calls the 'long history of intercultural engagement' that the performance of Shakespeare forms. Now it is likely that there are more film versions of Shakespeare's plays in Indian cinema than anywhere else in the world.

A copy of Shakespeare's plays was disguised with Indian religious pictures and passed around some of the ANC prisoners on Robben Island in South Africa. Nelson Mandela marked, signed and dated (16.12.79) his favourite lines. They are from *Julius Caesar* when Caesar says:

*'Cowards die many times before their deaths,  
The valiant never taste of death but once.  
Of all the wonders that I yet have heard,  
It seems to me most strange that men  
should fear,  
Seeing that death, a necessary end,  
Will come when it will come.'*

*Julius Caesar* was translated into Swahili by the first president of Tanzania, Julius Nyerere.

2012: The Globe to Globe Festival hosted 37 productions of Shakespeare's plays in 37 different languages over a 6 week period at The Globe theatre in London. They included the first Shona translation of a Shakespeare play, *Vakomana Vaviri ve Zimbabwe (The Two Gentlemen of Verona)*, *Troilus and Cressida* performed in Maori, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* in Swahili, *Twelfth Night* in Hindi, *Othello* in English Hip hop, *All's Well that Ends Well* in Gujarati and *The Taming of the Shrew* in Urdu.

Look out for 'Rahm' the Pakistani drama-thriller based on Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* which is being released soon.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Vicki Wienand is a freelance publisher, writer and teacher. She is Series Editor of the highly successful Cambridge School Shakespeare series published by Cambridge University Press. She has chaired the Senior and Junior Judging Panels of the Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition for three years.

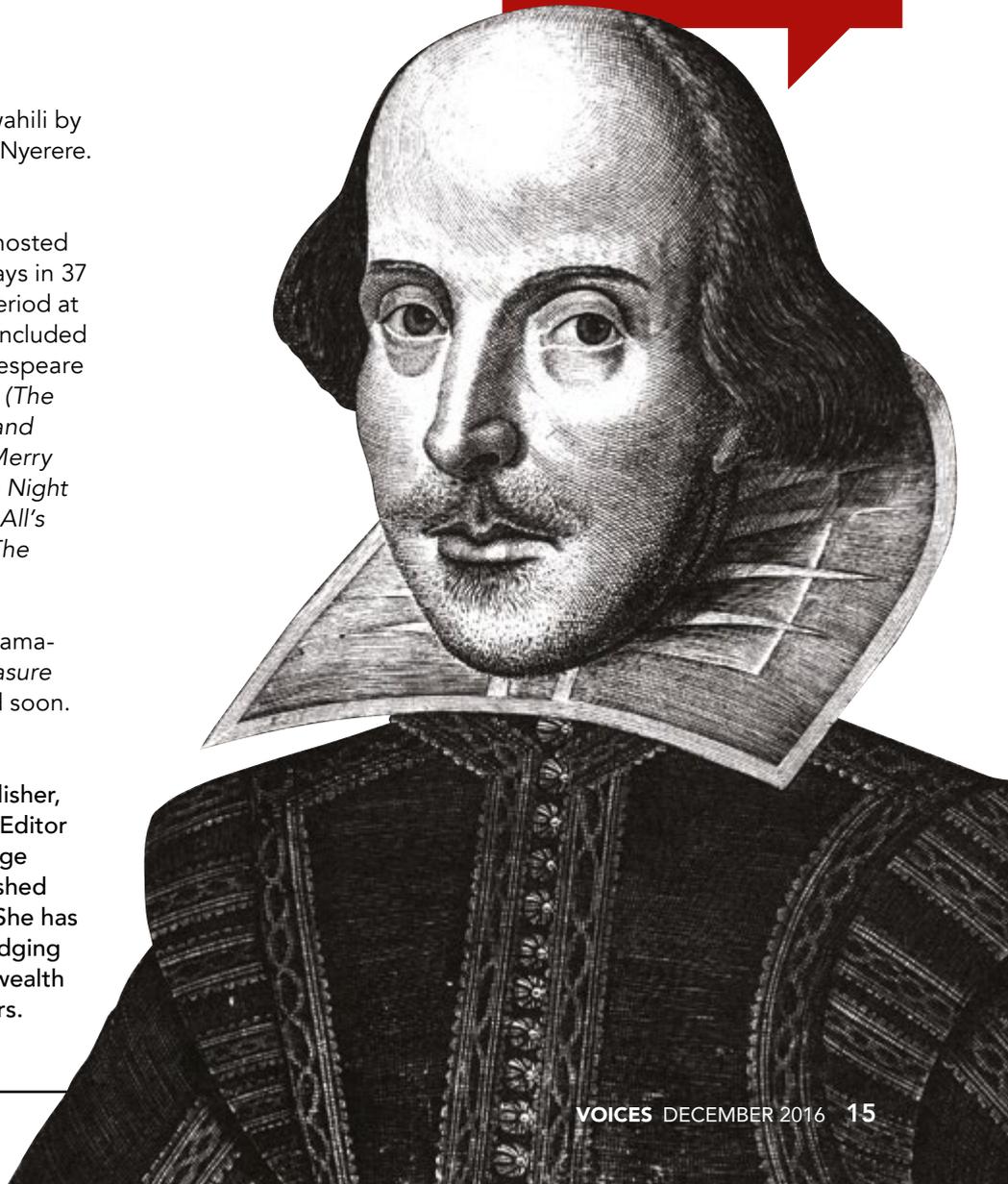
**28** The word 'commonwealth' is used 28 times in Shakespeare's plays, below are some examples:

*'I come to talk of  
commonwealth affairs'*  
says the Duke of Gloucester  
in *Henry IV, Part II*

*'Here comes a member  
of the commonwealth'*  
says Boyet in  
*Love's Labours Lost*

*'Hear him debate of  
commonwealth affairs'*  
says the Archbishop of  
Canterbury in *Henry V*

*'While I was busy  
for the commonwealth'*  
says the Lord Chief Justice  
in *Henry IV, Part II*



# YOUTH FOR THE FUTURE

A two-day youth assembly was held as an integral part of the RCS International Meeting and was attended by young people representing RCS overseas branches and Associate Fellows.

Attendees travelled from all five regions of the Commonwealth and represented a varied mix of young Commonwealth citizens, many of whom are actively involved in youth development work in their community. The meeting was designed to give young adults their own space to make recommendations concerning how the RCS can develop and increase its engagement with young people. It also provided an opportunity for them to learn about the Commonwealth, strengthen their connections with the RCS international family, build their networks and learn new skills. Trustee and board member John Loughton facilitated the programme, sharing his personal experiences as a young leader and social entrepreneur.

The first day, hosted by the High Commission of Zambia, had a focus on

learning more about the Commonwealth and sharing regional experiences and priorities and discussing how young people can make change in the Commonwealth. Opened by the High Commissioner, HE Muyeba Chikonde, and RCS Director, Michael Lake, the day included panel and group discussions to share experiences of different forms of action for change and how it is possible to use different networks in the Commonwealth.

'It was great to be amongst different youth ambassadors that are part of the RCS Network, who all shared a strong desire to make a positive change through their social action projects in their respective countries'. Hamza Patel, Salford Three Faiths Forum and British Council Active Citizen.

“  
*Thank you for all your kindness and love. It felt like I was with my family. I am pleased to be associated with the amazing team at the RCS.*”

**Muhammad Ahmad, Associate Fellow**

On the second day, hosted at the Maltese High Commission, the focus shifted to skills-building and exploring youth leadership. Michael Sani from Bite the Ballot gave an inspirational talk about engaging in democracy, followed

→ Delegates discuss regional priorities for youth





*“The RCS international youth gathering was a critical event demonstrating the important role that we as an organisation see youth playing in driving change. The Commonwealth is a young community, with the majority of its peoples being below the age of 30 – therefore it was a fitting response that we facilitated the convening of dynamic citizens leading grassroots change globally.*

*I was pleased to see a range of clear and ambitious outcomes developed and presented to the wider RCS meeting on how we better embed youth leadership in our internal structures, how local and national RCS branches can benefit from and aid their nearby young leaders, and also how we maximise the exciting energy of over 1,000 RCS Associate Fellows. As our most famous Commonwealth leader Nelson Mandela said, ‘it falls upon a generation to be great’. It is now upon us as an international network to ensure our actions live up to the expectations of my generations’ dream and ensure the future of the Commonwealth is sound.”*

**John Loughton, RCS Board Member and Trustee**

by an interactive session on how to make a difference and how perseverance, positivity and developing resilience are vital to achieving goals. Claudine Beaumont, from Google, led a workshop on social media and how to use it as an effective tool for youth development, and Queen’s Young Leader and Associate Fellow PJ Cole spoke about the power of networks and the importance of mentorship. The meeting concluded with the development of a set of recommendations.

“*It was inspiring to learn what engaged young people are doing around the Commonwealth and have the opportunity to learn from their experiences.*”

**Jenny Stodola, Vice-Chair Youth RCS Canada & Associate Fellow**

At the main International Meeting, five youth delegates presented the recommendations in an inter-generational discussion with members of RCS Branches. The most important areas were: youth engagement, networking and capacity building. Recommended strategies included engaging with Associate Fellows, Commonwealth scholars, local youth and student groups and

professional associations, and offering study tours, intra-RCS youth exchanges and model CHOGMs. For their part, they planned to engage future generations by lobbying for greater education about the Commonwealth in schools.

Feedback has shown this was an overwhelmingly positive experience for everyone. The Royal Commonwealth Society intends to further consolidate its youth networks as a result of the meeting in order to empower young people in the Commonwealth and help them make change in their communities.

↓ **Panel discussion: ‘Making change in the Commonwealth’**



# BRINGING THE FAMILY TOGETHER

Over 80 RCS representatives from 33 branches around the world came to London for a three-day meeting on 5-7 October – the first RCS International Branches Meeting for five years.

Previously scheduled every two years, the 2016 meeting was considered a great success and hopes were expressed of resuming both the frequency and the former custom of peripatetic hosting.

The meeting was preceded by a two-day youth meeting (see pages 16-17), from which a forthright outcomes statement was delivered to branch representatives.

↓ Mr Rob Taylor, Deputy High Commissioner for New Zealand welcomes delegates

↘ Alan Pottinger, Technical Director of partner CFA, presents the QCC

→ Judith Elson, Chair of Canada National Branch, in regional discussions at the High Commission of New Zealand

“  
*The youth participation was so important and it was so good to know that they are interested and will carry the flag onwards.*”

Heather MacKinnon MD, President RCS Nova Scotia Branch

RCS President, Lord Howell of Guildford, opened the meeting and called for branches to reaffirm their commitment to

‘a new Commonwealth for a new era’. The Society was, he said, a ‘unique grassroots organisation ... the ideal platform for the future’. Mr Gary Dunn, Deputy Secretary-General (Corporate) of the Commonwealth Secretariat followed, with a talk about the Commonwealth Hub.

The first day, kindly hosted by the High Commission of New Zealand, continued with a session on developments and current priorities, presided over by RCS Director, Michael Lake, and branch-lead sessions, each with a different focus, with chairs and panelists from 15 individual branches and a number of others contributing from the floor. The aim was to share and discuss the challenges facing branches, the achievements of many and the opportunities for expansion of the network, with the goal of strengthening the RCS as a whole, while promoting and expanding its programmes.

“  
*...thanks for being an effective bridge between old, new and the future RCS.*”

John Apea, Regional Co-ordinator for Africa



Our thanks to Salome Reynolds Mader, of RCS Toronto Branch, for her valuable contribution to the photography for this event.

On the second day, the meeting moved to the High Commission of Nigeria where speakers from The Queen's Young Leaders programme partners, The Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Trust and Comic Relief, addressed assembled delegates. Staff members from the RCS Research & Policy and Youth & Education teams expanded on the current and future work of the Society.

At the High Commission of Canada, on the third morning, delegates were delighted to attend sessions run by experts on Digital Diplomacy, Fundraising and Brand followed by a presentation about The Queen's Commonwealth Canopy (QCC).

A number of events were scheduled after the meetings including a magnificent concert given by ABRSM at the High Commission of Australia, a visit to Buckingham Palace and a tour of Westminster Abbey.

“

*... The Branch Leaders and members, with their valuable wisdom, encouragement and warmth, were outstanding and made us feel like a big joint Commonwealth family. ”*

Hari Om Dahiya, President and Youth Chairman, the Commonwealth Students Welfare Group of India (CSWGI)

“

*Both the youth conference and then the branches meeting were successful in helping to build confidence in our joint endeavour to raise the profile of the modern Commonwealth... There was a real energy apparent over the five days and that is very encouraging. ”*

Michael Lake CBE, Director of the RCS

 **MORE INFORMATION**  
[bit.ly/BringingTheFamilyTogether](http://bit.ly/BringingTheFamilyTogether)  
[bit.ly/InternationalMeeting2016](http://bit.ly/InternationalMeeting2016)

## BRANCH FOCUS



THE ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY  
Ireland Branch



# IRELAND

## AND THE MODERN COMMONWEALTH

On Friday 7 October, following the close of the International RCS Branches meeting, RCS Ireland branch invited delegates and others to Afternoon Tea in the Cholmondeley Room and Terrace at the House of Lords.

Speakers on the subject of Ireland and the Modern Commonwealth included The Rt. Hon the Lord Howell of Guildford, President of The Royal Commonwealth Society; Senator Frank Feighan and John McGrane, Director of the British-Irish Chamber of Commerce.

# COMING UP IN THE COMMONWEALTH

## 2016

### 11-17 DECEMBER

62nd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference, London (CPA)

## 2017

### 2 JANUARY

2nd Meeting of Education Ministers Action Group, London (Commonwealth Secretariat)

### 22-25 JANUARY

The Education World Forum, London

### 8 MARCH

International Women's Day (United Nations)

### 9-10 MARCH

Commonwealth Trade Ministers Meeting, London (CWEIC)

### 10-11 MARCH

12th European Conference of the Commonwealth Nurses' & Midwives Federation, Cyprus (CNMF)

### 13 MARCH

Commonwealth Day and launch of The Queen's Baton Relay

### 13-24 MARCH

Commission on the Status of Women, UN Headquarters, New York

### 20-24 MARCH

Commonwealth Law Conference, Melbourne

### 22-24 MARCH

Commonwealth Cyber Security Forum, London, (CTO)

### 3-7 APRIL

19th Commonwealth Forestry Conference, Dehradun, India

### 6 APRIL

International Day of Sport for Development and Peace (United Nations)

### 23 APRIL

English Language Day 2017 (United Nations)



## THE QUEEN'S COMMONWEALTH ESSAY COMPETITION 2017

### 1 MAY

Entry deadline for The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition

### 22-31 MAY

70th World Health Assembly and Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting, Geneva

### JUNE

Applications open for Queens Young Leaders, London (RCS and partners)

### 5 JUNE

World Environment Day (United Nations)

## KEEP IN THE CONVERSATION

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

[@TheRCSLondon](https://twitter.com/TheRCSLondon)

[/thercs](https://www.facebook.com/thercs)

[Linkedin.com](https://www.linkedin.com/company/thercs)



Cambridge University Library is celebrating its 600th anniversary with an exhibition featuring rare and fascinating items from all corners of the world, encompassing every era of human history.



Many objects on display arrived in Cambridge with the Library of the RCS, whose members donated an eclectic range of artefacts. These include Stone Age tools, a travelling Qur'an and gold weights from West Africa; an ostrich feather from a Zulu king's crown; ivory travelling cutlery; a boomerang and glass spearheads from Australia; Indian mica paintings; a Fijian lali and ceremonial sceptre from the Solomon Islands; and an eighteenth-century pocket globe showing the recent discoveries of James Cook.

'Curious Objects' runs until 21 March 2017 and is accompanied by a virtual exhibition.



[exhibitions.lib.cam.ac.uk/curiousobjects](http://exhibitions.lib.cam.ac.uk/curiousobjects)



THE ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY

# THE VALUE OF A LEGACY



Leaving a legacy is an excellent way to help ensure the valuable work of The Royal Commonwealth Society continues well into the future.

[www.thercs.org/support-the-rcs](http://www.thercs.org/support-the-rcs)

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

#### HOW DO I LEAVE A LEGACY?

Including a legacy to The Royal Commonwealth Society in your will is straightforward. You can make a gift of a specific sum of money or a proportion of your residual estate; if you have already made a will you can add a codicil which we can supply, or see '**Support the RCS**' at [www.thercs.org](http://www.thercs.org). Leaving a legacy to a charity such as the RCS can also be an effective way to reduce inheritance tax.



“

*The 2016 RCS International Branches Meeting was a great opportunity as a young person to be involved and play my part in helping to advance the work of the Royal Commonwealth Society.*”

Ryan Brathwaite MSA, Chair of the Sports Committee, RCS Barbados Branch



 @TheRCSLondon  facebook.com/thercs  youtube.com/user/TheRCSociety



**THE ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY**

Commonwealth House, 55-58 Pall Mall, London SW1Y 5JH  
T: +44 (0)20 3727 4300 E: info@thercs.org [www.thercs.org](http://www.thercs.org)

**Request a print copy**

RCS Supporters can elect to receive a print copy free of charge, email info@thercs.org

Photography: where not specified, please refer to RCS

Cover: Member of Derby Sikh Group planting trees in The National Forest.



**Editor:** Hilary Greengrass  
**Design:** RF Design UK Ltd  
[www.rfportfolio.com](http://www.rfportfolio.com)  
**Print:** Impress Print Services Ltd  
[www.impressprint.net](http://www.impressprint.net)  
**Cover image:**  
© Christopher Beech  
Registered charity in England and Wales (226748), incorporated by Royal Charter.