

MR GERALD HENSLEY

(1935-2024)



Mr Gerald Hensley served as Special Assistant to the Commonwealth Secretary General from 1965-1969. He had a distinguished career in the New Zealand public service and beyond. Amongst other things, he chaired the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group, advising Papua New Guinea Government on the reconstruction of its armed forces in 2000.

Selected links:

[He stood up to Muldoon and Lange and the Fiji army](#)

[Former diplomat, senior public servant Gerald Hensley dies](#)

[Interview with Gerald Hensley: Commonwealth Oral History Project](#)

[Wikipedia article on Gerald Hensley](#)

[A diplomat and fine raconteur](#)

[A Man for Torrid Seasons](#)

[Eulogy – Gerald A Hensley](#)

[Gerald Christopher Philip Hensley CNZM \(04.12.1935 - 10.02.2024\) St Mary of the Angels - 20 Feb 2024 @ 10.30 NZDT](#)

[Kahu Despatches - Gerald Hensley's website](#)

[MFAT 75th Anniversary Conference: New Zealand's Pacific Story](#) Panel discussion including Gerald Hensley. Chaired by Don McKinnon.

MR CHRIS ROGERS

(1943-2024)



Mr Chris Rogers, former head of the economics department at the University of Dundee and who had been instrumental in the creation of the university's Centre for Energy, Petroleum and Mineral Law and Policy, had been seconded to work at the Commonwealth Secretariat in 1976.

Selected links

[Chris Rogers obituary](#)

[Son's tribute to Chris Rogers, former head of economics at Dundee University](#)

MR VIVIAN BROWN

(1946 – 2024)

Mr Vivian Brown worked as a chauffeur at the Commonwealth Secretariat.

- *Very sorry to hear about Vivian's passing. He was a kind and jovial fellow who was the first to greet you when you entered MH in the morning and last to say good bye.*

*He also relished good wine and vodka which I was happy to share with him from time to time from my diplomatic allocations. And in return i got invaluable commentary on the great west Indian cricketers who graced the sport in post war era. My heartfelt condolences to Vivian's wife and family. **Rumman Faruqi***



- *So sorry to hear this news about Vivian, and so early into what should have been a happy retirement. Given his work with the DSGs, and occasionally the SG, I admired his steady professionalism and good humour. More broadly, whether on reception in Marlborough House or on other duties, he was always an affable presence, warm in his welcome and with a lively chat that was always entertaining and gave a lift to the day. I echo Rumman's appreciation of a great guy - and my thoughts are with his Bliss and his family. **Stuart Mole** (Dr Stuart Mole, Chair, The Commonwealth Association)*
- *I was sorry to hear the sad news of Vivian's death. He was a dear friend and well-respected colleague. We maintained contact online up to a few weeks before he died. I knew that he was very ill and had been in hospital but I was optimistic about his recovery. The news of his death therefore came as a shock.*

Vivian was thoroughly professional in his job, always well turned out, punctual and willing to help whatever the task. He was a sensitive soul, very proud of his Jamaican heritage and not afraid to express an opinion. He loved his children dearly and was proud of their achievements.

Vivian had a mischievous sense of humour with many hilarious tales to tell. I remember one year he volunteered to mix the rum punch for the SG's Christmas party with a twinkle in his eyes. The result guaranteed a lively and enjoyable event. In recent years he took to sending regular messages on WhatsApp, mostly about black history and culture. Some were informative, some questionable and others guaranteed a belly laugh. I shall miss those messages as I shall miss my friend. May his soul rest in peace. With deepest condolences to Bliss, Vivian's children and the Brown family. Lorna McLaren

DATUK NOOR FARIDA ARIFFIN

(1947-2024)



Datuk Noor Farida Ariffin served as Director of the Women and Development Programme (WDP) of the Commonwealth Secretariat from 1988-1992. She served in a number of senior positions in the Malaysian public service and continued to lobby for institutional reform and gender equality.

- *I heard with great sadness today that a former colleague Noor Farida Ariffin, ComSec's second Director of the Women and Development Programme, passed away in Malaysia today after a long illness. She was 76. Farida was seconded to the Commonwealth Secretariat from Malaysia's Attorney-General's Office. On her return to Malaysia, she continued supporting women's rights in the voluntary sector.*

Between 2000-2007, Farida served as Malaysia's Ambassador to the Netherlands. After retiring from public service she co-founded the G-25, a Malaysian group of retired senior civil servants who publicly lobbied for institutional reform. She was active in this group and in supporting women's rights until she passed away. Farida was a member of the Commonwealth Association. Cheryl Dorall

- *Very sorry to read Cheryl Dorall's news of the passing of Noor Farida Ariffin. I thought Farida a lovely person, always bright and cheerful and a delightful colleague at meetings abroad, which were the principal occasions we used to work together. For me it marks the end of another past link between the work of EAD and that of WDP, and for someone aged only 76, it has happened far too early. RIP. Ian Thomas*
- *Very sad news indeed. Farida was a lovely person. May she RIP. Rickie Sankar*
- *Thank you to Cheryl for sharing this news. It is sad indeed - it seems no time since we were being told of honours Farida had received for recent distinguished service to her country. She was a congenial colleague on the Human Resource Development Group at ComSec when she took up the WDP post in succession to Doriene Wilson-Smillie, as I remember things. Very real efforts were made in those days to undertake work crossing sectoral boundaries, culminating in the Pitroda Report. I send my condolences to her family. Peter Williams*
- *So sad to hear about Farida. She was invaluable colleague. She never gave up. Always stood up for her ground. Shared the same floor. Mohan Kaul*
- *Very sad news indeed. I had the pleasure of meeting Farida in KL just over a year ago, after nearly two decades. She was obviously a different person after her stroke but her mind was as clear and spirit as indomitable as ever. She will be deeply missed by an army of friends and admirers. Rest in peace, dear Farida! In sorrow, Amitav Banerji*
- *So very sad to hear that Farida is no more. She was a true champion of women's rights and rights for all. She was one among the few who actively supported the Commonwealth Secretariat initiative on Democracy, Human Rights and Development during the World Conference on Human Rights in 1993. She was a wonderful colleague and a friend. She will be missed. Rest in peace, Farida. Madhuri Bose*
- *The news of Farida's death made me very sad. I knew she had been ill for some time but nonetheless it was very upsetting to hear that she had passed away. As Director of the Women and Development Programme, she worked closely with me and other colleagues in the Human Resource Development Group but more than that, she became a good friend of my (now late) wife and visited us at our home several times. It was always good fun having Farida around in social situations but she could bring a touch of lightness when it was required in more serious contexts too. May she rest in peace. Raja Gomez*

- *Such sad news. Noor Farida was a delightful and amiable colleague with an impish sense of humor. She was tremendously curious about other cultures and had an adventurous spirit. We had long conversations about gender issues, which often ended with both of us laughing as she urged me to invest heavily in the property market to secure my future. My deepest condolences to Farida's family and friends.*

Lorna McLaren

- *Sad to hear that Noor Farida passed away! Farida was very very kind to me when I worked briefly in her division. We shared the same birthday of 3rd of September. I kept in touch with Farida until not long ago. May her soul rest in peace. My heartfelt condolences to her family.* **Bridget Unegbu**
- *Sorry to hear of Farida's passing. My condolences to her family and friends. May she rest in peace.* **Kamala Bhoolai**

Selected links

[Death of bold, outspoken Noor Farida a loss to nation, say friends \(video\)](#)

[G25 co-founder, ex-top diplomat Noor Farida dies](#)

[Noor Farida, G25 co-founder, passes away at 76](#)

[Noor Farida, former ambassador who wore many hats](#)

[Ep 118| Should Politicians Be Ambassadors?](#)

[The remarkable journey of Noor Farida Ariffin: Lawyer, diplomat, activist \(1947-2024\) - Aliran](#)

[Interview with Datuk Noor Farida Ariffin: Commonwealth Oral History Project - SAS-Space](#)

MR PETER DUNNE

(1937-2024)

Mr Peter Dunne worked as Conference Officer, and in many other capacities prior to that, in the Commonwealth Secretariat from 1966-1996.

- *Members will wish to know that earlier today I received news from Nuala Dunne that her husband Peter had died in a Birmingham Hospital on 9th July. Peter was 87 and had joined the Commonwealth Economic Committee in 1961, before it was taken over by ComSec in 1966. After a series of positions in the Administration Division, Peter became the Secretariat's Conference Officer, a title he held for many years until retirement in 1996. As such, and in collaboration with local administrations, he*

*had joint operational responsibility for a series of meetings of Commonwealth Heads of Government and of different ministries and agencies. His wife Nuala had also worked in various positions in ComSec. They had been married 54 years. **Ian Thomas** (EAD, 1966-96)*

- *Very sorry to hear about Peter Dunns death. He was a good and trusted friend and member of the Commonwealth family. My heartfelt condolences to Nuala.*

Rumman Faruqi

- *I'm sorry to hear this news. Peter was a very kind man. **Professor Stephen Chan***
- *I was so sorry to hear of Peter's death. I have kept in touch with Peter and Nuala over the years and have left my condolences on the phone as I could only get voicemail at the moment. Peter was exceedingly helpful to me especially when I was in the Commonwealth Youth Programme but also throughout my stay in ComSec. He will always remain in my memory. May he rest in peace. **Raja Gomez***
- *I was also very sorry to hear this. Peter was always kind and helpful to me when I worked for John Syson and then Moni Malhoutra in SG's office - it is a long time ago! May he rest in peace. **Elizabeth Hinks***
- *Yes Peter was a kind and good-hearted man. May he rest in peace. My condolences to Nuala. **Antony Ellman***
- *This is very sad news indeed. Peter was one of the first persons I met on my arrival at Marlborough House in 1990 and we formed a special bond. He was a larger-than-life Sincere condolences to Nuala and family. **Amitav Banerji***
- *Really saddened to learn of Peter Dunne's passing. Peter and I travelled widely together during my time in the International Affairs Division (IAD) through the 80s. Having been in the Secretariat from 'before' the beginning it was a matter of great pride for him attaining the position of Conference Officer, which he performed with typical enthusiasm and energy. He was a good travelling companion - always focussed, reliable, helpful and pleasant.*

Shortly before her death in August 2022 I shared some memories with Patsy including the press report of a media briefing prior to the 1985 Nassau CHOGM with Patsy, Peter, me and the head of the CHOGM Task Force. It illustrates the variety of roles as individuals we were called upon to play in the field, often in areas outside of our job description and at short notice. Peter shaped up to these as being in the service of the Commonwealth. Patsy commented: glad to see this photo remembering we were "a Rolls Royce team" and as representing "my best years were at a time when there was so much hope that the sunny uplands were in sight". Nassau represented that vision and hope for the Commonwealth in a small way and though his job had him focussed on the organisational side of the summit, Peter shared in these vision and achievements.

*In post-Secretariat days, we used to meet up on our occasional visits to London and Lynne and I once stayed with Peter and Nuala in their Birmingham home. It was good to be reminded of a little known characteristic of Peter - his passion for the arts e.g. his amazing first editions library; and his genuine knowledge and enjoyment of classical music. He will be remembered with great affection. **Hugh Craft***

- *I was also saddened to learn of Peter's passing. In the six years I was in Sonny's office I had many dealings with Peter and many problems that needed to be solved. He was always smiling and cheerful, and once said to me that solving problems was both a challenge and finding viable solutions was rewarding in itself. Nuala always gave him full support and they made a great team, so I send my heartfelt condolences to Nuala at such a sad time. **Mark Robinson***
- *I'm very sorry to hear of the passing of Peter Dunne. He was a great character, jovial, efficient and always immaculately attired. I remember him fondly and our occasional exchanges and banter as one Irishman to another, albeit from other sides of the border. I also remember an incident at a conference planning meeting, in Zimbabwe I think, where there was some problem concerning flags. "Flags will fly, Mr Dunne!" declared Moni Malhoutra. And they did. My sincere condolences to Nuala. **Roy Chalmers***
- *I join others in mourning Peter Dunne's passing and endorse all the observations made about the sheer pleasure of working with him on numerous events over, in my case, ten years from 1984 to 1994. He was always a 'can do' or 'can try to do' rather than a 'no can do' person and eased our paths through many tricky situations. I had no idea he was still living and wish I had been aware of that. I don't recall seeing him at all recently at our Association events?*

*If anyone learns whether Peter or Nuala have indicated whether donations in his memory to some charity would be welcome, I'd be glad if they could let me know. With my wife still incarcerated in Addenbrooke's for several weeks following a (basically successful) bowel cancer operation on June 28, I am afraid travel to the Birmingham area has to be ruled out for me at present. **Peter Williams***

- *I too share in the sadness of Peter's death and pay tribute to a dedicated professional and a wonderful character who served the Commonwealth faithfully for many years. He and Nuala made a great partnership and my heart goes out to her. **Stuart Mole** (Chair, The Commonwealth Association)*
- *I, too, join colleagues in mourning the death of Peter Dunne. Peter was an imposing figure whose larger than life personality was never easily forgotten. He was an efficient and reliable colleague who relished his role as Head of the Conference Section. Such was his presence at the Secretariat headquarters that he was fondly referred to by some colleagues as Lord Marlborough – a moniker he secretly enjoyed*

with a twinkle in his eyes. Peter came into his own at CHOGMs where he had an easy relationship with Royalty, Heads of Government and local support staff alike.

*I came to respect and admire Peter's achievements when I became Head of the Conference Unit. I marvelled at how much he had accomplished with minimum conference support staff, a very limited budget and no modern technology. He could be very stern, but he could also be very funny, especially when regaling colleagues about his days as a thespian – it would seem that Laurence Olivier was not a patch on him. Peter left a lasting impression on Marlborough House long after he retired. Many colleagues will mourn his passing. I regret I will not be able to attend the funeral in Birmingham but send my deepest condolences to Nuala, his family and loved ones. **Lorna McLaren***

- *Although I have not seen or worked with Peter I mourn his death because so many of the Secretariat colleagues are praising his achievements & character. He must have been a great guy. Birmingham is too far from Bangladesh where I live so I can't attend the funeral!!! I wish him heavenly bliss. **Selina Mohsin** (Bangladesh)*

THE HONOURABLE SIR SHRIDATH 'SONNY' RAMPHAL
OE OCC GCMG AC ONZ
(1928-2024)

Sir Shridath Ramphal, who served as **the second Commonwealth Secretary-General** from 1975-1990, was a towering figure in international diplomacy and a cherished elder statesman of the Commonwealth and the Caribbean.

As the longest-serving Commonwealth Secretary-General, Sir Shridath was instrumental in the fight against institutional racism in Southern Africa, playing a key role in the termination of apartheid in South Africa. Nelson Mandela once said of him: "He is one of those men who have become famous because, in their fight for human justice, they have chosen the whole world as their theatre."

Sir Shridath was the recipient of numerous prestigious honours, including the Order of the Caribbean Community (OCC), the Knight Grand Cross of the Most Distinguished Order of St. Michael and St. George (GCMG), the Order of Excellence of Guyana (OE), the Order of Merit of Jamaica (OM), the Order of the Companions of Oliver Tambo from South Africa, Honorary Companion of the Order of Australia (AC), and an appointment to the Order of New Zealand (ONZ), New Zealand's highest civil honour.

- *Colleagues will be saddened by news of the death of Sir Shridath Ramphal. May his soul rest in peace. **Lorna McLaren***

- *I am very sad about this news. If there were one person under whom I can say I was proud to serve, it was him. **Professor Stephen Chan OBE***
- *Very sad news indeed. Sir Shridath was a true visionary of the Commonwealth, of its values and its potential. **Cheryl Dorall***
- *What a sad news. My his soul rest in perfect peace. I cherished ALL his moments during his tenure as Commonwealth Secretary-General, especially hosting wonderful Christmas parties for Commonwealth staff throughout his tenure. **Godson Okafor***
- *As Stephen and others have indicated, it was indeed a pleasure and a privilege to have worked under Sonny Ramphal. Let's hope that CHOGM in Apia will elect a worthy successor. **Antony Ellman** (FPRD 1976-1984)*
- *Yes, I echo what Godson Okafor said and I remember those wonderful Christmas parties too in New Zealand House, he was also a great dancer at those parties. He danced with any and all of us female staff, no matter how lofty or how low a grade we were, you got the feeling he valued all of his staff equally, no matter who or what they were or where we came from. During his tenure and the next SG were the only times I REALLY felt like I was really a part of the big ComSec Family of staff. I am glad I was there during the best years of the ComSec during the time when they truly valued and cared and looked after their staff and as staff you could see and feel that too. **Annie Carlton***
- *I would like to add my personal and sincere tribute to Sir Shridath Ramphal- or Sonny as he was affectionately known to all of us. Sonny was not only a great Caribbean and Commonwealth statesman, but a truly global icon and leader. He made visionary contributions to key international initiatives on development, the environment and disarmament such as the landmark Brandt Report on North-South relations, much of which is still highly relevant today. His commitment to the ending of apartheid is well-known and it was under his stewardship that the Commonwealth truly demonstrated its full potential.*

I was privileged as Director of the Commonwealth Trade Union Council to have had the benefit of his support and I was proud to have him as my boss on joining the Commonwealth Secretariat as Assistant Director in 1988. He also provided me with direct inspiration and encouragement in my later Commonwealth local government work.

*Above all Sonny was a genuine and truly affectionate human being, comfortable with everyone, whether it was HM The Queen, Commonwealth leaders, grass roots activists and trade unionists or indeed the most junior of his staff. He will be greatly missed but his global vision will live on in our hearts and minds. **Dr Carl Wright***

- *Sonny was a giant of the Commonwealth and inspiration to those who worked for him and subsequent generations. I remember how when I was a research student and he was SG he was still generous with his time when I sought to interview him on his pivotal role on negotiations on Zimbabwe and South Africa. Even near the end he was still arguing Guyana's case before the ICJ in The Hague.*

*Like our late Queen, with whom he worked so closely and together created and epitomised the values of the Commonwealth, it seemed he would go on forever. Our deepest condolences to Sir Ronald and the whole family. We will all miss Sonny but his spirit and inspiration is eternal. **Matthew Neuhaus***

- *I can but echo the sentiments of others about such sad news. Sir Shridath was indeed a true visionary and was certainly a giant among the three CSGs under whom I had the privilege to serve. Rest in Peace, **Ian Thomas***
- *I join all colleagues who've already written in to express their sadness at the news of the passing of Sir Shridath Ramphal. As many of you have said, he was an amazing person and a great leader. I was honoured to join the Secretariat when he was he led Comsec in pursuing immeasurable challenges.*

*I also agree that he was always the soul of the parties held at the Canteen, and I was very much honoured to be one of the people he asked to dance with at one of the dances! I wish to convey my sincere condolences to his family. May his soul rest in everlasting peace. **Evelyn Adlam***

- *Dear Sir Ronald, I have received from the Commonwealth Association a copy of your message dated 31 August, conveying the sad news of the death yesterday of Sir Shridath Ramphal.*

Words are inadequate to express my very sincere condolences to you and to all his family, but I just wanted you to know that you are very much in my thoughts and prayers at this difficult time. I had the good fortune to work at Marlborough House for the totality of Sir Shridath's service as Commonwealth Secretary-General. It was both a privilege and an honour to do so. He was a superb international civil servant.

*In his farewell speech at Marlborough House, just days before leaving his post as Secretary-General, I recall that he quoted II Timothy 4 verse 7 **'I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith'**. These words are just as*

true this week as they were in 1990. May he rest in peace. With every good wish,
Terence Dormer

- *As others have said, this is a grievous loss. The Commonwealth and the world have lost an iconic figure. I never had the privilege of serving under his stewardship at Marlborough House, but greatly admired his qualities and his achievements. May he rest in peace and may his family and the army of his friends and admirers have the strength to bear his passing. In sorrow and solidarity,*
Amitav Banerji
- *Very sad news indeed. Sir Shridath was not only a wonderful leader but also a friend to every one of us who served under him. May he rest in peace. As Antony has said, let us hope that CHOGM will have his achievements and strengths in mind when they carry out the duty of electing a successor to the post he held with such distinction.* **Raja Gomez**
- *Joining all commonwealth colleagues to express my deep sadness at the loss of an iconic global figure. Pray for his soul to rest in peace and glory.* **Mohan Kaul**
- *We give thanks for a truly meaningful life. May his soul and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace and rise in glory.* **Guy Hewitt**
- *I am very sad to hear that Sir Shridath has passed away and I join colleagues in mourning the loss of a great Commonwealth SG and statesperson who was hugely admired and respected across the Commonwealth and in all the world's major councils. I offer my condolences and solidarity to his family as they bear this great loss. May his soul rest in peace.*

*I had the great privilege and honor of working under his leadership, when I joined the Economic Affairs Division in August 1985 as a 26-yr old rookie and supported the late Dr Persaud and Dr SK Rao in the work on sanctions against the South African apartheid regime. Sir Shridath was an intellectual giant and I never ceased to be amazed and inspired by his legendary drafting and oratory skills. I often had goosebumps hearing him deliver some of his most impassioned speeches against apartheid. He was the architect of many initiatives for a strong, collective Commonwealth voice as well as meaningful action on small states' security, international trade, debt, and climate change, but spearheading the Commonwealth's role in vanquishing apartheid was probably his greatest achievement. With great sorrow, **Krishnan** (aka Chandu Krishnan - Boston, Massachusetts)*

- *Dear Ron, It was kind of you to write to the Commonwealth Association in the moving way that you did in conveying the distressing news of the death of our first Patron, Sir Sonny Ramphal, and attaching the formal notice of his passing. You will have already seen some of the outpouring of sadness and grief from our members,*

many of whom worked in the Secretariat (or in other Commonwealth organisations) with Sonny, or perhaps served subsequently but who nonetheless knew Sonny by reputation and by his example of passionate activism which continues to inspire.

I hold to the view that that the modern Commonwealth should be dated not from the London Declaration of 1949, as important as that was foundationally, but from the creation of the Commonwealth Secretariat in 1965. After the pioneering work of Arnold Smith to establish the organisation and its independence, it was Sonny from 1975 who fashioned the Secretariat in a way that enabled it to make an international contribution to many of the global issues of the age, far beyond its size and modest resourcing. Sonny did that in many ways. A superb speaker and wordsmith, he gave the Commonwealth an image and a profile which stretched across the association and, in particular, caught the imagination of a generation of new leaders. Through his personal endeavours, he carried the voice of the Commonwealth into a variety of cutting-edge international commissions, supplemented by the Commonwealth's own programme of expert groups on many important issues. He was careful to seek out new talent which he could bring into the organisation, and across key areas, give intellectual substance to the Commonwealth's programmes and its international outreach.

Sonny also developed a dynamic diplomatic method through his relationship with Commonwealth leaders, increasingly evident in the CHOGM 'retreat' but also impacting the 1979 Lancaster House peace negotiations giving birth to an independent Zimbabwe. This was all the more extraordinary, given that this was a British-hosted conference to which the Commonwealth was not invited. And yet, the external influence of the Commonwealth was crucial to its success. The long struggle against apartheid in South Africa was perhaps his most important and notable contribution but his was also a prophetic voice on many other issues, from the crippling debt burden for developing nations to the devastating impact of HIV/AIDS, and from the unique problems of small states to the existential threat of global warming and sea-level rise.

For those of us who were fortunate to work in Marlborough House in Sonny's time, whether directly involved or not, he gave us belief, purpose and ambition through his extraordinary leadership. On a personal level, he was never short of a kind word and a broad smile; and of course his parties (at which he often cooked) were legendary. We will long cherish his memory and will miss his enduring interest in the Commonwealth Association.

*Finally, we knew that Sonny's health was becoming increasingly frail but it is a comfort to know that his ending was peaceful, without pain, and with his children and family around him. Please pass on our deepest condolences to the family, on behalf of all members of the Commonwealth Association, not least our new Chair, Max Gaylard, who is currently travelling but who wanted me to send this letter. In sorrow, and with every good wish, **Stuart Mole***

- *Thank you Stuart for speaking for all of us. **Cheryl Dorall***

- *I want to add my voice to the appreciation of Sir Sonny Ramphal. I started my stint of nearly 20 years under his visionary leadership. He had established TAG or the Technical Assistance Group because he saw a gap in the market, as it were. The idea of employing lawyers and economists in London to fly out at short notice to assist developing country members of the Commonwealth in their transnational negotiations with multinationals was brilliant and would last for decades. May his soul rest in peace. **Kofi Date-Bah***
- *Dear Stuart, This is a very fitting tribute on behalf of the Commonwealth Association. Although I never worked with Sonny Ramphal, when I joined the Secretariat in 1996 it was clear that he had been pivotal to its reputation and role in international affairs. I endorse all that you have said. Regards, **Jon Sheppard***
- *Dear Stuart, Thank you for your very apt and beautiful tribute on behalf of our Association. **Madhuri Bose***
- *I totally agree. **Richard Bourne***
- *Dear Sir Ron, I received the news of the passing of Sir Shridath (Sonny) Ramphal with great sadness. To us here an Iroko tree in the forest of the Commonwealth has fallen!*

I first met Sonny Ramphal in Georgetown Guyana in 1972 at a Ministerial Meeting of Non-Aligned countries at which I was the representative of the first Commonwealth Secretary-General, Arnold Smith. Sonny was then a widely perceived brilliant Foreign Minister of the Republic of Guyana and an obvious confidant of President Forbes Burnham.

When he accompanied President Burnham to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting of 1973 in Ottawa at which I was the Conference Secretary and the talks in the corridors were about the successor to Arnold Smith whose second term was due to expire in 1975, there was widespread recognition among the delegates that Sonny Ramphal personified a bridge between the old and the new Commonwealth countries. And so his election by Heads of Government at their meeting in Kingston, Jamaica two years later was unanimous.

Thereafter, I worked closely with him in Marlborough House as Assistant Secretary General from 1975 to 1977 and as Deputy Secretary General from 1978 to 1990 barring the four months in 1983 when I was invited home by President Shehu Shagari to serve as Nigeria's Foreign Minister. I subsequently had the privilege of succeeding Sonny Ramphal as the third Commonwealth Secretary General in July 1990.

Sonny Ramphal was a giant champion of the Commonwealth causes during his fifteen years service as the organization's Secretary General. For example, he believed passionately in rectifying the grave imbalance in economic development between the developed countries of the North and the developing countries of the

South, a belief that made him an important member of the Willie Brandt International Commission whose mandate was, in essence, to explore ways of redressing the imbalance.

Sonny applied his great oratorical and writing prowess to the campaign for sports and trade sanctions against apartheid South Africa and played a significant role in the transition of independent Zimbabwe from the white racist minority-ruled Rhodesia through the historic Lancaster House Conference chaired by Lord Carrington the then British Foreign Secretary. Sonny also contributed to the emergence of independent Republic of Namibia in 1980.

Sonny Ramphal has left a huge legacy; I am sure that his passing will be mourned by all who are interested in the history and affairs of the modern Commonwealth.

*Please accept and convey to all the other members of your family my wife's and my deepest condolences. We pray that Sonny's soul will rest in peace. **Chief Emeka Anyaoku GCON GCVO CFR (Commonwealth Secretary-General, 1990-2000).***

- *Thank you Sir Ron for this sad but special message from your family. We will pause and reflect on his amazing life before responding more fully to your message. Much love to your family, **Don and Clare (Rt Hon Sir Don McKinnon ONZ GCVO, Commonwealth Secretary-General, 2000-2008)***
- *Dear Sir Ron, As someone who joined the Secretariat in 1973 and attended the Kingston CHOGM I would like to join those many, who were inspired by the leadership of the then SG. For me two things stand out. One was the foresight which led to the creation from within Marlborough House the idea of creating an ACP institutional presence in Brussels for the whole world of developing countries globally. The other was the inspiration and foresight which led to the creation of Meetings of Young Commonwealth Leaders thus securing a vital foothold for the future of the Commonwealth among young Parliamentarians and young Ministers under the age of 30. Sir Sonny was magnificent. With great respect for all that he achieved, **Geoff Martin***
- *As one most of whose time at the Commonwealth Secretariat was spent while Sir Shridath was at its helm I, like all colleagues, was saddened to hear of his passing. Among the many honours bestowed on SG - as we affectionately called him - was an honorary degree from the University of Warwick. I was privileged to be at the convocation when he received it. The ceremony was held in the magnificent surroundings of Coventry Cathedral (the University is in Coventry despite its name). The citation called him "Master Builder of the Commonwealth," a description with which few could argue. **Asif Khan***
- *May the soul of Sir Shridath Ramphal rest in eternal peace. We shall continue to remember him for all his work and his achievements. **Beatrice Morgan***

- *Sir Sonny's role in the Commonwealth was an exemplar of the best possible stewardship of an International Governmental Organisation. Maintaining the balance of demands of nations poor and rich, multi ethnic and multi religious populations, small island states and India, the largest democracy in the world, was a daily challenge.*

During my time as Secretary-General Sir Sonny was always an invaluable sounding board prior to a complex decision.

A great legal mind with a formidable intellect Sir Sonny had been both Justice Minister and Foreign Minister in Guyana and assistant Attorney General in the West Indies Federation.

*Anyone aspiring to leadership of International Governmental institutions should be, and will be for many years to come, reading Sonny Ramphal's writings. **Don McKinnon** (Rt Hon Sir Donald McKinnon ONZ GCVO, Commonwealth Secretary-General, 2000-2008)*

- *I have been deeply saddened at the news of Sonny Ramphal's passing. Thank you David for sending through all the moving tributes - a pity about the meanness of the Times obituary. Sonny was an icon in the international community, a good friend to those of us privileged to work closely with him, his passing the end of an era.*

*For those interested in snippets of Commonwealth history in the 80s HM the Queen and Archbishop Tutu had never met until SG Ramphal brought them together in Marlborough House (at the Commonwealth Day reception in 1988, I think?!). I was asked by Sonny to 'mind' the Archbishop until he and the Queen emerged from the Green Room (having been involved in discussions with Tutu in South Africa with the EPG). The first of many future happy meetings between the Head of the Commonwealth and the Archbishop. With great memories and admiration, **Hugh Craft***

- *There is little I can add to the rich array of contributions here. I never actually met Sir Sonny but his presence really provided the soundtrack to my time at school, university, and involvement in anti-apartheid protests in the early-mid 1980s. His contribution to the Commonwealth was certainly seminal and seismic. I recall an interview he gave to Stuart, if I recall correctly, where at the end of the conversation he commented that while the achievements on South Africa are clearly top of mind for many, his work in areas such as debt had perhaps been somewhat overlooked. That is an area where current PhD researchers - myself included - should consider picking up.*

*On a footnote, I was at the [Mayor of London's Black On The Square](#) yesterday in front of South Africa House. While many younger people there may not know Sir Sonny by name, I am sure his legacy in ending apartheid is something they would all be forever grateful. **Arif Zaman***

- *My first meeting with Sir Shridath ‘Sonny’ Ramphal, in 1984, in his elegant offices in Marlborough House, had been relaxed and enjoyable. His charm and his erudition were immediately apparent. But other elements of the selection process seemed to me far less successful, and I had concluded that my application to work in the Commonwealth Secretary-General’s private office was doomed to fail. I duly heaved all the papers I had accumulated on the appointment into the wastepaper bin and resolved to look elsewhere for my next job. Several weeks later I was both pleased but also considerably mystified to receive an official letter, on the Commonwealth Secretariat’s blue notepaper, appointing me as the Secretary-General’s Special Assistant.*

While I remained in the grip of imposter syndrome for the early months of my new employment, there was no mistaking the excitement and exhilaration of working in close proximity to a figure who had already built a substantial international reputation as an advocate of the developing ‘south’ and for the causes of racial equality and global justice. It was nearly twenty years since the establishment of the Commonwealth Secretariat and nearly ten since Sonny had been elected the Commonwealth’s second Secretary-General at the 1975 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Kingston, Jamaica. Chaired by Michael Manley (and with representatives of Rhodesia’s liberation forces in the summit’s wings), the character of the Commonwealth had changed markedly, with a majority of its membership now drawn from recently independent nations in all parts of the world, outside the longstanding dominions of the ‘old Commonwealth’.

After the pioneering work of Arnold Smith to establish the Secretariat and its independence, it was Sonny who fashioned the organisation in a way that enabled it to make an international contribution to many of the global issues of the age, far beyond its size and modest resourcing. In 1977, after the Soweto rising of school students in South Africa the year before, Sonny used his first Commonwealth summit (and its Scottish retreat) to broker the Gleneagles Agreement extending the international boycott on apartheid sport. In 1979, with the incoming Conservative government in the UK, and its new prime minister Margaret Thatcher, poised to recognize Rhodesia’s ‘internal settlement’ and Bishop Abel Muzorewa’s flawed election, Ramphal helped to deflect that decision and instead bring the issue to the forefront of the Lusaka CHOGM. Thatcher’s initial suspicions of the Commonwealth were allayed by a charm offensive, led by Zambia’s president, Kenneth Kaunda, the summit’s host. She was quick to appreciate that, while a Rhodesian peace settlement, and independence, would be driven by the UK as the former colonial power, the Commonwealth could clear the way for the full involvement of the liberation forces in talks and for international support for the outcome.

Both in the Commonwealth’s 1979 Lusaka Agreement and in the Lancaster House peace negotiations giving birth to an independent Zimbabwe, Sonny’s dynamic diplomatic method was increasingly evident. This was all the more extraordinary, given that the latter was a British-hosted conference to which the Commonwealth was not invited. And yet, the external influence of the Commonwealth, sometimes expressed through the intervention of individual Commonwealth leaders and

sometimes through the collective impact of their High Commissioners in London, was crucial to its success.

I was shortly to witness a quickening and deepening of the Commonwealth's campaign against apartheid (and sharp disagreements between the British government of Mrs Thatcher and the rest of the Commonwealth over sanctions), but this was not the only issue in Ramphal's in-tray, even if it was the most notable. As well as his passionate activism, he also provided intellectual leadership to the Commonwealth, as a member of a series of international commissions such as the Brandt Commission on world poverty and the North/South divide (reports in 1980 and 1983), the Palme Commission on disarmament and security (1982) and, later, the Brundtland Commission on Environment and Development (1987), as well as a host of Commonwealth Expert Groups, assembled by Ramphal. This underpinned early initiatives on international recognition for the special vulnerabilities of small states, and on tackling the crippling debt burden for developing nations. Within a year, I was to hear Ramphal urging sceptical Commonwealth Health Ministers to respond to the emerging menace of HIV/Aids, which, initially dismissed by some as a gay plague from the USA, was a decade later to ravage a number of countries in Africa and become a devastating global pandemic. Likewise, it was an Expert Group headed by British Scientist, Martin Holdgate, which in its 1989 report first urged the Commonwealth to highlight the existential threat of global warming and sea-level rise.

Early into his tenure, Ramphal confirmed his reputation as a superb speaker and gifted wordsmith. One of my first tasks was to research material for what we dubbed Sonny's 'Roots' speech. In it, he spoke of his Indian great-grandmother who, after failing to commit suttee on her husband's funeral pyre, and shunned by her family, travelled with her son from India to work as an indentured labourer on the sugar plantations of Demerara, in present-day Guyana. To my acute embarrassment as a Liberal Party activist, the particular plantation concerned, Vreed-en-Hoop, was owned by Sir John Gladstone, the father of the great reforming Liberal Prime Minister, William Gladstone. The family accumulated fabulous wealth from slavery and was one of the largest beneficiaries of compensation paid by the British government to slave owners on slavery's abolition in 1833. Ramphal delivered a version of the speech one night at Lancing College, in its historic chapel. His oratory that evening was spellbinding as he recounted the impact of slavery on his family and its modern manifestation in the form of apartheid in South Africa. At the end of the lecture, a softly-spoken man introduced himself as a former Headmaster of Lancing College and asked me if I had assisted Sonny with his speech. When I said I had helped with the research, he gently revealed an additional fact that I had missed: that he was in fact Sir William Gladstone and a great-grandson of the former prime minister. His son, Charlie, and his family have now disavowed John Gladstone as 'a vile man', issued a public apology and are paying reparations to anti-slavery projects in Guyana. Perhaps a seed was planted that night in the telling of Sonny's story?

Sonny's fluency and his engaging manner were also particularly suited to television and radio. As a result, he gave the Commonwealth an image and a profile which

stretched across the association and, in particular, caught the imagination of a generation of new leaders.

While for most of his tenure, and for all of Margaret's Thatcher's time as British Prime Minister, the two were characterized as implacable foes, this was not always the case. They worked constructively together on ending the Rhodesian rebellion and paving the way for Zimbabwe's independence. Ramphal performed a significant service to the British government during the 1982 Falklands War in mustering widespread Commonwealth support for the UK position at the UN. The 1985/6 mission to South Africa of the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group to seek a negotiated end to apartheid could not have achieved what it did without Thatcher's behind-the-scenes lobbying of President Botha. As it was, the group secured unparalleled access to all shades of opinion in South Africa and in the region, met Nelson Mandela in prison on three occasions and produced a blueprint for negotiations which formed the basis of a settlement five years later. It was the most substantial diplomatic initiative ever mounted by the Commonwealth and helped establish the tripartite relationship between Mandela in his prison cell, the South African apartheid regime and the African National Congress in exile which became the conduit for peace negotiations culminating in Mandela's freedom in February 1990.

However, it was Thatcher's opposition to economic and financial sanctions which, in the latter part of the 1980s, saw the breakdown of the Commonwealth's consensual decision-making on South Africa and a further souring of relations between Thatcher and Commonwealth leaders. This unhappy period – of the 'binary Commonwealth' – only ended with the start of John Major's premiership in 1990.

*For those of us who were fortunate to work in Marlborough House in Sonny's time, whether directly involved or not, he gave us belief, purpose and ambition through his extraordinary leadership. On a personal level, he was never short of a kind word and a broad smile; and of course his parties (at which he often cooked and concocted copious quantities of rum punch) were legendary. **Stuart Mole***

- *I would like to associate myself with the eloquent tributes to Sonny Ramphal voiced by colleagues and join them in mourning his death. Three decades after he retired from being Secretary-General I have still found myself eagerly awaiting his reactions to the latest developments impacting on the Commonwealth and his own generous remarks about former colleagues when learning of their passing. And almost to the end he has been active in championing important causes, of which his recent role with other former CSGs in ensuring survival of the Institute of Commonwealth Studies is a prime example.*

In education we particularly remember his leadership in bringing the Commonwealth of Learning into being from the initial exploration with Michael Faber at IDS and moving on through the Briggs and Daniel reports to give concrete definition to the project; and finally its creation as an intergovernmental organisation in 1988. Despite only lukewarm (at best!) interest from UK and Australia he, Emeka Anyaoku and Moni Malhoutra skilfully helped mobilise – principally from Brunei,

Nigeria and India - the funding needed to supplement Canada's inputs as host; an inspiring example of what might be possible when developing member states are inspired to exercise some financial muscle to ensure fulfilment of their aspirations.

Supplementary to the major Rhodesia-Zimbabwe and South African issues as sources of tension with the Thatcher Government, was the Secretariat's effort to safeguard access for Commonwealth students to higher and further education on favourable terms in the face of the introduction of full-cost tuition fees in Britain. The UK's unyielding position met with criticism and concern voiced through the Standing Committee on Student Mobility and Higher Education Co-operation. Caribbean countries were among those seriously affected and, unsurprisingly, eminent Barbadian colleagues like Sir Hugh Springer, Sir Roy Marshall and Billie Miller responded to Sonny's invitation to play important leadership roles in trying to find compromise solutions. Sir Rex Nettleford and Alfred Sangster from Jamaica, and of course the first President of COL, James Maraj, were others from the region playing active roles in the Secretariat's many endeavours in education at that time.

He took seriously his responsibilities as Chancellor of both UWI and the University of Warwick, to which as others have said he invited many Secretariat staff colleagues to attend his installation (wasn't it his installation as Chancellor, rather than to receive a doctorate that took us all to Coventry Cathedral. Asif?) and a number of Warwick graduates have told me of the pains he took to engage with them personally and individually when conferring degrees.

*Stuart Mole has alluded to Sonny Ramphal's superb talent as orator and writer – we remember how readily he seemed able to lift our perfectly respectable B+ and A-grade drafts to the A*** mark when they reached publication stage. Marlborough House was an exciting and visionary place to work when Sonny Ramphal was at the helm. What a debt we Association members, and the Commonwealth community at large, owe him! **Peter Williams** (Director Education 1984-94)*

I, too, would like to associate myself with the tributes to Sir Shridath Ramphal. I join colleagues, friends and well wishers in mourning the loss of a remarkable man.

One of the most rewarding experiences of my life was serving as Senior Executive Secretary to Sir Shridath. Without a doubt, it was the best learning experience of my entire career. To see SSR in full flow - whether it was negotiating with a Head of Government, addressing an audience of eminent persons, dictating an important speech on complex global issues or just interacting with staff and colleagues at his infamous Christmas parties - was truly inspiring. Work was arduous, and the Secretary-General was no respecter of weekends or public holidays. But simply being associated with the end product in the smallest of ways was for me a matter of great pride. Sir Shridath has left giant footprints on the sands of time.

Sincere condolences to his family and friends. **Lorna McLaren**

Selected links:

[Sir Shridath Ramphal obituary](#)

Sir Shridath Ramphal, Commonwealth secretary-general who charmed the Queen but clashed with Thatcher –The Telegraph obituary can be accessed [here](#)

Sir Shridath ‘Sonny’ Ramphal obituary: Commonwealth secretary-general – The Times - can be accessed [here](#)

<https://thecommonwealth.org/news/statement-commonwealth-secretary-general-passing-sir-shridath-ramphal>

[Statement from Prime Minister Mia Amor Mottley on the passing of Sir Shridath Ramphal - Barbados Today](#)

[Editorial | Transcendental Ramphal](#)

<https://www.jamaicaobserver.com/2024/09/01/sir-shridath-ramphal-hailed-global-statesman/>

[Sir Shridath \("Sonny"\) Ramphal talks to Commonwealth Round Table's Rita Payne.](#)

[Interview with Sir Shridath Ramphal - Commonwealth Oral History Project](#)

[About Face - Shridath 'Sonny' Ramphal - BBC Sounds](#)

[Guyana's Sir Shridath Ramphal, esteemed international statesman, dies at 95](#)
[globalvoices.org](https://www.globalvoices.org)

<https://barbadostoday.bb/2024/08/31/sonny-ramphal-titan-of-caribbean-diplomacy-dies-at-95/>

[Sir Shridath Ramphal - A tribute by Richard Bourne - The Round Table](#)

<https://www.jamaicaobserver.com/2024/09/02/duty-preserve-sir-shridath-ramphals-legacy/>

[Preview YouTube video Sir Shridath \("Sonny"\) Ramphal talks to Commonwealth Round Table's Rita Payne.](#)

