

## **Text of the remarks by Chief Emeka Anyaoku at the tree planting in memory of Patsy Robertson in the garden of Marlborough House on 9<sup>th</sup> May 2023**

I am delighted to be back in Marlborough House (MH) after so many years. I recall with abiding pleasure my thirty-four years in total spent on these premises. For no less than twenty-eight of those years, Patsy was a valued colleague.

I first met Patsy when I arrived in MH in April 1966 which was within the first year of the establishment of the Commonwealth Secretariat in July 1965. The first SG Arnold Smith, a senior Canadian diplomat, assembled in the Secretariat a relatively small team of officials with whom he consulted closely in pursuit of his vision for the Secretariat and the Commonwealth organization. One of his early undertakings in the Secretariat was a review of the various existing Commonwealth organisations mandated by Heads of Government when they decided to establish the Secretariat with a view to determine which of the organizations should be integrated in the new Secretariat.

I served as the Secretary of the Review Committee of selected representatives of Commonwealth Governments whose work resulted in the creation of the Economic and Education Divisions in the Secretariat from what had existed respectively as the Commonwealth Economic Committee and the Commonwealth Education Organisation.

Patsy was a member of the initially small information team working with the late Clyde Sanger and I was an Assistant Director in the International Affairs Division which later became the Political Affairs Division of the Secretariat.

Arnold Smith's vision and preoccupation in those early years of the Secretariat was to make a reality of the modern Commonwealth which had been proclaimed in the London Declaration of 1949 by the Heads of Government of the then eight members of the Commonwealth under the symbolic headship of HM King George VI.

Arnold Smith was confronted with two main challenges as he pursued his vision. At the bureaucratic level, it appeared that not all the British Government officials who had before the establishment of the Secretariat organized and managed the Commonwealth's affairs, including especially the meetings of Commonwealth prime ministers, seemed happy to hand over those responsibilities to the new, independent Secretariat. Signs of this were evident in the difficulties the

Secretariat had even in as minor an administrative matter as obtaining CSG 1 as the registration number for the Secretary-General's official car.

But by far the greater challenge was to change the general public perception of the Commonwealth as the *British* Commonwealth. This was where the Information Division played a major role and Patsy's sterling qualities as an effective communicator played a key part. She relished communicating to the general public the essential definition of the modern Commonwealth, that was subsequently reaffirmed in the Singapore Declaration of 1971, as a voluntary association of independent sovereign nations. I have no doubt, were she still around, of what she would be saying to some of the Caribbean and British journalists whose comments about the recent coronation of HM King Charles 111, the new Head of the Commonwealth, seemed to suggest that they were still living in the pre-1949 era of the Commonwealth.

Patsy deservedly moved from the rank of a Chief Officer to Assistant Director, and finally to becoming the Director of the Information Division of the Secretariat in 1988 - the position that she occupied until her retirement in 1994.

Patsy cared passionately for the Commonwealth and was an effective advocate of the organization's values and principles. She often lamented the lack of positive interest by some British and wider Commonwealth media in the modern Commonwealth and its activities.

I remember Patsy's enthusiasm when soon after my assumption of office as Secretary-General, I asked her to be a member of the preliminary Secretariat team that I sent to Malaysia to prepare the grounds for the very first Commonwealth Observer Group to a member country's national elections in 1990.

And she was also equally enthusiastic when I appointed her a member of the Secretariat team that accompanied the Commonwealth Observer Group to the first multiparty elections in Zambia in 1992. Expecting that the election might lead to some national conflict, I asked Patsy to call me the moment the results and projections indicated the winner.

As it happened, Patsy called to tell me that President Kaunda had lost the elections while I was having lunch with Nelson Mandela in my hotel room in Johannesburg. I was able to talk immediately to Kaunda and the incoming President Chiluba and as a result President Kaunda handed over power by

personally welcoming Chiluba to State House in Lusaka, and conducting him round his new domain.

Patsy showed uncommon dedication in her task of informing the general public of the role of the Commonwealth in the struggle to end apartheid in South Africa. She was an effective spokesperson of the Secretariat when my predecessor, Sonny Ramphal, championed the call for international sanctions against apartheid South Africa in the period up to 1990 and when from 1990 to 1994 I led the seminal role of the Commonwealth in ending apartheid.

The Commonwealth's seminal role included supporting the negotiations between the apartheid Government and the anti-apartheid political parties, sending a team of police officers from Commonwealth countries to assist in the training of the South African police to change from brutal policing of anti-apartheid protesters to community policing, despatching high-level Commonwealth Observers whose presence helped to reduce violence when the killing by the police of ANC stalwarts in Boipatong threatened to derail the negotiations, and finally sending electoral experts, and later a large election observer team, to help South Africa's Electoral Commission in the organisation of the national elections that brought in the democratically elected government of President Nelson Mandela.

Patsy's remarkable service to the Commonwealth continued after she left the Secretariat in 1994 in activities with a number of Commonwealth organizations. Her activities included becoming the Founder Chairperson of our now thriving Commonwealth Association which is being energetically served by David Blake as Executive Secretary and Dr Stuart Mole as the Chairperson.

Finally, Patsy Robertson loved this former Royal residence, Marlborough House, and its gardens. I believe therefore that it is a fitting recognition that HM The Queen just before she died approved the planting of a tree, since chosen to be the Indian bean tree, *Catalpa Nana*, in the garden of Marlborough House in memory of Patsy Robertson.

And I have the honour and huge pleasure of doing the ceremonial planting in the presence of Patsy's children, John and Sarah Robertson, and her many friends.