



# THE COMMONWEALTH ASSOCIATION

*Staying engaged – promoting and fostering the Commonwealth*

## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2023

Delegates' Lounge, Marlborough House, Pall Mall, London SW1Y 5HX

Wednesday 19 July 2023

Starting at 3pm

### *Agenda*

1. 1500-1505	<b>Welcome and opening remarks – Stuart Mole</b>
2. 1505 - 1507	<b>Apologies</b> To be sent to the Secretary, David Blake – email <a href="mailto:info@comassoc.org">info@comassoc.org</a> or by phone on 01494 583112 or 07740856948
3. 1507 – 1512	<b>Minutes of the 2022 Annual General Meeting</b> (circulated in advance)
4. 1512 – 1525	<b>Chair's report 2022/2023</b> (circulated in advance) – Stuart Mole Questions from the floor on Chair's report and 2022 AGM minutes
5. 1525 – 1535	<b>Treasurer's report</b> (Accounts for the financial year 1 January – 31 December 2022 circulated in advance) – Richard Sisson Questions on the accounts from the floor Adoption of the accounts
6. 1535 – 1545	<b>Elections for Officers and Executive Committee and appointment of the auditor</b> Nominations were invited with a closing date of 12 July. Details of nominations received are attached.
7. 1547 – 1558	<b>Any other business</b>



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## Minutes of the 2022 Annual General Meeting held online using Zoom on Thursday 19 July 2022

1. The Chair, Stuart Mole, welcomed members from around the Commonwealth who were present online for the meeting. He regretted that owing to the heatwave in London, with temperatures of up to 38 degrees, it had not been possible to hold the meeting in person at Marlborough House, but he felt that it was better to hold the meeting online rather than not to hold it at all, or to postpone it until later in the year.

69 people had registered to attend the AGM and/or the lecture in person, of whom 52 (75%) were members and supporters and 17 were not (25%). Online attendance was not as high as hoped, comprising a total of just 36 people (52% of those who had registered), of whom 28 (77%) were members and supporters and 8 (23%) were not. However, the quota of 15 for the AGM was reached.

2. **Apologies for absence for the AGM** were received from Munawwar Alam, Rawwida Baksh, Domini Bingham, Chris Bowman, Karen Brewer, Hugh Craft, Max Gaylard, Raja Gomez, Elizabeth Hinks, Asif Khan, Judy McNeil, Godson Okafor, Rita Payne, William Rezel and Martin Smith.

**Apologies for absence for the lecture** were received from Jon Davies, Prof Luis Francheschi, Dr Anne Gallagher, Lord Luce, Dr Arjoon Suddhoo, Stephen Twigg and Brigid Watson.

3. **Minutes of the 2021 AGM**

The minutes of the previous year's meeting, which had been circulated in advance, were accepted by the meeting as a correct record.

4. **Chair's report**

Stuart Mole presented his *Chair's report*, which had been circulated to members in advance. He ran through the report, emphasising the following issues:

- the measures taken to commemorate Patsy Robertson, including the lecture in her name and the plan to plant a tree in her honour in the garden of Marlborough House

- the development and growth of the new website and the Comassoc Google Group
- the relationship between the Association and other Commonwealth organisations, including particularly the Independent Forum for Commonwealth Organisations (IFCO) and The Round Table
- the highly positive report on the future of Commonwealth Studies in the University of London
- the successful Round Table conference 'Is the Commonwealth Working?', in which a number of Association members played a key role

Stuart's report was accepted by the meeting.

## 5. Treasurer's report

Richard Sisson presented the *Accounts* for 2021, which had been circulated in advance. Income from membership subscriptions had risen from £1,692 in 2020 to £1,885 in 2021. Expenditure for the year was considerably up from £216 to £2,079, but this was explained by hefty sums for the new website, the subscription for Zoom and the design and printing of the membership leaflet. This rise had been anticipated at last year's AGM. There was a slight reduction in the surplus for the year of £5,897, which in the circumstances was good. It was important to note, however, that owing to the pandemic there had been no social events, which usually accounted for a substantial proportion of the Association's expenditure.

Richard's report was accepted by the meeting.

## 6. Elections

The following nominations for officers and committee members were accepted by the meeting:

<b>Position</b>	<b>Nominee</b>	<b>Nominated by</b>	<b>Seconded by</b>
Chair	Stuart Mole	Amitav Banerji	Cheryl Dorall
Vice Chair	Bishakha Mukherjee	Greg Covington	Sir Peter Marshall
Secretary	David Blake	Richard Bourne	Raja Gomez
Treasurer	Richard Sisson	K B K Rao	Praxede Weerasinghe
Membership Secretary	Lorna McLaren	Carmaline Bandara	Domini Bingham
Committee Member	Shobhna Rattansi	Dharani Rethnam	Judy McNeill
Committee Member	Rickie Sankar	K B K Rao	Elaine Ogilvie
Committee Member	Sree Vallipuram	Bobby Dohunso Tettey	William Rezel
Committee Member	Felix Samuel	Andrea David-Hugh-Kong	Godson Okafor

## 7. Appointment of auditor

Rickie Sankar was re-appointed as auditor of the Association's accounts.

## 8. Any other business

Mark Robinson spoke about the Kigali CHOGM, which he had attended. He was surprised that there was the longest communique that he could remember, with 117 clauses. He felt that the low attendance of Heads of Government and the admission of Togo and Gabon as almost a fait-accompli were both matters of concern. He reported on the re-election of Baroness Scotland as Secretary-General.

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The meeting was followed by the Second Patsy Robertson Memorial Lecture, which was given by

Sir Malcolm Rifkind, former British Foreign Secretary and the Chair of the University of London's Committee to conduct an inquiry into the future of Commonwealth studies at the University of London. The inspiring and thoughtful lecture, which was about the future of the Commonwealth, is available on the Association's website and on its *YouTube* channel at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RgA3UFvw7YU&t=528s>



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## Chair's Report, 2022/2023

I started my report last year by welcoming the plan to return to Marlborough House for our 2022 AGM and for the Second Patsy Robertson Memorial Lecture. Unfortunately, 19 July 2022 turned out to be the day of a heatwave with temperatures up to 38 degrees and we made a last-minute decision to hold the events on Zoom. Our AGM this year is also planned for 19 July and I am keeping my fingers crossed that we will be able to meet in person this time! It is always good to see old friends and colleagues, even if Zoom is embedded as one of our standard operating mechanisms, especially for committee meetings.

### 1. Remembering Patsy Robertson and other former colleagues



A special moment in the year was the planting of a tree in memory of our founding chair, Patsy Robertson, who died in 2020. The idea came from Richard Bourne, who proposed at our 2021 AGM that we seek permission for the planting of a suitable tree in the grounds of Marlborough House. It took us around eighteen months to obtain the necessary approvals but on 9 May this year we held a memorial event in the garden, followed by a reception in the Blenheim Saloon. The tree is an Indian bean tree, *catalpa nana*, which, as my photo indicates, is happily thriving.

The event was attended by about 90 people, including members of Patsy's family and a number of friends, some of whom had flown in specially for the occasion. Pictures and videos of the gathering are available on the Association's website.

Chief Emeka Anyaoku, the former Secretary-General who worked with Patsy for 28 years, was our guest of honour and we were also joined by the current Secretary-General, Baroness Scotland. Both spoke affectionately about Patsy and we were also pleased to be joined by John and Sarah Robertson, Patsy's son and daughter, who spoke movingly about their mother as only offspring can.

As it happened, Chief Anyaoku reached the age of 90 earlier in the year and we took the opportunity of his presence to wish (and sing!) him Happy Birthday and to eat a special cake decorated with the flags of the Commonwealth and Nigeria.

Patsy was also remembered by the Second Patsy Robertson Memorial Lecture, which was given on Zoom by Sir Malcolm Rifkind, the former British Foreign Secretary, who spoke about *The Future of the Commonwealth*. Like the first lecture by Dr Anne Gallagher, Sir Malcolm's thought-provoking lecture is available on our website and on YouTube.

In June of this year, we heard of the death of one of our patrons, Sir Peter Marshall. Peter, who was Deputy Secretary-General from 1983 to 1988, encouraged us to form the Association and was closely involved with it in many ways. Our Comassoc Google Group was flooded with messages from our members and these have been posted on our website. His wisdom, humanity and humour will be remembered for years to come.

Like many former colleagues, I attended Peter's funeral later in June at St Mary Abbots, Kensington, and my report of the occasion has been posted on the Association's website. An obituary for Sir Peter is available on the Round Table website at: <https://www.commonwealthroundtable.co.uk/commonwealth/sir-peter-marshall-1924-2023/>

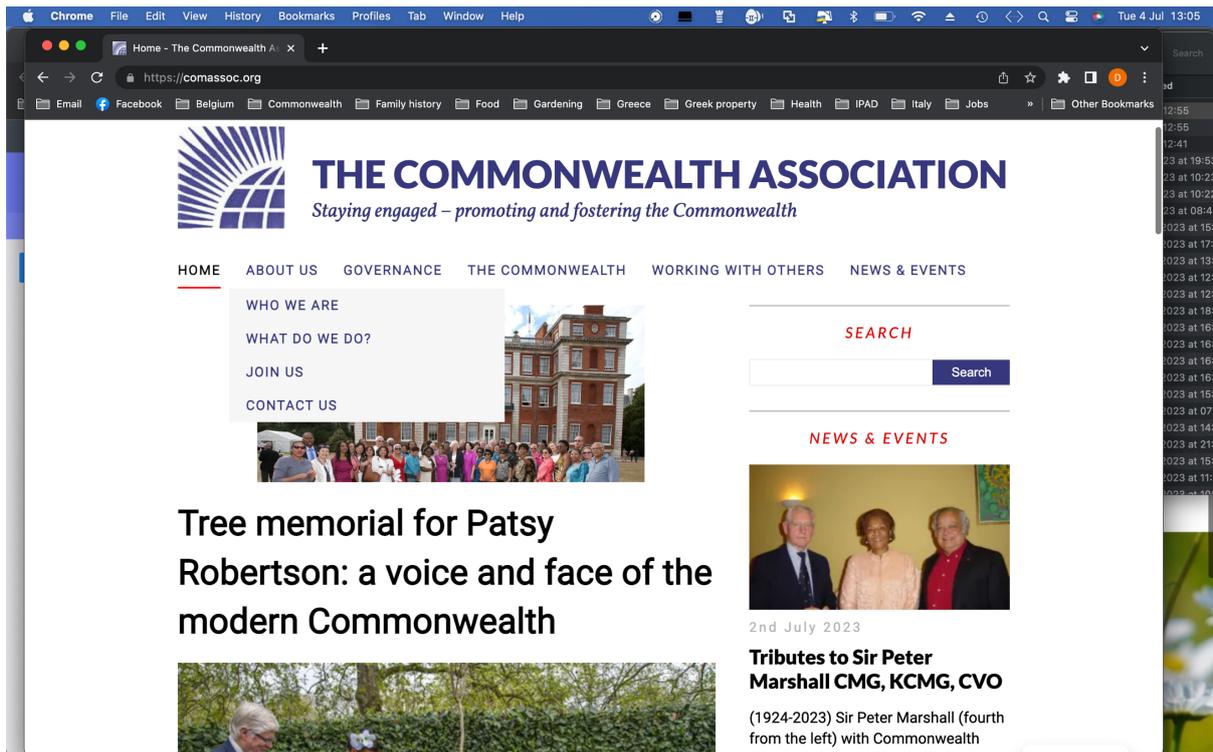
During the year we have lost a number of other former colleagues who gave years of service to the Commonwealth. These include Yusuff Ali, Tony Eggleton, Semisi Fakehau, Dr Ved Goel, Gina Mason and Merrick Needham. We are very sorry to lose these valued colleagues and extend our condolences to their families.

## **2. Communicating with members and supporters**

### **a) New members**

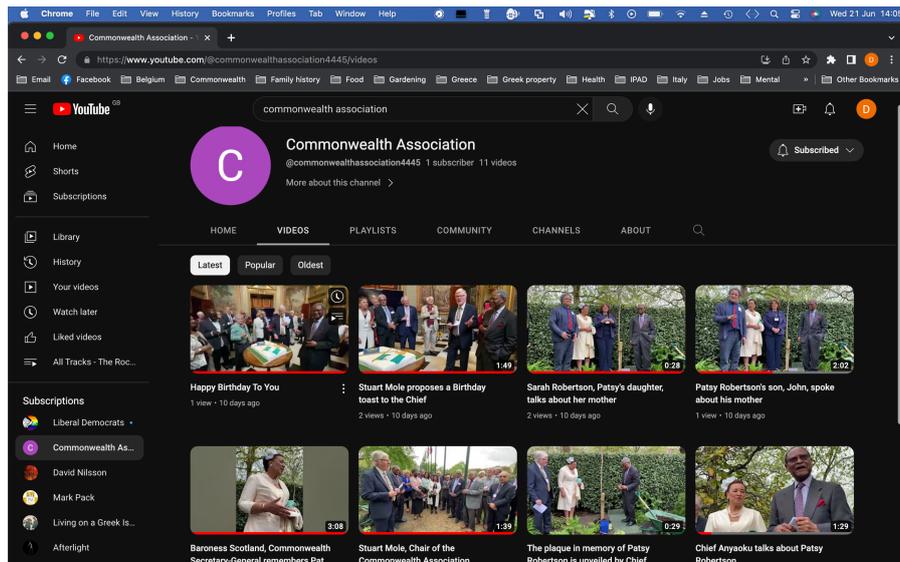
It is inevitable, given the status of our Association as an alumni body, that we lose members over time. The Secretariat's rotation policy and smaller size also means that we have fewer recruits from our principal source. However, we have gained a number of new members this year and would call on all members to encourage former colleagues of Commonwealth organisations to join and take part in our activities. Lorna McLaren, our Membership Officer, has established a strong link with the Secretariat's Human Resources Division, which now informs leavers of the existence of the Association. She is also spreading information to other Commonwealth organisations.

### **b) The website and our YouTube channel**



Our website continues to develop and provides an excellent means of communicating with members and the world outside. Shobhna Rattansi and David Blake have posted a range of stories about Association events, including the Patsy Robertson Memorial Lecture, the Christmas Social, which was the first in person event for several years, and the tree-planting ceremony in Marlborough House. Commonwealth matters covered included COP26 and Commonwealth Innovation, an exciting digital platform. Association members played a substantial role in conferences organised by the Round Table and the Institute of Commonwealth Studies and these have been covered, with links to video proceedings and interviews.

Shobhna and David have made a point of using photographs and videos on the website and this has led to the establishment of a Commonwealth Association channel on YouTube, where our videos can all be viewed.



An important part of the website is 'Memories Unlocked' which encourages members to recall their time with the Secretariat, Foundation or other Commonwealth organisation. The articles include:

- Annie Carlton on how she was an accidental recruit to the Secretariat
- Sir Peter Marshall on the amount of aspirin consumed during the 1983 CHOGM held in New Delhi, and at the Non-Aligned Movement summit in the same city earlier in the year
- Chris Bowman on his election observation experience in Ghana in 1992
- Asif Khan on accidentally meeting Jeremy Pope in Sri Lanka in 1992
- Max Gaylard on stories about the New Zealand Prime Minister Muldoon
- Mary Mackie on her meeting with Fidel Castro
- Antony Ellman on the early days of the Food Production and Rural Development Division (FPRD)
- Greta Fernandes with her happy reminiscences of times at Marlborough House



We are keen to expand this section of the website and would encourage all members who have stories to tell or pictures to share to get in touch with Shobhna Rattansi. Email [shobhnasr@gmail.com](mailto:shobhnasr@gmail.com)

### **c) Comassoc – the Google Group**

The main way we communicate directly with our members and encourage them to interact with each other is through our Google Group, *Comassoc*, managed by David Blake, our Secretary. A message sent through it goes to all members and supporters and can be discussed by everyone. This year, messages have been sent on 158 subjects, including issues such as subscription renewal, conference publicity, events information and news about former colleagues. There have occasionally been vigorous and frank debates. This is the place to raise an issue for discussion or inform other members of any matter, providing it has a Commonwealth connection. At the moment, we do not differentiate between members and supporters on the Comassoc network and know that this is a much-appreciated service. However, we may need to align this service more closely to paying members in future.

### **3. Working with IFCO**

The CA (through our representative Bishakha Mukherjee) has been actively involved with the Independent Forum for Commonwealth Organisations (IFCO). Bishakha is a member of the Steering Group and was involved in preparatory work for last year's CHOGM in Kigali. IFCO played a substantive role in the work of the Committee of the Whole (CoW) and attended the Foreign Ministers Meeting in London and made presentations on the draft Communique.

The CA could not be present at CHOGM on this occasion. However, by all accounts, the Commonwealth accredited organisations (COs) on the IFCO's Steering Group played a lively part in the interactions with the CHOGM itself and with the Commonwealth Peoples Forum.

Either Bishakha or I have been regular attendees at the Secretary-General's periodic consultations with Commonwealth organisations.

In other work, a report entitled *The collective contribution of Commonwealth Accredited Organisations to advancing the principles and objectives of the Commonwealth Charter* has been finalised. Bishakha had been elected to the project advisory panel to monitor the study, initiated and paid for by the Commonwealth Secretariat. The consultant conducting the research and reporting his findings is the former Director of the Commonwealth Foundation, Vijay Krishnarayan. The Secretariat has not yet announced when the study will be published.

#### **4. Working on women's economic empowerment**

Bishakha Mukherjee has been representing the CA on a significant project for women's economic empowerment. She is working with the Commonwealth Businesswomen's Network (and other commercial partners) to develop a Commonwealth Women's Entrepreneurship Accelerator (CWEA). The project seeks to enable high potential female-led businesses to grow their enterprises internationally, using the Commonwealth trade advantage. The programme will be developed across the Commonwealth, starting with the first cohort from one region. The Secretary-General and the Commonwealth Secretariat endorsed the CWEA at the June 2023 Meeting of Commonwealth Trade Ministers.

#### **5. Working with The Round Table and the Institute of Commonwealth Studies**

The Association has had a lengthy relationship with *The Round Table*, with many of its individual members playing a role in the organisation's activities.

In January 2023 the Round Table held a conference at Cumberland Lodge on the theme of Commonwealth global challenges.

Association members and supporters who spoke in the sessions included:

- **Arif Zaman** - Session 1: Multilateralism and soft power in an age of nationalism, conflict and division
- **Alexandra Jones** - Session 3: Upholding human rights, press freedom and democracy: Can the Commonwealth make a difference?
- **Joel Kibazo** and **Mark Robinson** Session 4: After Kigali: The Commonwealth's future challenges
- **Stuart Mole** – Concluding remarks

A number of our members and supporters also participated in interviews:

- **Rita Payne** who interviewed Dr Olumide Abimbola, Abhiir Bhalla and Acting Institute of Commonwealth Studies Director, Dr (now Professor) Sue Onslow.

- **Stuart Mole** who interviewed panellist Baroness Prashar
- **Mark Robinson**, who interviewed panellist Jo Lomas, the FCDO's UK Commonwealth Envoy, summing up the key points
- **Amitav Banerji**, who interviewed the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Baroness Scotland
- **Alexandra Jones** who had a discussion with Dr Kiran Hussein on the media and climate change, China and human rights

I also presented a paper on the Commonwealth's role in the transition from apartheid at a seminar at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies on *Not all by ourselves: South Africa's transition to democracy 1990-1994*. This was in advance of publication of my book "*The Commonwealth, South Africa and Apartheid: Race, Conflict and Reconciliation*" (Routledge, 2023), which was published in May.

## 6. Working with the Commonwealth Youth Programme – CA's Youth Initiatives

Last year, in reviewing the Association's activities and projects, the Executive Committee (ExCo) decided to develop a strand of our activities which promoted and supported young people in the Commonwealth. This, we felt, would demonstrate our belief in young people as key to sustaining the organisation's values into the future. We also recognised that 2023 marks the 50th anniversary of the birth of the Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP), at the 1973 CHOGM in Ottawa.

Several meetings have been held with Layne Robinson, Head of Social Policy Development in the Secretariat, and his CYP team, resulting in a number of agreed initiatives for engaging and empowering young people in the Commonwealth. These are as follows:

### a) A Commonwealth Association Youth Award

The CA proposes to fund a Commonwealth Association Youth Award to be presented every three years at the triennial Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting. This would be subject to renewal after each triennium.

The award would comprise a cash contribution of £1,000 together with a trophy and a certificate. A provision of £500 would be budgeted annually for this purpose, for a total outlay of £1,500 every 3 years.

The CA will decide the theme and badging of the award and will also be involved in the selection and judging process (as well as the presentation, if desired or possible).

### b) CYP@50

Following the decision of Commonwealth leaders at the 2022 CHOGM in Rwanda, a series of events and projects are taking place in 2023, the “Year of Youth”, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Commonwealth Youth Programme.

In partnership with CYP, ExCo agreed that the **2023 Patsy Robertson Memorial Lecture** should be delivered by a prominent young Commonwealth activist. A shortlist of possible invitees was considered and Cherisse Francis, a young Barbadian lawyer, will deliver the 2023 lecture.

The CA has also been invited to partner with CYP in creating a **virtual museum** by gathering photographs, oral histories and memorabilia, and, where possible, proposing speakers or potential guests at special events, lectures or meetings. This could include helping to facilitate contact with former CYP colleagues or supporters. Rickie Sankar recently demonstrated to ExCo how his own photographs and memorabilia of CYP’s early years might form part of such a collection.

### **c) Youth mentorship programme**

A third area of partnership, once the above has been achieved, might involve putting together a **youth mentorship programme**, involving CA members. In the first instance, this could involve CA volunteers in providing their expertise and sharing their experiences with young professionals, either individually (with maybe two or three telephone or zoom calls a year) or collectively (say, with the thirty or so Young Professionals currently working in the Secretariat).

### **d) What you can do**

Our Association contains a wealth of knowledge and experience which might be of benefit to young people in the Commonwealth. If you feel you might be able to help any of the initiatives set out above and would be interested in hearing more, please do contact Lorna McLaren ([lornaamclaren@gmail.com](mailto:lornaamclaren@gmail.com)), Felix Samuel ([sfelix956@aol.com](mailto:sfelix956@aol.com)) or myself ([stuart.mole@sarlsdown.co.uk](mailto:stuart.mole@sarlsdown.co.uk)) as soon as you can. This is a very worthy cause, and we need more volunteers willing to help in any way possible.

## **7. The Institute of Commonwealth Studies**

I reported last year that the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, one of the postgraduate institutes in the University of London’s School of Advanced Study, had been under threat – not for the first time. As a result of a robust Commonwealth campaign, a Committee of Inquiry chaired by our 2022 Patsy Robertson lecturer, Sir Malcolm Rifkind, recommended the continuation of the Institute and set out a path for its renewal. A New Zealander, Kingsley Abbott, was later appointed as the Institute’s eleventh Director, in succession to Dr Sue Onslow. Dr Onslow, who has now become a professor, has had close relations with the Association and we look forward to inviting Kingsley Abbott to our events and continuing our previous partnership.

## **8. The Tonga earthquake and tsunami**

Members will recall that, encouraged by the concern of Association members, ExCo agreed to donate £500 to the official Tongan relief fund. I wrote to the Tonga High Commissioner, forwarding the cheque, but no written acknowledgement was received despite several attempts to contact the office and the cheque was not cashed. Given our doubts about a suitable routing for our donation, ExCo decided to cancel the cheque in the circumstances.

## 9. How the Committee works

The Association is run by its Executive Committee, which consists of the officers (Chair, Vice-Chair, Secretary, Treasurer and Membership Officer), three elected Committee members and up to three co-opted members.

During the year under review the Committee has met eight times in September and November 2022, January, March, April, May, June and July 2023. All but one of those meetings have been held on Zoom.

## 10. Thanks

As this report shows, a voluntary association such as ours undertakes a wide range of activities. The members of the Executive Committee all have strengths in particular areas and have worked hard to achieve our goals. I thank them for all that they have done during the period under review.

These are not easy times for the Commonwealth, but we, as former colleagues in the service of the association, are determined to stay engaged with the organisation and to promote and foster the values for which it stands.

**Stuart Mole**

Chair

12 July 2023



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## NOMINATIONS

### Officers and Executive Committee Members

2023-2024

Position	Nominee	Nominated by	Seconded by

Chair	Stuart Mole	Amitav Banerji	Cheryl Dorall
Vice Chair	Bishakha Mukherjee	Richard Bourne	Domini Bingham
Secretary	David Blake	Sharon Robinson	Raja Gomez
Treasurer	Richard Sisson	Mushtaq Zaman	K B K Rao
Membership Secretary	Lorna McLaren	Carmaline Bandara	Bobbie Dohunso-Tetty
Committee Member 1	Shobhna Rattansi	Dharani Rethnam	Judy McNeill
Committee Member 2	Sreetharan Vallipuram	William Rezel	Chumani Monerawela
Committee Member 3	Felix Samuel	Andrea David-Hugh-Kong	Diana Bailey

Dharani Rethnam – Returning Officer -- David Blake – Secretary  
12 July 2023



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## **THIRD PATSY ROBERTSON MEMORIAL LECTURE**

19 July 2023, 5pm

Marlborough House, Pall Mall, London

Organised by The Commonwealth Association and  
the Commonwealth Youth Programme

**Cherisse Francis**

**Can the Commonwealth Be You(th)?**



**Cherisse Francis** is a legal professional, researcher and educator. She holds an LL.B from the University of the West Indies, a Legal Education Certificate from Hugh Wooding Law School and an LL.M in Human Rights and Criminal Justice from the University of Aberdeen. She completed this latter degree as a Commonwealth Scholar in 2018. Since being called to the Barbadian legal bar in the same year she has interacted with the Caribbean legal sector in both governmental and non-governmental capacities. Presently, she is a Doctoral Candidate at the University of Warwick researching trafficking in persons in the Caribbean. At that same institution Cherisse is a seminar tutor for undergraduate and masters students.

For over a decade Cherisse has been involved in voluntary youth development work locally and internationally. She serves as a Trustee for Small Enterprises for Education and Development (SEED) Barbados, an NGO which is committed to the personal and professional development of young people in Barbados and the diaspora and the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) London Office, an international NGO which works towards the practical realization of human rights throughout the Commonwealth. Cherisse is also on the Executive Committee of Commonwealth Youth, Human Rights and Democracy Network and is a member of the Young Feminist Fund (FRIDA) Global Advisory Committee (Caribbean Region).



The Commonwealth

