



# **Commonwealth organisations and the Peoples' Commonwealth: Common purpose or parting of the ways?**

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in partnership with the Royal Over-Seas League

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Welcome from **Maj.-Gen. Roddy Porter** (Director-General, Royal Over-Seas League)  
and **Stuart Mole** (Chairman, *The Round Table*)

**Roddy Porter** said that he was delighted that the Royal Over-Seas League was able to partner with the editorial board of *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs* and with the Commonwealth Association in sponsoring a meeting on the important topic of Commonwealth organisations. The Royal Over-Seas League shared the values to which the Commonwealth aspired, and believed that Commonwealth civil society had huge potential for helping to further those values, particularly in the fields of democracy, human rights, cultural exchange, and social development. The Royal Over-Seas League saw itself as a Commonwealth organisation and was keen to facilitate the activities of the wider Commonwealth. Its founder, Sir Evelyn Wrench, had made a 46,000-mile journey round the world, visiting many of the countries which now made up the Commonwealth, and had seen the need for an association to cement the bonds of understanding and friendship between their peoples, and he had therefore founded the Over-Seas Club in 1910, which became the Royal Over-Seas League after the First World War and now had some 16,000 members worldwide. The hyphen in 'Over-Seas' symbolised dialogue between peoples. The ROSL's ethos and values were encapsulated in its charter: fostering interest in the Commonwealth, providing social centres where visitors from around the Commonwealth would be welcomed, encouraging the arts in the Commonwealth, especially among young people, sponsoring and encouraging projects for those in need, and co-operating with kindred societies to promote the Commonwealth's values. It was therefore highly appropriate that the Royal Over-Seas League should co-sponsor and host this meeting of and on fellow Commonwealth organisations.

**Stuart Mole** said in turn that he was delighted to be meeting at the Royal Over-Seas League, and was grateful to it and to the Commonwealth Association for joining the editorial board of *The Round Table* in sponsoring the conference. The meeting came at an important time in the development of the Commonwealth, and at a point when the relationship between the 'official' and the 'unofficial' Commonwealths was in some flux. The unofficial Commonwealth was often described in glowing terms by the Heads of Government in their communiqués and by the Secretariat and Foundation in their statements. But to paraphrase Mae West, flattery was fine so long as one didn't inhale. How far Commonwealth organisations' contributions really were valued would be addressed in the conference. But clearly the reality was complex. The current health of Commonwealth organisations certainly provided a mixed picture. Some, such as the Commonwealth Games Federation, had undergone a remarkable renaissance. There were newcomers such as Commonwealth Exchange and the Commonwealth Enterprise and Investment Council. Others, such as the Commonwealth Business Council, had collapsed, or, like the Commonwealth Youth Exchange Council, had merged with other organisations. Others still, such as the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association, were casting off their 'Commonwealth' labels. Some would argue that the processes of emergence and extinction were natural and cyclical. He was himself less sure. The Commonwealth Foundation, once the mentor and protector of Commonwealth professional and civil society organisations, had now adopted a new strategic direction, oriented towards civil society in the Commonwealth not Commonwealth civil society, in which explicitly Commonwealth civil society organisations seemed to

have little part to play. The Commonwealth Secretariat had been preoccupied with internal and external challenges; key staff had left and their replacements had not yet been recruited; there had been no meeting of Commonwealth civil society organisations with representatives of the Secretariat since the previous CHOGM, and little evidence of practical headway in discussing the delivery of programmes mentioned in CHOGM communiqués and the Secretariat's strategic plan. Moreover, the difficulties besetting the intergovernmental Commonwealth had their knock-on effects. The Commonwealth brand mattered to these organisations, and it needed integrity. Commonwealth organisations were as committed as ever to the ideals of the Commonwealth. But they needed to be clear about the challenges in their relationship with the evolving 'official' Commonwealth. They also needed a strong Secretariat and engaged governments in order to flourish.

## **Session 1: “Fading anachronism or Commonwealth agents of change: Do Commonwealth organisations have a distinctive contribution to make?”**

Chair: **Professor John Wood** (Secretary-General, Association of Commonwealth Universities)

Speakers: **Vijay Krishnarayan** (Director, Commonwealth Foundation)  
**Sally-Ann Wilson** (Secretary-General, Commonwealth Broadcasting Association)  
**Oliver Everett** (Chief Executive Officer, Commonwealth Enterprise & Investment Council)

Opening the first session, **John Wood** took the opportunity to say a few words about his own organisation, the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU). This was a membership-based organisation of around 540 universities from across the Commonwealth, which existed to provide both co-ordination and practical assistance among its member universities. In particular the ACU aimed to help its members in adapting to the constantly changing environment in which universities and their students now found themselves, moving from a greed and growth culture to a more sustainable one, at the same time as facing the enormous challenges of technological change. It seemed that no-one had quite woken up yet to the revolution implied by the next phase of the internet, bringing vast amounts of information and interconnectivity. To give just one example, by itself the square kilometre array, involving fourteen Commonwealth countries, would generate ten times more information than the current global internet traffic. There would be almost instant access to huge amounts of information for those capable of accessing it. But many universities, especially in the developing countries, would struggle to keep up. There were vast challenges for training and for making information more widely available. The ACU's membership was growing, though mainly in the developing countries. While it retained its 'Commonwealth' brand, it was not in any sense dependent on the 'official' Commonwealth organisations, and it saw itself as a truly global organisation; indeed it was about to welcome its first US affiliate (since the university in question had a campus on Vancouver Island).

**Vijay Krishnarayan** said that he felt rather as if he had been cast as a pantomime villain, but he would keep to his brief and address the theme of the session. He spoke as an unapologetic advocate of civil society, and as someone whose own background was in civil society, albeit he had worked for the last years on the inside, as it were, as a member of the Commonwealth Foundation's staff. During those eight years he had done what he could to get civil society voices heard in Commonwealth circles.

The new direction taken by the Commonwealth Foundation in its latest strategic plan was of course problematic for some Commonwealth civil society organisations. For some it raised existential questions; but the 'official' Commonwealth of course faced existential questions of its own.

In 2003 Stephen Matlin had been commissioned to report on the role of the Commonwealth civil

society organisations, and his conclusions were presented in a very thorough report which had guided the work of the Commonwealth Foundation for the next ten years. At the time Vijay Krishnarayan was in particular struck by Matlin's conclusion that Commonwealth civil society organisations were a key part of the Commonwealth family, and that without them the Commonwealth would be largely irrelevant. But he was not so sure that these assertions still rang true. The environment in which Commonwealth organisations operated had changed in several important respects, and this had impacted on the way they interacted with the official Commonwealth. The mainstays of the unofficial Commonwealth were the networks of professionals and academics represented by many Commonwealth organisations; but Commonwealth citizens no longer showed deference to professionals in the way they once did. In addition, there was a widespread and deep-rooted, and perhaps not entirely wrong, perception that Commonwealth organisations were sometimes excessively UK-based and run by a demographic not representative of the Commonwealth at large.

It was also becoming harder to cite successes in terms of Commonwealth organisations' impacts on the policy-making process. Access to ministerial meetings was diminishing, or becoming more token and regulated. The endorsement of the Latimer House Principles in 2003 and the Commonwealth teacher recruitment protocol adopted the following year were shining examples of civil society agenda-setting for the official Commonwealth, and could be cited as uniquely the achievement of Commonwealth organisations. But it was ten years since Commonwealth organisations could claim success on a similar scale, and in the meantime the international environment had changed very significantly. The Commonwealth Secretariat and Commonwealth Foundation were both strongly pressed by member states to show value for money and impact. The Foundation had a key responsibility to encourage the participation of citizens, which of course meant working with civil society organisations whether they were explicitly labelled as Commonwealth or not, so long as they endorsed Commonwealth principles and perspectives. There was a huge vitality in civil society organisations in the Commonwealth which was not channelled into explicitly Commonwealth organisations.

None of this was to say that Commonwealth civil society organisations had not been active. But as Matlin paraphrased Darwin, those most adaptable to change were those most likely to survive. The Commonwealth Foundation would continue to work with many of them; for instance, it had entered into an important partnership with the Commonwealth Nurses Federation to look at legislation relating to mental health in the Seychelles and Zambia. The Foundation would look forward to working with other Commonwealth organisations in areas defined by its own strategic plan where they could make distinctive contributions.

**Sally-Ann Wilson** said that it was with some personal regret that she was making one of her last public appearances as Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association (CBA), whose members had in May 2014 voted overwhelmingly to drop the word 'Commonwealth' from the organisation's title and change its name to the Public Media Alliance. She had joined the CBA in 2001 and had led it since 2010, and had personally valued the organisation's membership of the

Commonwealth family.

Addressing the theme of the session, Sally-Ann Wilson said that the CBA's members clearly were important agents of change in many societies; and the CBA was by no means a fading anachronism. On the contrary, it was the largest global association of public service broadcasters. Its members broadcast to some 2 billion people, and all the evidence showed that public broadcasting continued to play an incredibly important role in the internet and social media age, with many citizens turning to public service broadcasters for information and analysis via the internet and social media as well as radio and television.

The CBA itself was also an active agent of change. It ran training programmes throughout the Commonwealth, including on the integration of broadcast, internet and social media. It had sponsored more than 500 documentaries in the last thirteen years, and in 2013 its project for young filmmakers, Your WorldView, won the Nexus Commonwealth Communicator award. But, perhaps sadly, the CBA no longer saw itself as a specifically Commonwealth agent of change. It subscribed to and actively sought to uphold the values embodied in the Commonwealth Charter, and was proud of its association with and contributions to the Commonwealth. But it was not clear that the Commonwealth itself stood strongly for those values any longer. Over the last thirteen years, there had been increasing numbers of attacks and intimidation against journalists and broadcasters throughout the Commonwealth. But there had been no strong support for them from the official Commonwealth. The Commonwealth 'brand' no longer had the cachet that it once had.

The CBA's members had voted to change the organisation's name partly in order to extend its work beyond the Commonwealth, but partly also in recognition of the fact that a close association with the Commonwealth was no longer seen as desirable. It was of course entirely understandable that the Commonwealth Foundation should see the need to re-orient its activities around more closely targeted objectives, and of course no organisation could expect to receive funding as of right. But the CBA had expended a good deal of time on funding bids to the Foundation without getting any feedback about their rejection. Similarly, it could not really afford to lend its expertise too readily to the Secretariat, when its input merely featured in documents which went nowhere while the staff time and resources had to be funded. The situation was not helped by the fact that the Secretariat and Foundation themselves were doing media work which overlapped with that of the CBA, but without any coherent strategic agenda. The CBA, in its new incarnation as the Public Media Alliance, would be keen to continue working with the Foundation and Secretariat, but it needed to be clear that its efforts would be worthwhile. Sadly, though, the CBA's members felt that little was now to be gained from any close association with the Commonwealth 'brand'.

**Oliver Everett** said that he was a long-time admirer of the Commonwealth and thought that it had an important contribution to make. On his travels he had also detected an incredible enthusiasm for the Commonwealth as a brand. As Vijay Krishnarayan had said, the Commonwealth and its various components faced a series of existential questions. Review and reform were necessary and understandable, but there was also a danger that soul-searching could descend into navel-gazing. He

himself believed in celebrating the art of the possible.

Any organisation was only worthwhile if it could make a difference to people's lives. Every organisation had to continue to show its relevance in order to survive. His own organisation hoped to fill an important role in the Commonwealth by addressing the issues of trade and investment that made possible all other social development. He had seen the benefits that economic development could bring, and the role of international trade and investment in that. The Commonwealth Enterprise and Investment Council sought to tap into the Commonwealth 'advantage' in terms of shared language, history and approaches, common legal and financial systems, and a common commitment to transparency and ethics.

It was understandable that in some countries there was resentment at rich countries lecturing them. But what he described as 'good' money had a choice. Similarly, developing countries had a choice. The choice of a bad investor had consequences, and the relationship rapidly became unequal. Good money sought to invest, to share knowledge and returns, bringing education, health and security in a virtuous circle. There was a clear link between good governance and attracting good money. The Commonwealth was an ideal network through which to match good money with investment opportunities, and trade was a key way in which the Commonwealth could be made relevant to its citizens.

- The meeting heard of a number of Commonwealth organisations, particularly smaller professional bodies, which were now struggling financially as a result of the withdrawal of funding from the Foundation. The meeting also heard that many organisations, while accepting the reasons for this change in the Foundation's strategic direction, had found it difficult to access Foundation or Secretariat funding for which they had bid under the new rules; and that there had been little or no feedback on why these bids had been unsuccessful. The hope was expressed that the Foundation would remain open to funding bids from accredited Commonwealth organisations, and that the Secretariat would also provide funds to help Commonwealth organisations develop partnerships with it in programme delivery.
- Addressing Vijay Krishnarayan's point about the lack of Commonwealth civil society success in influencing the agenda of the official Commonwealth, it was suggested that the problem was more with the official Commonwealth than with the civil society organisations: it seemed sometimes that good governance was not supported by the official Commonwealth (the Heads and the Secretariat) in the way it had been in the past. Indeed, the official Commonwealth seemed in retreat on the major issues of Commonwealth principle, and there was little leadership and commitment on these issues from the Secretariat.
- It was pointed out that the Commonwealth Games Federation was an excellent example of an organisation which had hit low times but had seemed to undergo a wonderful renaissance; but its relations with the Foundation and Secretariat were tenuous, to say the least.
- There was some discussion around access to ministerial and Heads of Government meetings.

Some participants felt that civil society input was one of the most distinctive aspects of evolving Commonwealth practice, and that it helped to broaden and deepen ministers' understanding of issues. Others felt that civil society was being frozen out. But it was also pointed out that neither ministers nor Heads came together merely in order to hear Commonwealth and civil society organisations tell them what to do. It was also suggested that most submissions by civil society organisations came too late in the process to affect the agenda of CHOGMs and ministerial meetings: if Commonwealth organisations wanted to affect the outcome of the next CHOGM, they should really be doing the legwork now.

- It was suggested that part of the problem for the official Commonwealth and therefore for Commonwealth organisations, was that the Commonwealth no longer had a defining purpose or a big idea, as it once had with the struggle against the apartheid regime in South Africa, or as it did with the small states agenda in the 1980s and 1990s. The Commonwealth needed to find issues on which its voice would be distinctive and of direct benefit to large numbers of its members, such as the initiative being pushed by the Commonwealth Human Ecology Council for a charter for oceans and fisheries. Another suggestion was for a Commonwealth bank, to enable more citizens to access start-up capital.
- A number of participants emphasised that given the demographics of the Commonwealth, it was imperative to engage better with young people. Commonwealth organisations should work with others outside the immediate Commonwealth family to ensure that youth voices were heard.
- Vijay Krishnarayan's point about the UK-centric composition of some Commonwealth organisations was also supported, and it was emphasised that Commonwealth organisations needed to be able to demonstrate a pan-Commonwealth reach and identity.
- It was suggested that just as Commonwealth organisations should aim to feed their concerns into official processes, so also the official Commonwealth could do more to link up their concerns and processes with those of the wider international community, particularly the post-2015 UN agenda.

## Session 2: Keynote address by the Commonwealth Secretary-General

Chair: **Patsy Robertson** (Chair, Commonwealth Association)

Speaker: **H.E. Kamalesh Sharma** (Commonwealth Secretary-General)

**Patsy Robertson** introduced the keynote speaker, HE Kamalesh Sharma, the fifth Commonwealth Secretary-General, now coming towards the final lap of his second four-year term. She said she was looking forward to hearing him speak, and to his insights into the sometimes prickly relationship between the 'official' and 'unofficial' Commonwealths. Before becoming Commonwealth Secretary-General, Kamalesh Sharma had enjoyed a long diplomatic career, including a spell as India's Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York. The following year, 2015, would see an opportunity to reflect on the service of these two great international organisations, with the 70th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations and the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Commonwealth Secretariat. The latter had been created in 1965 at the insistence of the newly independent countries, and represented just sixteen member states to start with. Over its history it had helped more than twice as many newly independent countries navigate the perilous international waters and fulfil their international obligations, and improve the lives of their citizens suffering from poverty and lack of opportunities. But both the UN and the Commonwealth had been widely criticised by the media and by civil society organisations for failing to meet their obligations, let alone the expectations made of them. The Commonwealth in particular had been criticised for its refusal to name and shame its offending member states, and for its 'softly, softly' approach to recalcitrants.

The demands of civil society organisations had been at the centre of Commonwealth debates for the last thirty years, and Commonwealth organisations had been instrumental in helping the Commonwealth to define its goals and to generate strategies to meet the challenges it faced. Earlier, the meeting had heard of the sad fact that one of the oldest Commonwealth organisations had decided to ditch its 'Commonwealth' label because it was thought to be an impediment to progress. Whether or not that was symptomatic of a wider disillusionment, there were certainly difficult issues that needed facing. During his own period of office, the current Secretary-General had not been immune from criticism by civil society organisations, particularly on the issues of democracy and human rights. He had, perfectly reasonably, maintained that it was not his job to name and shame member states; rather, it was to work patiently with them to help them meet their obligations. A quiet role quietly done was, he could fairly argue, the essence of Commonwealth diplomacy. But it was also the proper role of civil society organisations to hold leaders' feet to the fire. She hoped the Secretary-General would welcome the opportunity to outline how he viewed the creative dissonance between the official and the unofficial Commonwealths.

**Kamalesh Sharma** began by saying that although he would not have chosen that word to describe the relationship between the official and unofficial Commonwealths, he would not dissent that it had sometimes been prickly. The Commonwealth was like a family, and its components couldn't be expected to agree on everything under the sun. The nature of the organisations was different: they

had their own constituents, and obligations to these. But they were all in the same business, of trying to promote core values while moving with the times. While it was sad that the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association had decided to change its name, this clearly served the organisation's purpose in a globalising world. He looked forward to continuing to collaborate with it in its new guise, and he didn't feel that its decision to change its name reflected on the Commonwealth as a whole.

Kamalesh Sharma reckoned that he had spent an average of ten days each month travelling. He had visited many Commonwealth countries repeatedly. Wherever he went he was keen to take the pulse of the Commonwealth, to speak to younger people, and to soak up views on the organisation and its future. What he had found everywhere was appreciation of the Commonwealth but an impatience with it born out of a desire to see it do more. The Commonwealth was, he believed, a vibrant organisation, and getting more vibrant by the day. People wanted and expected to see it do more, not less.

Both the intergovernmental organisations and the Commonwealth's civil society organisations were in the business of seizing new opportunities to move forward the values they shared. Across Commonwealth civil society there were encouraging signs of growth and renewal. Recently he had read reports of a Commonwealth Association for Public Administration and Management conference in Malaysia which had achieved breakthroughs in number of areas. There had been a very successful Commonwealth Agricultural Conference in Australia. The Commonwealth Association of Architects would be marking its fiftieth anniversary in 2015 with a major conference in London, with 'designing city resilience' as the theme. Commonwealth Exchange was a new body, promoting the trade, educational and strategic capabilities of the Commonwealth. People sometimes forgot that the Royal Society was also a Commonwealth body. Earlier the same day he had spoken at a Conference of Commonwealth Postal Administrations. An embryonic association of certified bookkeepers had just applied for accreditation. The Commonwealth's engagement with youth was especially important. The recently-constituted Commonwealth Youth Council was the largest in the world. There was a vibrant Commonwealth Youth Climate Change Network. The Commonwealth's online presence was expanding exponentially. This didn't look like a Commonwealth in decline; the graph was surely rising.

The question of course arose, how the Secretariat viewed its relationship with the unofficial Commonwealth, and what it could do to help it, to their mutual advantage. The Secretariat wanted to be an enabler and facilitator for all the stakeholders who espoused Commonwealth principles, and would do what it could to enable greater co-ordination and collaboration between governments, civil society, business and youth to create partnerships around shared Commonwealth values. The Secretariat's strategic plan underlined the importance of its commitment to building strategic partnerships; in the section devoted to civil society, it emphasised its commitment to institutionalised mechanisms for collaboration with civil society.

In pursuit of this goal, the Secretary-General had created a reformed staff establishment to ensure

collaboration with civil society. Previously there had been a single post shared between the Foundation and the Secretariat. But clearly there was a rationale for the post to be based in the Secretary-General's Office, the better to support frameworks of collaboration and practical linkages between Commonwealth organisations and the various Secretariat divisions. Though the details had yet to be agreed by the Secretariat's Board, the Secretary-General saw no reason why member states would disagree. The new framework for collaboration envisaged at least twelve meetings a year between the Secretariat and civil society, business and youth organisations. Accredited organisations would also receive advance background papers and be invited to make submissions which would be circulated to member governments. In future, Commonwealth Secretariat documents would contain references to key civil society recommendations, and a report would be published online on Commonwealth Connects on the ways in which the Secretariat had delivered on its civil society commitments. Yet another way in which the Secretariat planned to integrate and involve Commonwealth organisations was by including civil society representatives in the Secretary-General's delegations to global intergovernmental meetings.

The Secretariat needed to approach building a new relationship with civil society organisations in a structured way, and linked to its strategic plan and results-based management; it would not necessarily be in the form of formal memoranda of understanding with each organisation, since the essence was to make clear on a case-by-case basis the practical and meaningful ways in which they would work together. The Secretariat had made a start, with joint projects with the Commonwealth Local Government Forum and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. The Secretariat and Commonwealth organisations were all labouring in the same vineyard, and the Secretariat hoped to convince civil society organisations to see it as a crucial partner, as well as vice versa.

### **Session 3: “Post-box or powerhouse? Building capacity, raising standards, and increasing collaboration in Commonwealth organisations”**

Chair: **Rhonda Cox** (Membership Secretary,  
Commonwealth Human Ecology Council)

Speakers: **Carl Wright** (Secretary-General, Commonwealth Local Government Forum)  
**Rita Payne** (President, Commonwealth Journalists’ Association)  
**Andrew Tuggey** (Chief Executive,  
Commonwealth Parliamentary Association UK)

**Rhonda Cox** said that, as perhaps the youngest person in the room, it was a privilege to have been asked to chair the session; this was a small sign of the Commonwealth's recognition of the importance of representing the young people of the Commonwealth.

**Carl Wright** started by saying he was probably one of the older people in the room, but he too was grateful to have been asked to speak. He had had the great privilege of working in Commonwealth organisations in different capacities for almost 35 years. He had seen many ups and downs, crises and successes, including at the thirteen CHOGMs he had attended. But he felt that neither the concept of 'post box' nor that of 'powerhouse' was particularly apt: perhaps 'punch box' and 'fall guy', or 'incubator of innovation', 'facilitator' and 'honest broker' would be better.

When speaking about the Commonwealth, Carl Wright – like millions around the world – did not unduly distinguish between the three categories of Commonwealth institutions: the three inter-governmental organisations (Secretariat, Foundation, and Commonwealth of Learning), the nine or ten quasi-governmental 'associated organisations' (the Commonwealth Local Government Forum, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, the Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation, and so on), and the fifty or so accredited civil society organisations and professional bodies. They were all part of the Commonwealth family and were what gave it breadth and value. Nor should these categories be designed in tablets of stone. Potentially, there could be further reclassifications. What was important was what the organisations represented, including their Commonwealth representativeness, adherence to agreed political values, capacity and resources, and what results they produced, not some overrated notion of diplomatic status.

Having said that, Carl Wright did feel that the Commonwealth was at a serious crossroads and was probably at its least dynamic and least relevant that he had seen in the past 35 years. There was an acute danger that unless it underwent a serious political and organisational re-launch no later than the Malta CHOGM, it would simply fade away, not so much with a bang as a whimper. If that were to happen, it would be a tragedy of historic proportion. Carl Wright believed passionately in the Commonwealth, its scope for reaching out, for building peace, resolving tension, promoting dialogue and pioneering innovation in promoting development. It would be a betrayal of the work of past generations and a denial of opportunity for future generations to come if the Commonwealth was allowed to fade away.

Carl Wright had just flown in from Asia, and despite polite acknowledgements, he did not detect any strong sentiment in support of the Commonwealth in key Asian capitals. In the UK the Coalition government had been more supportive than its predecessors, but the public had little understanding of the modern Commonwealth.

But there was hope. Carl Wright was constantly encouraged to witness how strong Commonwealth bonds and its reputation were. He encountered this perhaps most strongly in smaller member countries and even outside the Commonwealth in countries like Nepal, or Ireland (where the Commonwealth Local Government Forum held a historic Commonwealth event in 2013 at Mansion House, Dublin, the birthplace of the Irish Dáil, with representatives of all key political parties, including Sinn Féin and the Ulster Unionists), or South Sudan (which wanted to join up, and where the Commonwealth Local Government Forum would be holding a ministerial round table on decentralisation in November). He was also much taken by the thoughtful address recently given in London by the Prime Minister of Malta, who, as CHOGM host, would have a key role in any re-launch. In the UK, too, not least in Buckingham Palace, there was much political commitment to a revival of the Commonwealth.

What, then, was to be done if the Commonwealth was to be rescued from its current decline? Carl Wright would suggest five 'R's, in addition to the 'R' of re-launch. He would not claim any originality for his suggestions, but he did feel that they had great urgency if the Commonwealth was to move away from its current malaise.

The first 'R' was 'reform'. Every organisation needed organisational review. The Eminent Persons' Group (EPG) had provided a comprehensive plan for Commonwealth reform, endorsed by the 2011 CHOGM. This, as the discussion over the Secretariat's 2013 strategic plan had shown, was an ongoing process, which should be results and outcomes driven. Most of the current reform proposals were critical to a re-launch: a streamlined CHOGM, designed to attract Heads; selecting the right Secretary-General, preferably through a transparent process and a proper job specification; getting rid of time-bound contracts for senior staff; and better decision-making structures. Why not revive the idea of each country designating a distinct Commonwealth minister, separate from CMAG, and entrusting key decisions to regular meetings of ministers instead of officials and High Commissioners? Of course the same considerations of review and reform applied equally to all associated and accredited organisations, not just the inter-governmental organisations: they all needed to be fit for purpose, otherwise there was little use for them.

The second 'R' was 're-group'. This in a sense was part of reform, but what Carl Wright proposed was a more joined-up Commonwealth, in which the various organisations of different types were institutionally inked in an organic manner instead of being fragmented or in competition. A start had been made by the Secretariat divesting itself of functions, such as local government, which other bodies could do better, in line with the 2011 EPG and CHOGM recommendations. This did not, however, preclude partnerships, say between the Secretariat, the Foundation, the Commonwealth

Parliamentary Association, the Commonwealth Local Government Forum, and other Commonwealth organisations in the promotion and revival of democracy in a country like Fiji, or indeed working with third parties like the UN, the African Union, or the European Union. Such partnerships were surely a win-win situation for everyone.

The third 'R' was 're-focus'. Even a more joined-up Commonwealth could not and should not try to do everything but should instead focus on what it did best and where it could be most relevant. This meant being, as he had said at the start, an incubator of innovation and facilitator and honest broker. The organisation was small enough to pioneer new ideas quickly, and its representative, cross-cutting membership allowed it to offer itself to provide 'good offices', especially to promote democratic values and help resolve conflict. It also should retain its special concern for small states, the bulk of its members. This must involve focusing on development as well as democracy, and the Commonwealth must contribute in a practical way to the implementation of the UN's post-2015 development agenda. The Commonwealth Local Government Forum, working with UNDP and other partners, had invested considerable time and resources in the current UN negotiating process, and there was likely to be a UN goal addressing the issue of global urbanisation and the role of cities. It was a shame that the Commonwealth overall had not been more engaged in the post-2015 process to help bridge the differences between the G77 and the developed countries. In future, why not have a senior Commonwealth Secretariat diplomat based in New York and playing a proactive role in UN discussions?

The fourth 'R' was 'resources'. Even without new funds, the combined resources of all the Commonwealth organisations were not insignificant. Collectively, Carl Wright suspected, they were unlikely to amount to less than £50 million a year. In addition, the unique in-kind contributions were likely to amount to at least another £50 million. This was not bad, especially considering that this was for very focused technical assistance and knowledge exchange, not entailing expensive infrastructure, that no funds were needed for translation, and that the overheads of most Commonwealth organisations were pretty lean; having these resources better coordinated and avoiding duplication would maximise impact. Moreover, if reform, re-grouping and re-focusing were achieved, there was no reason why more resources should not be more forthcoming, either from member states or external partners. To create momentum, the Malta CHOGM should commit to member states doubling financial resources to all Commonwealth organisations, say over five years. This must, however, not only be provided by the ABC countries, but also by other Commonwealth members in a position to do so such as India, Malaysia, Nigeria and South Africa.

The final 'R' was 'reach-out'. There was nothing sacred about having 53 member states. The Commonwealth Games had some 70 nations and territories, including Scotland and Wales and territories like Gibraltar. There were several countries, like Burundi and South Sudan, who were actively exploring membership of the Commonwealth, not on account of any ancient ties with Britain and the Queen, but because most of their economic and trading partners in the region were members of the Commonwealth and it made sense to link up with them and also with the wider Commonwealth network. Carl Wright was not advocating a huge increase in new members, a

dilution of core membership criteria, or diverting from the exclusive use of English. But why not create a new category of associate or observer members who, in return for membership fees, could benefit from technical and know-how exchange, and the prospect of advancing to full membership? But there should also be a tougher application of existing rules, whereby current members who failed to meet key political values and CMAG criteria could be 'demoted' or fully suspended more readily in line with current CMAG rules. The departure of The Gambia's regime was, frankly, no loss, and it was possible to think of other countries where full Commonwealth engagement was difficult to justify.

In conclusion, Carl Wright said that there was much to play for. In Britain there was the ugly xenophobic face of UKIP: anti-immigration, anti-foreigner, and anti-development aid. Similar movements existed in other countries, a result of the massive post-2008 economic downturn, ever-greater growth in inequality of income and wealth, and, most dangerous of all, voter alienation from what they perceived as corrupt and out-of-touch political elites. At the same time, the world had witnessed the rise of religious hatred and barbarism on a scale not seen since medieval times. All such political and religious intolerance by definition negated and served to undermine the work of international organisations like the Commonwealth and its fundamental values and beliefs.

**Rita Payne** spoke on behalf of the Commonwealth Journalists' Association (CJA), which had been formed in 1978 by a group of journalists including a few who were in the room, Derek Ingram, Patsy Robertson and Richard Bourne, with a mission to promote and protect freedom of information in Commonwealth countries. With increasing numbers of journalists and media workers being killed, jailed, tortured, and threatened in countries across the world including Commonwealth nations there was a greater need than ever for the CJA to expose abuses and the targeting of media workers. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, 70 journalists were killed in 2013, many of them in the Commonwealth.

While the levels of violence against media workers were rising alarmingly, the CJA was facing a financial crisis and its survival was at stake as a result of the Commonwealth Foundation's decision to end core funding to it and other Commonwealth associations. The CJA's money had run out and it no longer had funds to maintain its head office in Canada or pay very modest amounts for its only two paid positions, a part-time executive director and an editor of the quarterly CJA newsletter. All the other executive positions in the CJA, including her own as president, were voluntary. Its members were all journalists who now found themselves having to divert their energy and attention from dealing with the work they should be doing to chasing possible sponsors and donors, which was not really their area of expertise.

There was considerable work for the CJA to do. So far in 2014 it had been approached by colleagues in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Uganda, and several other countries for support. If the CJA were to draw up a league table of Commonwealth countries where journalists and media workers were under threat, Pakistan would top the list. So far that year thirteen journalists had been killed, while others were being regularly threatened. Journalists in Pakistan faced threats from an array of

sources including militants, criminals, and warlords, as well as political, military, and intelligence operatives. The CJA had sent a letter to the Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif, urging him to take measures to protect journalists. The letter was widely covered in the Pakistan media but there was little the Prime Minister could do because he was himself being undermined by elements within the military. Just the previous day Rita Payne was contacted by Kamran Shafi, a former diplomat, retired army officer, and freelance columnist who wanted to speak to her about death threats being directed at him and his family. The CJA was seen as a reference point for journalists like him who felt vulnerable and under threat and wanted the CJA to publicise their plights in the hope that this would prompt the Commonwealth to take action.

The situation in Sri Lanka was perhaps no less dire than that in Pakistan. A prominent civil society campaigner said threats to journalists had become a regular occurrence and implored the CJA to bring this to the attention of the Commonwealth Secretariat, especially in light of the Commonwealth Secretary-General's forthcoming visit to Sri Lanka. A long-established Sri Lankan journalist confirmed that attempts had been made to intimidate journalists and others into not attending an awards ceremony for investigative journalists organised by Transparency International. He described this as just another attempt at intimidation. He went on to say that he attended the meeting despite the threats, because 'it was important to demonstrate that we will not be cowed by such tactics. I always feel that if they want to kill you, they will not give any warnings. These warnings are designed to intimidate and drive fear. As the mail you received suggests, such intimidation and threats cannot be carried out without direct support of the state apparatus'.

Since the CJA's resources were limited, it could in some instances be most effective by spreading the word and joining forces with other organisations, such as the Committee to Protect Journalists and Index on Censorship, which were better funded and staffed and therefore in a stronger position to investigate allegations. For instance, the CJA circulated a note to associated groups about the latest threats to Sri Lankan journalists and received helpful responses, and the intimidation of the media was brought to the attention of the Human Rights Committee in Geneva which reviewed Sri Lanka.

The CJA was also following up appeals from journalists in the Maldives about their colleague, Ahmed Rilwan Abdullah, from Minivan News, an opposition news agency, who had been missing since August. Again the CJA circulated the appeal to Commonwealth associations such as the Commonwealth Magistrates and Judges Association as well as the Committee to Protect Journalists and Index on Censorship, who followed up with their own investigations. Although the journalist was still missing, three suspects had been arrested, and it seemed plausible that no arrests would have been made if the CJA and other media groups had not publicised the case.

Disturbing reports were coming in from other parts of the Commonwealth, too. The CJA had received appeals from colleagues in Africa where some journalists were coming under attack, and one or two had even been killed while reporting on the outbreak of Ebola or sensitive issues such as gay rights. As a result of this pressure it was not a surprise that media self-censorship was becoming

increasingly prevalent. Disturbing reports were also emerging from Malaysia, regarded as a relatively moderate country, where sedition laws were being arbitrarily used to silence dissent.

The CJA had plenty to do. Despite limited funds from an earlier grant from the Foundation, CJA branches in India and Uganda organised two successful and timely training programmes for journalists: in November 2013, CJA-India hosted a joint programme with the branch in Bangladesh on enhancing editing skills for election reporting (a lasting outcome of which was a code of conduct for election reporting drawn up by CJA-India and CJA-Bangladesh), and in May 2014 CJA-Uganda organised a three-day training seminar in Kampala entitled 'Action for Democracy', which brought together more than 60 journalists from Uganda's broadcasting and print media. CJA branches in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sarawak and Cameroon held meetings, seminars and workshops to mark World Press Freedom Day, and topics ranging from the safety of journalists and the alarming rise in violence against women journalists to media coverage of climate change. Leading members of the CJA's regional branches had been speaking at public meetings about the vital role of the media in helping to uphold the key values of the Commonwealth Charter – transparency, accountability and good governance.

The UK branch of the CJA was trying to strengthen awareness and understanding of international political and media developments through regular debates and discussions with high-profile speakers who were experts in their specific fields. CJA-UK also organised well-attended discussions and book launches, such as, recently, on China's international relations, the safety of journalists in Pakistan, the future of the BBC World Service, attempts to form a stable government in Afghanistan, and other headline topics. It would not have been possible to hold these events without support from the Institute of Commonwealth Studies and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, which gave the CJA free access to meeting rooms when these were available. Since freedom of expression was a basic human right, the CJA also had close links with the Commonwealth Human Rights initiative.

Without funds the CJA would no longer be able to fund training programmes and workshops at a time when there was a greater need than ever for journalists across the Commonwealth to learn how to adapt to the changed media landscape in a digital age. With irresponsible postings on social media spreading panic and hysteria on Ebola, the spread of ISIS, fighting in Syria and Iraq, and extremist attacks in Nigeria and Kenya, the CJA could play a vital role in training journalists to check their sources and provided balanced reporting on sensitive issues.

Since the CJA and other Commonwealth associations were engaged in promoting the same values, enshrined in the Commonwealth Charter, the CJA welcomed opportunities to interact. It would damage the Commonwealth as a whole if groups like the CJA were no longer able to continue to help colleagues who were isolated and vulnerable and viewed the organisation as their only link to the outside world. At a time when the credibility of the Commonwealth, its institutions and its international role were being questioned, failure to support the CJA and associated groups could be damaging for the organisation itself.

**Andrew Tuggey** spoke as a representative of one of the oldest Commonwealth organisations, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, CPA (founded in 1911 as the Empire Parliamentary Association). CPA UK had evolved from the founder branch, while CPA International was set up in the 1960s. The latter was now divided into nine geographic regions, with some 175 branches in total: unlike the Inter-Parliamentary Union, CPA International encompassed state, provincial, and territorial as well as national branches, making sometimes for an interesting dynamic.

The CPA liked to see itself more as a powerhouse than a mere postbox. Its mission was to strengthen parliamentary democracy. It was important to have strong parliaments, able to hold their executives to account. Stronger democracy not only better protected human rights, it provided better decision-making, leading to more sustainable and equitable development and prosperity. The CPA started off as a networking club, and its members still found the exchange of experiences and opinions useful. But the CPA was also more directly involved through capacity-building programmes, workshops, and themed conferences (some of them opened up to non- Commonwealth parliamentarians).

The task of coordinating 175 autonomous branches was not an easy one and CPA International had faced a number of challenges in terms of its organisation and direction in recent years. There had been some strong disagreements, but Andrew Tuggey believed that there was light at the end of the tunnel, and that CPA International would emerge reformed and strengthened. There was an evident need for more of the work the CPA did, and huge opportunities for it to make a greater mark.

There was keenness in some regions that CPA International be regarded as a diplomatic organisation, but this was not appropriate for an organisation which represented non-state actors. There was more to be said for the suggestion that the CPA should have some presence at CHOGMs. CPA International had a strong branch in Malta, and there was a hope that in conjunction with the CLGF the CPA would run an event at the Malta CHOGM which would bring together politicians and others from all levels of government.

- Some dismay was expressed at the thought that an organisation which did such valuable work as the CJA was under threat simply for want of a relatively small amount of money. Rita Payne responded by saying she was sure the CJA could keep going, but it was a hand to mouth existence, and the lack of resources prevented it doing many of the things it wanted to do and which it knew needed doing.
- The meeting heard of other organisations in a similar position, dependent on volunteers and now having to fund-raise for small amounts of core funding.
- The loss of the Commonwealth Media Development Fund, administered by the Secretariat, was noted as a particular blow to Commonwealth media organisations.
- It was suggested that Commonwealth organisations' capacity to act as powerhouses was limited by the difficulties in interacting with the official Commonwealth organisations, which were their main means of access to government agendas. A number of different organisations had similar tales of putting huge amounts of time and effort into documents

and other inputs requested by the Secretariat, only to see them disappear into some kind of black hole. Collaboration between the official Commonwealth and the civil society sector had often been trumpeted as a unique plus-point for the Commonwealth, and civil society organisations were willing to put resources into such collaborations, but if there was no will at the intergovernmental level, civil society organisations were stuck in a sort of no man's land. There were many missed opportunities, such as the Commonwealth's failure to have any meaningful input into the UN's post-2015 development agenda, or the failure to build CMAG into a credible body.

- By contrast, it was suggested that civil society organisations could not expect too much of the official Commonwealth. Commonwealth member governments had for many years been taking a more narrowly focused view of what the Secretariat and Foundation should or should not do, and neither was awash with resources; their agenda were set by the governments, and it had to be remembered that the Secretariat was smaller than CARICOM or the Cornwall Fire Department. Most Commonwealth organisations would survive without funding from the Secretariat or Foundation, especially those which made themselves most relevant to the people they served.
- Carl Wright's five 'R's were the subject of some discussion. Pressed to say which of the five he would prioritise, he plumped for 'regrouping'. He believed the best way forward was effective partnerships and collaborations. People in, say, Tonbridge or Tuvalu did not think of separate Commonwealth organisations, but of the Commonwealth as a whole. Much could be gained from the pooling of resources and expertise. His argument was supported by several other participants, who pointed to the advantages of sharing costs, representation, information, and expertise.
- It was suggested that Commonwealth organisations could usefully meet periodically to exchange opinions and experiences.
- There was some criticism of the accreditation arrangements for Commonwealth organisations, which were described as divisive and of limited practical value.

#### **Session 4: “The Unofficial and the Official: Commonwealth organisations, civil society and the space for engagement”**

Chair: **Alexandra Jones** (Editorial Board, *The Round Table*)

Speakers: **Balasubramanyam Chandramohan** (Member, Commonwealth Civil Society Advisory Committee)  
**Richard Bourne** (Senior Research Fellow, Institute of Commonwealth Studies)  
**Peter Williams** (Management Committee, Council for Education in the Commonwealth)

**Alexandra Jones** opened the session by saying that there had already been some discussion of the scope and need for collaboration between the official and unofficial Commonwealths, and the Secretary-General had outlined his own plans for improving such collaboration. She had herself worked for the Foundation, the Secretariat, and various civil society organisations, and had seen much scope for improved collaboration. But there were of course many questions and concerns around funding, accreditation, status, and outcomes, which she hoped the session would explore further.

**Balasubramanyam Chandramohan** took as his starting point the fact that the Commonwealth was ill-equipped for ‘hard power’: it was not a treaty-based organisation and had no means of compelling its members. But with its geographical reach, diversity of membership and deep roots in civil society as well as inter-governmental co-operation, it was pre-eminently suited to the exercise of ‘soft power’.

As regards the space for engagement, it was clear that there was a great deal of scope for collaboration on specific themes or problems between the Commonwealth and regional groupings such as CARICOM or the SADC, as well as between the different parts of the Commonwealth itself, and between Commonwealth organisations and other organisations not accredited to the Commonwealth.

As a member of the Commonwealth Foundation’s Civil Society Advisory Committee, Balasubramanyam Chandramohan was acutely aware of the need for the Commonwealth to be less London-centric. One question that arose was how to incorporate the voices of more grassroots civil society organisations, as well as those of the accredited Commonwealth organisations. The challenge was to find relevance in relation to local and regional activities. The Commonwealth had missed some tricks in this respect: for instance, the Commonwealth had seemed to be largely silent on the Ebola outbreak, despite the expertise in health and crisis management to be found in member states and in Commonwealth organisations. On a completely different issue, five Commonwealth member states were also members of the G20, but again very little was heard of Commonwealth concerns in that grouping.

As Carl Wright had made clear in an earlier session, increased collaboration between the unofficial and official Commonwealths was the way forward for the organisation, and would help leverage funding and influence as well as avoiding duplication or competition. Collaboration between different elements of the unofficial Commonwealth was also very much to be encouraged. This was normal practice among academic institutions, where institutional collaboration was (and to an extent always had been) the name of the game.

As a former director of the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI), **Richard Bourne** had been asked to say a few words on behalf of that organisation. The CHRI had been set up in the late 1980s by a consortium of five Commonwealth civil society organisations; based in Delhi since 1993, but with small offices in Accra and London, it worked towards the practical realisation of human rights in the Commonwealth, including those embodied in the Commonwealth Charter. The CHRI was, however, very worried by the worsening human rights situations in many Commonwealth countries. Clearly some governments regarded legitimate criticism as subversion. The freedom of the media had come under particular attack, with the use of sedition laws, threats, kidnappings, and intimidation.

The CHRI was very dissatisfied with the limited space for interacting with the official Commonwealth organisations. The CHRI was willing to partner with the official organisations, and believed that it could bring a great deal to the table when it came to discussions of human rights or of related issues such as policing. But a key issue was the weakness of the intergovernmental Commonwealth institutions – as witnessed by the poor and declining turnouts for CHOGMs and ministerial meetings. In consequence the CHRI now found itself spending more time and effort lobbying the UN and regional bodies than interacting with the official Commonwealth organisations. The will to collaborate was there, but it needed a great deal more effort from the official side to make it worthwhile for organisations like the CHRI to invest time and effort in the process.

Now speaking personally, Richard Bourne said that the two main ‘existential’ tasks of Commonwealth organisations were to secure their own futures, and to help secure the future of the Commonwealth more broadly. Clearly the two were interrelated. If the Commonwealth brand was damaged, it made it very much harder for any body with ‘Commonwealth’ in its title to achieve success; conversely, if the Commonwealth was seen as more valuable, people would flock to join Commonwealth organisations. But the future of the Commonwealth could not be left to the governments. The bigger ones had other priorities, and the smaller ones lacked resources and influence. Hence it was also up to Commonwealth organisations to try to help revitalise the Commonwealth.

Commonwealth organisations presented a fairly mixed picture at that moment. The Commonwealth Games Federation had undergone a remarkable renaissance, following the debacles in Edinburgh and Delhi. Just a few months after the Institute of Commonwealth Studies had closed the Commonwealth Advisory Bureau a new think-tank had emerged, in the form of Commonwealth Exchange. At the same time, a number of Commonwealth organisations had folded, or were facing

severe financial and other problems. If Commonwealth civil society was to be able to help save the Commonwealth it needed first to put itself on a sounder foundation, more youth-oriented, alert to the use of digital and social media, providing more opportunities for its members, and alert to the possibilities of partnership and collaboration. For instance, there might be scope for joint fundraising for some of the smaller organisations, or joint taskforces.

Above all, it was important to stress the Commonwealth as a community, and to raise awareness of its potential in member states. The Commonwealth's friends in the arts, sciences, sport, and the media should speak up more for the value of the association. More needed to be done to get Commonwealth voices heard in the mainstream media. The human resources available to Commonwealth organisations were the Commonwealth's most valuable asset. But they needed better co-ordination, and mobilisation around shared goals.

**Peter Williams** said that he proposed addressing 'space for engagement' in three senses: first, the opportunities for engagement with governments and Commonwealth policy-making, particularly in the context of CHOGMs and ministerial meetings; second, opportunities for ongoing engagement with colleagues in the Secretariat and Foundation, and in the programmes they were implementing; and third, and more briefly, 'space' in its purely physical sense. He would leave a fourth dimension – engagement through the media, the web and online networking – to one side.

The context of these discussions was of course the overall stance of the 'official' Commonwealth in the latest period of restructuring and reform following the 2011 Eminent Persons' Group (EPG) report, and the adoption and implementation of new strategic plans by the Foundation and the Secretariat. The EPG report and the Secretariat's strategic plan both seemed to promise much, but it was not apparent that anything substantial had yet been realised. The EPG had made a whole series of recommendations about the role of civil society and its relationship with the inter-governmental organisations. But it was noteworthy that when governments considered the group's 109 recommendations and rejected just eleven, that total included four out of the eight recommendations dealing with relations with civil society. Three of the remaining four were referred to ministers for further advice, and just one was accepted unequivocally. No doubt this frosty reception reflected a larger problem, that governments seemingly found it hard to distinguish between international civil society lobby groups criticising their shortcomings in terms of Commonwealth values from the professional development work which many of the Commonwealth organisations engaged in, and which governments appreciated.

Turning now to the scope for engagement at CHOGMs and ministerial meetings, Peter Williams said that Commonwealth organisations valued such engagement for the opportunities, albeit limited, they gave to mingle and become personally acquainted with members of government and their officials, and – it was hoped – to influence Commonwealth priorities and programmes. These possibilities naturally varied according to the security situation at any particular place and time, and according to the cultural norms in place in the host country. At CHOGMs the package included accreditation to the meeting, bringing limited invitations to the opening ceremony and Secretary-

General's press reception, use of a dedicated lounge area, the right to make a written submission, and, recently, attendance at a dialogue with foreign ministers. The People's Forum was of course another channel for engagement. In a sector like education, opportunities for engagement were more plentiful. The length of the ministers' meetings and the now traditional practice of holding parallel forums for different groups of stakeholders had opened up opportunities for engagement that other sectors might envy. Invited observers could be present in most sessions of the ministerial meetings, and might actually speak at the chair's invitation; there was also space for forum conclusions to be presented to ministers and plentiful opportunity for personal engagement at social events.

There were nevertheless all kinds of obstacles to the exercise of effective influence at all of these meetings. Agendas and draft conclusions had usually been thoroughly prepared weeks or even months in advance, and there was limited chance for individual civil society organisations' submissions, or even forum recommendations, to influence communiqués. Conference programmes were so crowded that it was difficult to get the full attention of ministers. Commonwealth organisations had been slow to learn the obvious lesson, that attendance at ministerial meetings and interactions with ministers should be seen as the culmination, not the first step, in engagement. Civil society organisations needed to plan a campaign round the strategic issues they wanted ministers to take up, do their homework well in advance and encapsulate it in well-argued reports, talk to host governments ahead of the meeting, dialogue with other governments in a variety of ways such as contact with their High Commissioners, and look to recruit other allies, among the responsible Secretariat officials and other Commonwealth organisations.

One interesting suggestion made by the EPG was to the effect that foreign ministers should hold dedicated and pre-planned meetings with representatives of civil society organisations and professional associations in the years between CHOGMs to agree on recommendations for joint programmes and projects which could be submitted to the next CHOGM for endorsement and implementation. Heads of Government rejected this suggestion, and one was bound to wonder whether civil society representatives, let alone senior ministers, could be persuaded to bear the expense in money and time of convening in any great numbers for gatherings from which the glamour and sense of occasion of CHOGMs would be absent. Nevertheless Peter Williams thought the idea was still worth looking at.

Addressing, next, the space for engagement with the Foundation and especially the Secretariat, Peter Williams referred to the paragraphs in the Secretariat's strategic plan which addressed relationships with Commonwealth organisations, and held out the prospect of strengthening strategic partnerships and of developing a framework of consultation with accredited Commonwealth organisations. Commonwealth organisations were waiting with some impatience for the Secretariat to carry out these promises. Their actual experience in the eleven months since the previous CHOGM was that there was a pall of uncertainty over the accreditation issue; the previously biannual meetings between the Secretariat and Commonwealth civil society organisations had lapsed; and the Secretariat had lost its civil society liaison officer with no clear communication

about future intentions and plans. The failure so far to put flesh on these promises was disappointing and conveyed the impression that the Secretariat had not seen this as an area deserving any kind of priority. In a way this was most surprising, given the downsizing of resources in the Secretariat and the resultant critical shortage of experienced staff capable of carrying out the programmes to which it was committed. Perhaps Commonwealth civil society organisations had themselves been too passive and should take more initiatives to create opportunities for engagement. One big obstacle had been the reluctance to embark on the formation of some kind of collective to represent those of their interests that were common in relation to co-operation with the inter-governmental organisations.

Turning finally to the physical space for engagement (including offices and meeting rooms), Peter Williams said that access to meeting rooms in Marlborough House had been a huge benefit to bodies lacking their own premises at a time when room hire charges in London were so high. But the facility had in recent years been much diminished, with accredited Commonwealth organisations now only able to use the dismal and unadorned Stewards Room – which was very often already booked. Provision of dedicated office space in Marlborough House or Quadrant House (presumably in return for payment of a subsidised rent) had sometimes been mooted, and there might now be fresh potential in this in a period of downsizing. But as far as Peter Williams knew, this had never been taken far, nor had the Secretariat or Foundation taken any significant initiative to help Commonwealth organisations to access accommodation elsewhere in London. Some divisions in the Secretariat provided selected Commonwealth organisations with some kind of secretarial base, but there didn't seem to be any consistency of practice, and some of these arrangements had been terminated. Commonwealth organisations would undoubtedly welcome the Secretariat revisiting and if possible enhancing these possibilities for helping them with physical space.

In conclusion, Peter Williams acknowledged that much of what he had advocated amounted to tinkering with small improvements to established arrangements, which would only take collaboration between Commonwealth civil society and the inter-governmental organisations so far. What was really needed was a new framework for accountability and debate, and a new culture of openness.

The nub of the problem that Commonwealth associations and other civil society bodies faced in trying to engage with Commonwealth policy-makers and policy-making was the black hole at the heart of the Commonwealth. The dreadful truth was that for all its talk of democracy and accountability for others, Commonwealth policy-making was itself totally un-transparent. There was no open Commonwealth assembly where the Secretary-General and his bureaucracy could be publicly held to account. There were no Commonwealth equivalents to Prime Minister's Questions or select committees. And there were no public debates before a strategic plan or a budget were approved. All the processes of discussion and decision took place behind closed doors in the Secretary-General's office, at closed meetings of the Board of Governors, at CHOGM's Committee of the Whole, or at sessions of ministerial meetings and CHOGMs from which the public, civil society representatives and the media were excluded; and because the media were generally so

uninterested in all of this, the basic democratic deficit in the Commonwealth institutions wasn't neutralised by media coverage.

- It was suggested that if soft power was about cultural diplomacy, the Commonwealth would be very much the weaker without its professional and civil society organisations. It was also suggested that the notion of 'Commonwealth organisations' needed to be widened to include many other organisations which contributed to the cultural diplomacy of the Commonwealth without being explicitly labelled as 'Commonwealth' or accredited to the Secretariat.
- There was some discussion of the possibility of monitoring Commonwealth organisations' inputs in order to get a good idea of the scale of their contribution.
- A number of participants referred to Balasubramanyam Chandramohan's point about the Ebola outbreak. It was pointed out that the Commonwealth Secretariat's capacity in this field was very much reduced, with no-one in the Secretariat now specialising in health. But the void could be filled by partnerships with Commonwealth organisations which had expertise in this field.
- Several participants picked up on Peter Williams's point about the timing of civil society inputs, and the need to get in early in the process. Many agreed that Commonwealth organisations should see CHOGMs and ministerial meetings as the culmination of a process. But a particular problem here was the secrecy endemic in the inter-governmental Commonwealth: although everyone knew there was a draft of the final CHOGM communiqué a long time before the actual meeting, for instance, it was very unlikely that civil society organisations would be invited to see it.
- It was also pointed out, however, that the space for engagement between Heads and civil society at CHOGMs was bound to be very limited. Indeed, now that CHOGMs had been reduced in effect to one and a half days' worth of meetings, with increasing commitments to meet young people, speak to the business and civil society fora, etc., there was a very great danger that Heads would be put off attending CHOGMs altogether, since the time for really useful discussions between Heads on core business was getting very limited. Civil society organisations were therefore perhaps barking up the wrong tree by seeking greater access at this stage in the Commonwealth calendar.
- There was some discussion of the possibility of outsourcing the management of Commonwealth meetings: for instance, the Commonwealth education organisations were well positioned to organise education ministers' meetings – though they would need to be given appropriate resources, and governments might need some persuading to let people other than civil servants organise the meetings.
- Differing points of view were put forward regarding the idea of holding the People's Fora in the years in between CHOGMs. Some participants were attached to the idea of meeting in the same venue and at roughly the same time as a CHOGM. But it was also pointed out that sometimes (as in Australia in 2011 and even more so in Sri Lanka in 2013) the People's Fora were held in places a long way from the main CHOGM meetings. The suggestion was made

that a small group of senior Commonwealth figures might be asked to investigate the pros and cons of divorcing the People's Fora from the CHOGMs.

- There was some discussion of the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office's commitment to the Commonwealth; it was pointed out that although the Commonwealth was never going to be an absolutely top priority for a UK government, the Coalition government had been a good deal more committed than its predecessors. As an indication, the number of FCO staff dedicated to the Commonwealth had risen from two to six.

## Session 5: Conclusions

Chair: **Sir Peter Marshall** (former Chair, Council of Commonwealth Societies)  
Speakers: **Baroness Usha Prashar** (former President, Royal Commonwealth Society)  
**Mark Robinson** (Chair [UK], Commonwealth Consortium for Education)  
**Beth Kreling** (Editorial Board, *The Round Table*)

Sir Peter Marshall having introduced the speakers, **Baroness Prashar** began by saying that when Václav Havel was once asked whether he was optimistic or pessimistic, he had replied, 'Neither - I am hopeful'. Baroness Prashar was hopeful about the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth's supporters could easily talk themselves into doom and gloom. But they must not forget that the Commonwealth is essentially a Commonwealth of people. It is its people that make the Commonwealth what it is, and in the twenty-first century interconnections between people would be more important than those between governments.

The Commonwealth is a voluntary association underpinned by significant values, and a multilateral forum through which its peoples and governments can begin to make an impact. Its values – including democracy, human rights, the rule of law, multiculturalism, and equitable development – are very important to today's world because they are under threat. It was in every right-minded person's interest to make the Commonwealth stronger. This was a responsibility shared by the peoples as well as the governments of the Commonwealth.

The meeting had been privileged to hear from both Kamallesh Sharma, Commonwealth Secretary-General and head of the Commonwealth Secretariat, and from Vijay Krishnarayan, the head of the Commonwealth Foundation. Baroness Prashar had heard and understood what Vijay Krishnarayan had said about the need to re-orient the Foundation's activities, but she thought his analysis deficient in one respect, which was that this need did not preclude continuing to support in a relatively modest way the Commonwealth professional organisations - indeed that it was counter-productive not to do so. The professional associations were an important part of the links that sustained the Commonwealth, and indeed could speak more readily to grassroots organisations than an inter-governmental body. On the issue of consultation, she had been heartened by Kamallesh Sharma's assurances concerning posts and meetings, but she was worried by the top-down approach to consultation that the Secretariat seemed to be adopting. She would like to see the Secretariat as a listening organisation which could learn from, and learn to deliver through, others. She would like to see it become part of the Secretariat's DNA that it thought in every instance in terms of partnerships, and of how to multiply the resources available. Structures should follow from this analysis.

One of the themes that had emerged strongly during the meeting was the need for greater collaboration, both between Commonwealth and civil society organisations and between them and the inter-governmental organisations. Baroness Prashar was particularly struck by the absence of - and need for - an umbrella body for Commonwealth organisations, like the NCVO for the non-

governmental sector in the UK, which could act as a bridge between the sector and the inter-governmental organisations, help with capacity-building for some Commonwealth and civil society organisations, and take up some of their key issues.

Another theme that had emerged strongly from the meeting was that the Commonwealth was about values or it was nothing. There had been some talk of 'branding', a word (or metaphor) she didn't like. For the Commonwealth really to make an impact, it needed to be seen to be living those values. Organisations of every kind needed to organise themselves in conformity with the values they preached, including fairness, equality, transparency and accountability.

The Commonwealth needed to think radically, but here was no shortage of ideas on what was needed. The process of reform needed to continue with much greater vigour. As several speakers had said, the Malta CHOGM would be very important. Like others, she had been greatly encouraged by the attitude taken by the Prime Minister of Malta in his speeches about the Commonwealth. As several participants had said, the choice of the next Secretary-General would be crucial. A great deal more transparency was needed about the process than had been the case in the past.

In some countries, civil society organisations are viewed as troublemakers or irritants. But they perform a necessary role everywhere; no country is perfect. At the same time, civil society organisations need to look at themselves regularly. Every organisation has a life-cycle, and if they have passed their sell-by dates they shouldn't be afraid to close down. Ultimately, civil society organisations are there for outcomes, not self-preservation. Looking to the future, what the modern world needs is to ingrain the Commonwealth's values. It was very important that Commonwealth organisations live the values enshrined in the Commonwealth Charter, and means needed to be found whereby the voices of the Commonwealth's citizens would be reflected in how Commonwealth values are made a reality. For this and other reasons, Baroness Prashar was hopeful, not just about the Commonwealth itself, but also about the role Commonwealth and civil society organisations can play in making Commonwealth values a reality.

**Mark Robinson** also started with an anecdote, about Lord Carrington who, asked about the Brandt report, said, 'It's a splendid document, but it's always at the bottom of my in-tray to be read the next day and there it seems to stay!'. Though Commonwealth organisations could no doubt produce a huge wish-list of what they wanted the official Commonwealth to do, they needed to be realistic about what was achievable or that too would stay at the bottom of in-trays.

There had been a good deal of talk about failings and inadequacies in the official Commonwealth. Some wise words had been said on this recently: 'Even though there have been recent appeals by friends of the Commonwealth ... not to debate the organisation "as if standing around the bed of a mortally ill friend", we have to admit there are all the symptoms of division and dysfunction in an organisation that depends on unity and cooperation. While we should not prepare funeral rites, we need to admit that the patient is sick, before going on to make a diagnosis and prescribe solutions'.

These were of course the words of Joseph Muscat, the Maltese Prime Minister, speaking recently at the LSE. It was good to know that at least one Head was saying the things that needed to be said.

No-one wanted to see the Commonwealth continue its slow decline. A different style of leadership was clearly needed. A lot had been said about the Secretariat, and wise voices had pointed out the very limited resources it now had to operate with. But it had always been short of resources – never more so than in the early days, under Arnold Smith. But still the Commonwealth punched above its weight. It wasn't really a question of resources, more how those resources were used. If the Commonwealth was again to punch effectively it needed both consensus and much stronger leadership – not only from the Secretariat (which of course was constrained by the demands of the member states) but from national governments, and from other parts of the Commonwealth family as well.

Mark Robinson agreed completely with what some participants had said about the need to be realistic about the prospects for interaction and input at CHOGMs themselves. A really crucial part of revitalising the Commonwealth involved making it more attractive for Heads to attend CHOGMs. This meant carving out more, not less, space for informal and behind-closed-doors interaction between the Heads themselves. He also hoped that serious thought would be given to where the CHOGM after next would take place as a remote venue could deter far more Heads from attending. Great care had to be taken to ensure CHOGMs did not become meetings of foreign ministers.

Finally, Mark Robinson said that he couldn't agree more with those who had emphasised the need for the Commonwealth to focus on its strengths. It could not be all things to all people, or a kind of UN-lite. Everything should be looked at in terms of where the Commonwealth could add value, and how best to do that – which in many areas meant (as Carl Wright and others had emphasised) mobilising the resources of the unofficial Commonwealth in partnership with inter-governmental organisations.

**Beth Kreling** said that she had found the meeting sober, realistic, and frank – but also incredibly depressing, since in the last five months she had been out of the swim on Commonwealth discussions (having been on maternity leave) nothing much seemed to have changed. The fact that there had been no consultations between the Foundation or Secretariat and Commonwealth civil society organisations since the Sri Lanka CHOGM was particularly galling, since this seemed to be going backwards not forwards.

Vijay Krishnarayan had been right to make clear that Commonwealth civil society organisations needed to show their relevance in terms of their own memberships. A corollary was that they needed to be clear about their own goals as well as how they might contribute to declared Commonwealth goals. As Baroness Prashar had said, they could not be expected to be happy with a top-down approach to collaboration from the inter-governmental organisations.

Several participants had alluded to the need for an umbrella organisation for Commonwealth organisations. She had been involved in several informal meetings since the Colombo CHOGM to explore the possibility of a collective voice. There were of course all sorts of problematic aspects for many organisations. But the benefits, she believed, would far outweigh any disadvantages.

Vijay Krishnarayan had said that he no longer agreed with the conclusion of Stephen Matlin's report, that Commonwealth civil society was a vital part of what made the Commonwealth worthwhile. She, however, agreed with Matlin more than ever. Without its civil society dimension the Commonwealth – particularly in an age of constant retrenchment and questioning of value for money – would be immeasurably poorer. Indeed, the financial pressures on both formal and informal Commonwealth organisations left hope that purely on a cost-benefit analysis both sides would judge it worth them working together. But the lack of effective communication and collaboration not only between the intergovernmental Commonwealth and the non-governmental organisations, but also between the Secretariat and the Foundation themselves was currently a major barrier to successful engagement with civil society. A coherent joint strategy for engaging with Commonwealth civil society was needed.

What also was needed was a more transparent and collaborative reality – driven by the Commonwealth organisations themselves as well as the inter-governmental organisations. It was not so much a question of finance (though clearly this was a concern for many small Commonwealth organisations) as of creating a space for dialogue. Despite what Vijay had said, Beth Kreling still thought that this was the proper role of the Foundation. Indeed, she did wonder whether the Foundation, with its new direction, was not digging a hole for itself: if the Commonwealth dimension to its work was taken out, it was not at all clear what the purpose of the Foundation really was.

Like Baroness Prashar, though, Beth Kreling was inclined to be hopeful. Both civil society organisations and the inter-governmental organisations needed to move beyond negativity and stop passing the buck, and instead focus on finding common purposes and scope for collaboration, which ultimately would strengthen both the Commonwealth and civil society organisations themselves.

Before opening the floor to questions, **Sir Peter Marshall** drew attention to two points which had been made repeatedly. On the one hand, it had convincingly been argued that civil society organisations could not and should not hope to insert themselves into CHOGMs and ministerial meetings in such a way that they actually limited the value of those meetings for their governmental participants; this of course tied in with Peter Williams's point about the need to get in much earlier in the policy-forming process. On the other it had equally convincingly been argued that the scope for collaboration both between Commonwealth civil society organisations themselves and between them and the inter-governmental organisations was enormous, and one of the real keys to revitalising the Commonwealth and helping it once more to punch above its weight.

- A number of participants emphasised that they and their organisations were keen to work in partnership with the inter-governmental organisations, and believed that they had much to

bring to the table; but there was, as Peter Williams had said, something of a black hole at the heart of the Commonwealth, and civil society inputs were often simply lost in a mire of bureaucracy.

- It was hoped that the Secretariat would reinstate its procedures for consultation and information-sharing, particularly in the run-up to the Malta CHOGM. It was also suggested that there should be an annual (or more frequent) meeting, convened by the Secretariat, at which possibilities for collaboration in the delivery of programmes could be discussed.
- Baroness Prashar's point about civil society organisations being regarded as troublemakers was illustrated by a number of examples; and it had been brought home most forcefully at the time of the Sri Lanka CHOGM, when it was made very clear that the Sri Lankan authorities wanted to keep civil society firmly at arm's length from the inter-governmental proceedings.
- While several participants welcomed the Secretary-General's announcement of the creation of new civil society liaison posts within his own office, it was pointed out that not much was known yet about the remit and level of appointment of the new posts, and how they might in practical terms facilitate engagement between civil society and the inter-governmental organisations. Several participants expressed agreement with Baroness Prashar that what was needed was for collaboration to move more in the direction of enabling and convening rather than top-down 'management'.
- Although there was a good deal of support for civil society liaison being moved completely into the Secretariat, some speakers found it hard to see what the point of the Foundation now was. It was also suggested that the Foundation did not seem to have resolved some of its accountability issues, which would become the more acute the more it moved away from its origins as a body to promote specifically Commonwealth civil society organisations.
- It was also pointed out that perhaps too much emphasis was being put on the question of consultation; if the problems were looked at from the other way round – that is, how best to deliver programmes that supported Commonwealth values – it should be obvious that in many cases it was sensible for the inter-governmental organisations to learn how to collaborate with and deliver through others, particularly those organisations with experience on the ground.
- Support was expressed for the idea of an inventory of Commonwealth organisations and their activities; it was suspected that many of them had a very good story to tell, and indeed that it would become clear that they were not only an important part of the Commonwealth family, but perhaps in terms of actual impact the most important part.
- Several participants spoke in favour of the creation of an umbrella organisation for Commonwealth organisations, which could make civil society voices better heard. It was also suggested that as an interim step there might be agreement on, say, an annual conference of Commonwealth organisations, focused not on navel-gazing but on what practical steps could be taken to collaborate in a rejuvenated Commonwealth. Such a conference might cover the whole range of issues facing Commonwealth organisations and seek ways to help them face them collaboratively, including fundraising, membership, advocacy, programme design, and evaluation.

- One participant with a long memory pointed out that the Commonwealth had been through many crises before; he remembered in particular the atmosphere of doom and gloom in the run-up to the 1971 CHOGM, with the Commonwealth riven over the issue of sanctions against South Africa. Yet the Commonwealth had emerged from that particular CHOGM very much strengthened, with the Singapore declaration and the founding of the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation. The Commonwealth needed brilliant leadership and good causes in order to thrive. There was certainly no lack of good causes in the modern world, to which the Commonwealth could make a distinctive contribution.

## **Speakers and chairs**

### **Richard Bourne** (Senior Research Fellow, Institute of Commonwealth Studies)

Richard Bourne OBE is a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London, and Secretary of the Ramphal Institute, and was Chairman of the *Round Table* from 2005 to 2011. He began his career as a journalist, working for *The Guardian*, *New Society*, and the *Evening Standard*, before becoming Deputy Director of the Commonwealth Institute (1983-9). He was subsequently founding Director of the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative and later of the Commonwealth Policy Studies Unit. He has published a number of books, on education, journalism, the Commonwealth, and Latin America.

### **Dr Balasubramanyam Chandramohan** (Member, Cw Civil Society Advisory Committee)

Dr Balasubramanyam Chandramohan FRSA is a member of the Civil Society Advisory Committee of the Commonwealth Foundation, and the Management Committee of the Council for Education in the Commonwealth. He has contributed to civil society work in the Commonwealth in general, but specifically in the UK, Sierra Leone, and Cameroon. He is a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London, working on a monograph on Transnational Education in the Commonwealth. He co-edits the peer-reviewed academic journal *Cameroon Journal of Studies in the Commonwealth*, and has served on approval panels for delivery of UK university courses in India and Singapore, among other countries.

### **Rhonda Cox** (Membership Secretary, Commonwealth Human Ecology Council)

Rhonda Cox is from Trinidad and has a strong interest in development and environmental issues. A recent MA in International Relations graduate from Regent's University, London, she began working at the Commonwealth Human Ecology Council in June 2014, initially volunteering but more recently as Membership Secretary.

### **Oliver Everett** (Chief Executive, Commonwealth Enterprise and Investment Council)

Prior to taking up his post as Chief Executive of the Commonwealth Enterprise and Investment Council, Oliver Everett was a Partner with NewMarket Partners, a situational management firm specialising in transforming businesses facing challenging situations. With operational, board and strategy experience, he has led turnarounds and given pragmatic and outcome-focused advice to many companies. A Sloan Fellow at London Business School, his experience includes distribution, engineering, contracting, leisure, restaurant, fashion and automotive as well as new venture start-ups across a number of fields. Starting his career in the Royal Navy, he worked for Renault then Lotus Cars and the Marshall of Cambridge Group. Before joining NewMarket, he was an advisor and non-executive director as well as running his own companies. He was chairman of an engineering company operating in the marine and utility sectors until December 2012.

### **Alexandra Jones** (Editorial Board, *The Round Table*)

Alexandra (Sandy) Jones is a long-serving member of the *Round Table's* Editorial Board, and has served in senior positions with both the principal intergovernmental organisations of the Commonwealth (Director of Strategy Planning and Evaluation and Board Secretary, Commonwealth Secretariat, 2002-2008; Deputy Director, Commonwealth Foundation, 1990-1994). Other roles she has held include: Chief Executive of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, and of the Chartered Institute of Linguists; Senior Governance Adviser to the UNDP in Indonesia; and most recently, Governance Director of Amnesty International; she also serves on several academic and charitable boards. She holds masters' degrees from Oxford, Harvard and London universities, is multilingual, and is a prizewinning poet, singer, and composer.

**Beth Kreling** (Editorial Board, *The Round Table*, and Convenor, Cw Organisations' Forum)

Beth Kreling is currently Chief Operating Officer at the education NGO Link Community Development International and Secretary of the Commonwealth Consortium for Education, an umbrella body representing Commonwealth civil society organisations working in the education sector. She has been closely involved with Commonwealth civil society activities for a number of years, most recently convening a series of meetings of Commonwealth Organisations. Prior to joining Link in 2010, she was a Consultant at political and economic risk consultancy, Oxford Analytica. She also has prior experience in publishing, working for Pavilion and Collins & Brown.

**Vijay Krishnarayan** (Director, Commonwealth Foundation)

Vijay Krishnarayan has been Director of the Commonwealth Foundation since 2012. A land-use planner by training, he has particular interests in the environment and sustainable development, and has been involved in civil society organisations in those fields for many years. He was Managing Partner for the Caribbean Natural Resources Institute before joining the Commonwealth Foundation in 2006 as Deputy Director, in which capacity he oversaw the Foundation's co-ordination of civil society input to the 2007, 2009 and 2011 CHOGMs.

**Sir Peter Marshall** (former Chair, Council of Commonwealth Societies)

Sir Peter Marshall KCMG, CVO, joined HM Foreign Service in 1949. He served in Washington, Baghdad, Bangkok, Geneva, and Paris, and as UK Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the UN in Geneva before joining the Commonwealth Secretariat as Deputy Secretary-General (Economic) from 1983 to 1988. He was Chairman of the Royal Commonwealth Society (1988-92) and of the Joint Commonwealth Societies Council (1993-2003) and has been involved in many other Commonwealth organisations. He has published several books on diplomacy, and is a regular contributor to *The Round Table*.

**Stuart Mole** (Chairman, *The Round Table*)

Stuart Mole CVO, OBE, has been Chairman of the *Round Table* since 2011. He was Parliamentary Press Officer then (after a spell as Director of OUTSET, a youth and disability charity) Head of the Office of the Leader of the Liberal Party (David Steel) before joining the Commonwealth Secretariat as Special Assistant to the Secretary-General (1984-90) then Director of the Secretary-General's Office (1990-2000). From 2000 to 2009 he was Director-General of the Royal Commonwealth Society. He is a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London, and a doctoral student at the University of Exeter.

**Rita Payne** (President, Commonwealth Journalists' Association)

As well as being President of the Commonwealth Journalists' Association, Rita Payne is a freelance journalist and media adviser. She writes for a range of publications and speaks on media-related issues. She worked for nearly thirty years with BBC World TV and BBC World Service News. From 1995 to 2008 she was Asia Editor at BBC World, with responsibility for three daily regional news programmes.

**Maj-Gen Roddy Porter** (Director-General, Royal Over-Seas League)

Major-General Roddy Porter MBE was commissioned into the Royal Welch Fusiliers in 1980, serving on several tours of Northern Ireland, in the Gulf War in 1991, and in Bosnia in 1993-4. Promoted to Major-General in 2008, he worked for a year in the multinational force headquarters in Baghdad, responsible for reconciliation initiatives with the Shia and Sunni militias. His final army appointment was as chief of staff (joint warfare development) in the Permanent Joint Headquarters, Northwood,

and general officer commanding UK military bases overseas. He became Director-General of the Royal Over-Seas League in October 2011.

**Baroness Usha Prashar** (former President, Royal Commonwealth Society)

Ushar Prashar, Baroness Prashar of Runnymede CBE, PC, has long been active in civil society organisations and public service roles. Having been Director of the Runnymede Trust and the National Council for Voluntary Organisations, she was a Civil Service Commissioner from 1990 to 1996 and First Civil Service Commissioner from 2000 to 2005, and Chairman of the Judicial Appointments Commission from 2006 to 2010. She was Chairman of the Royal Commonwealth Society from 2001 to 2008 and President from 2008 to 2013. She is Deputy Chair of the Trustees of the British Council and a member of the Iraq Inquiry. She was made a life peer in 1999.

**Patsy Robertson** (Chair, Commonwealth Association)

Patsy Robertson grew up in Jamaica and came to Britain in the late 1950s. She joined the staff of the newly formed Commonwealth Secretariat in 1965 as its press officer and was Director of Information and Official Spokesperson for the Commonwealth from 1983 to 1994. She worked as a senior Media Advisor for the Fourth World Conference on Women and Beijing +5 and with UNICEF on the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children in 1991-2. She is Chair of Widows' Rights International as well as the Commonwealth Association, and is a trustee of several charities including the Thomson Foundation and the Commonwealth Press Union.

**Mark Robinson** (Chair [UK], Commonwealth Consortium for Education)

Mark Robinson, after being called to the Bar, worked in his early career in the offices of the Chief of the UN Emergency Mission in Bangladesh, then the UN Secretary-General, and after that the Commonwealth Secretary-General (Sir Shridath Ramphal). He became an MP twice, serving as a Minister in the Wales Office and as PPS to the Minister of Overseas Development (Baroness Chalker) and the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Lord Hurd). He was also a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee and part of the investigation into the US invasion of Grenada. Since leaving Parliament, he has been Executive Director of the Commonwealth Press Union and Executive Chair of the Council for Education in the Commonwealth, and is currently the Chair (UK) of the Commonwealth Consortium for Education. He has also served on the Board of the Commonwealth Development Corporation, taken part in several Commonwealth Observer Groups, and been Chair of the Commonwealth Organisations Group on Zimbabwe.

**HE Kamallesh Sharma** (Commonwealth Secretary-General)

HE Kamallesh Sharma has been Commonwealth Secretary-General since 2008. He joined the Indian Foreign Service in 1965, and his postings included Bonn, Hong Kong, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and East Berlin (where he was Ambassador to the GDR). He was India's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the UN in Geneva (1988-90) and New York (1997-2002), the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative to East Timor (2002-4), and India's High Commissioner in the UK (2004-8). He has been Chancellor of Queen's University, Belfast, since 2009. In 2000 he edited *Mille Fleurs: Poetry from Around the World*.

**Andrew Tuggey** (Chief Executive, Commonwealth Parliamentary Association UK)

Andrew Tuggey DL, a former soldier and defence diplomat, joined the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association UK as Chief Executive and Secretary in January 2004. CPA UK's mission is to strengthen parliamentary diplomacy throughout the Commonwealth, which it achieves by conducting international parliamentary outreach on behalf of Westminster and the wider CPA. Funded by Parliament, CPA UK is one of Westminster's windows on the world and has partnerships with the United Nations Development Programme, Voluntary Service Overseas, the International Institute for

Environment and Development, and others in the field of parliamentary strengthening. He is HM Deputy Lieutenant in Gwent, where he also chairs ABF The Soldiers' Charity (formerly the Army Benevolent Fund).

**Peter Williams** (Management Committee, Council for Education in the Commonwealth)

Peter Williams OBE is an officer and Management Committee member of the Council for Education in the Commonwealth; and Founding Secretary, now President, of the Commonwealth Consortium for Education. He was Director of Education in the Commonwealth Secretariat, 1984-94, and Secretary of the Commission on Commonwealth Studies, 1996-7. In his earlier career he worked at the Overseas Development Institute, as Planning Adviser to the ministries of education in Kenya and Ghana, and Professor of Education in Developing Countries at the Institute of Education in London

**Sally-Ann Wilson** (Secretary-General, Commonwealth Broadcasting Association)

Sally-Ann Wilson is Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association, the largest global association of public broadcasters with 102 members in 54 countries. She joined the CBA in 2001 following a career in radio news and as a producer/director of TV documentaries, latterly working as a broadcast executive for the BBC and independent sectors. She is also a media academic and founder of the Masters' Programme in Media and International Development at the University of East Anglia, Norwich. In 2010 she was appointed to lead the CBA, which is currently undergoing reform. In 2014 she was awarded an honorary doctorate in Business Administration for outstanding services to international media by the University of Bedfordshire.

**Prof John Wood** (Secretary-General, Association of Commonwealth Universities)

A former Principal of the Faculty of Engineering, Imperial College, London, Professor John Wood CBE has been Secretary-General of the Association of Commonwealth Universities since 2010. An adviser to governments on international research infrastructures and former chair of the European Research Area Board of the European Commission, he is currently a member of the Research Innovation and Science Board of the European Commission, responsible for Open Science and Open Innovation. He is also, inter alia, co-chair of the Global Research Data Alliance.

**Carl Wright** (Secretary-General, Commonwealth Local Government Forum)

Carl Wright has been Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Local Government Forum since its inception in 1995. After serving as one of the first UK nationals in the European Commission, as an adviser to George Thomson, the British Commissioner, he was Secretary of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (1974-80) then founding Director of the Commonwealth Trade Union Council (1980-8). From 1988 to 1994 he worked for the Commonwealth Secretariat as Assistant Director in charge of Commonwealth programmes for South Africa, Namibia and Mozambique. He has served on a number of international expert and election observer groups. In 2013 he was awarded an honorary doctorate in Public Administration by the University of KwaZulu Natal.

## Participants

**Gurudas Bailur** (Commonwealth Association)

**Andrew Baines** (Commonwealth Education Trust)

**David Banks** (Public Affairs Adviser, S-G's office, Commonwealth Secretariat)

**Dr Craig Barclay** (Commonwealth Association of Museums)

**Terry Barringer** (Assistant Editor, *The Round Table*)

**Blackson Olaseni Bayewumi** (Initiator, Cw People's Council and Chair, Nigeria Conversation)

**Smuts Beyers** (CEO, Nexus Strategic Partnerships)

**Domini Bingham** (Commonwealth Association)

**Dr Karen Brewer** (Commonwealth Magistrates' and Judges' Association)

**Alexander Came** (Public Affairs and Programmes Officer, RCS)

**Eleanor Chinkondenji** (Commonwealth Association)

**Jane Cole** (Commonwealth Association)

**Oliver Craven** (Commonwealth Partnerships Manager, FCO)

**Terence Dormer** (Commonwealth Association)

**Col Nigel Dransfield** (Financial Controller, Royal Commonwealth Ex-Services League)

**Katherine Eden-Haig** (CEO and Secretary General, Commonwealth Lawyers Association)

**Dr RoseMarie-Rita O. Endeley** (Commonwealth Association, RCS, ROSL)

**Richard Evans** (Trustee, Ramphal Institute)

**Rumman Faruqi** (former Secretariat Director of the Economics Division)

**Jade Fell** (Features Writer, *Global* magazine)

**Greta Fernandes** (Commonwealth Association)

**Jennifer Fonseka** (Commonwealth Association)

**Eleanor Fuller** (Director of Advocacy and Cw Engagement, Q E Diamond Jubilee Trust)

**Alex Gapud** (Bristol Commonwealth Society)

**Simon Gimson** (Director, Sec-Gen's Office, ComSec)

**Prof Ved Goel** (Commonwealth Association)

**Dr Amelia Hadfield** (Editorial Board, *The Round Table*)

**Godfrey Hall** (Chair, Bath and District Branch, RCS)

**Stephen Hiscock** (Director for Guyana, Commonwealth Boxing Council)

**Clive Holland** (Deputy Commonwealth President, Royal Life Saving Society)

**Duncan Howitt** (Political Officer, Australian High Commission)

**Derek Ingram** (Editorial Board, *The Round Table*)

**David Ives** (Trustee, RCS)

**Jenny Ives** (Commonwealth Countries League)

**Prof Chris James** (Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration and Management)

**Dr Gordon Johnson** (Editorial Board, *The Round Table*)

**Helen Jones** (Director, Youth Affairs and Education Programmes, RCS)

**Sean Leno** (Director of Operations, Commonwealth Enterprise and Investment Council)

**Pete Lockwood** (Communications intern, Commonwealth Human Ecology Council)

**Mary Mackie** (Commonwealth Association)

**Leah Marchuk** (Second Secretary, Canadian High Commission)

**Stanley Martin** (Royal Over-Seas League)

**Dr Alex May** (Hon Secretary, *The Round Table*)

**Sashy Nathan** (Liaison Officer, Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative)

**Theodora Ndep** (RCS; consultant, public affairs branding)

**Anton Ofield-Kerr** (Head of Policy, International HIV/AIDS Alliance)

**Nalini Paranavitane** (President, Commonwealth Countries League)

**Rupert Jones Parry** (Co-Editor, *The Commonwealth Yearbook*)

**Trevor Percy** (Deputy Chair, Commonwealth HIV&AIDS Action Group)

**Emily Pignon** (Executive Assistant, Commonwealth Parliamentary Association)

**Dr Rosemary Preston** (Executive Chair, Council for Education in the Commonwealth)

**Scott Proudfoot** (Minister-Counsellor, Canadian High Commission)

**Andrew Robertson** (Co-Editor, *The Commonwealth Yearbook*)

**Sharon Robinson** (Commonwealth Association)

**Sally Shebe** (Director-General, Commonwealth Youth Orchestra and Choir)

**Anna Shepherd** (The Kaleidoscope Trust)

**Katie Silvester** (Executive Editor, *Global* magazine)

**Richard Sisson** (Commonwealth Association)

**Chandra Tambimuttu** (Commonwealth Association)

**Brian Waldy** (Cw Liaison Officer, Cw Association of Surveying and Land Economy)

**Dr Nicholas Watts** (Trustee, Chair of Projects Ctee, and Education Adviser, CHEC)

**Prof Janet Wilson** (Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies)