

Commonwealth Day 2009

Message from the Prime Minister of Jamaica, The Hon. Bruce Golding

Jamaica is pleased to join other members in commemorating the 60th anniversary of the founding of the Commonwealth of Nations under the theme "The Commonwealth at 60 - Serving a New Generation".

The Commonwealth is an organization of enduring importance, unique in its existence since it is not based on a charter, treaty or other legal instrument but by a framework of principles to which member nations subscribe. It is a remarkable organization comprising 53 nations and a combined population of almost 2 billion - almost one-third of the world's population - scattered across every continent.

Its membership spans countries that are rich and poor, not-so-rich and not-so-poor, and includes a diversity of religion, ethnicity and constitutional systems. We cherish this diversity and the partnership we have established based on equal status and consensus.

The Commonwealth is the only international organization other than the United Nations with such extensive global reach that focuses on political, economic and social development issues and the vulnerabilities and peculiar challenges faced by small states.

This year's theme reinforces the important role that the Commonwealth, with half of its population being under the age of 25, must continue to play in promoting international peace, understanding and cooperation. Through a variety of programmes designed to promote education, training, leadership development and cultural exchange, the Commonwealth is helping to shape a new generation of world citizens.

The Commonwealth's strong tradition of democracy, good governance and the rule of law remains as relevant and vital as it was 60 years ago and is a bulwark against political instability and the social dislocation it generates.

The Commonwealth can be justly proud of its achievements in promoting human development, national capacity building, the empowerment of women and young people and the ever-increasing role of civil society. Jamaica is proud of the contribution it has been able to make to the work of the Commonwealth and appreciative of the benefits it has derived in many areas of national development.

The Commonwealth will face new challenges in the future and will be called upon to provide leadership in addressing new problems which will emerge. The need for reform of the multilateral financial system, especially in terms of the treatment of small, heavily indebted, middle-income countries such as those in the Caribbean which, on behalf of CARICOM countries, I placed squarely before the Commonwealth at the last Heads of Government meeting in Uganda in November 2007, is an issue that has now assumed even

greater urgency in view of the current global economic crisis.

Jamaica looks forward to the next Heads of Government meeting which will be held in Trinidad and Tobago in November. As a sister CARICOM country, we are providing support to Trinidad and Tobago in the hosting of this conference and will assist in ensuring that the Commonwealth continues to pursue its mandate to foster the principles of democracy and promote economic and social development.

As we celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Commonwealth, I reaffirm Jamaica's unswerving commitment to the values and principles that have enabled it to endure and will enable it to confront the problems of the present and the challenges of the future with strength and confidence.