



Message from the Chair, Max Gaylard

The period since the launch in April this year of the inaugural Spring edition of The Commonwealth Association Newsletter has been a busy and eventful one for your Executive Committee (ExCo), as reflected in the summary of events and activities outlined in this second edition.

It has also been a time for us to welcome the accession to office in early April 2025 of Commonwealth Secretary-General the Hon Shirley Botchwey, and in early September 2025 the new Director-General of the Commonwealth Foundation the Hon Razmi Farook. We look forward to supporting them in whatever ways we can, and in particular to continue our own modest efforts to promote fundamental Commonwealth values and objectives in democracy and human rights, lend our support to the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and join with other interested parties in the protection of our global environment.

We welcome your feedback to further enhance the work of the Association as well as this publication.



Our warm Season's Greetings to all members.



Partnership with 2026 CYP Youth Awards Programme for the CA's Patsy Robertson Award for young journalists, broadcasters and writers

The CA has received high profile publicity for its PR Award, for which it is partnering with the CYP 2026 Youth Awards. To review the substantial number of applications, a member of ExCo will serve on a high-level adjudication panel alongside the Commonwealth Secretariat (ComSec), High Commissioners and other prominent personalities. Chris Cobb, President of the Commonwealth Journalists Association (CJA) which is partnering with the CA for this initiative, will also serve on the panel. In addition to the monetary award to be provided by the CA to the successful candidate, the CJA will provide free membership of their organisation to all PR Award finalists. The award will be presented in March 2026. More details can be accessed [here](#).

Palestine: How can the Commonwealth respond to the war in Gaza?

In the last few days, the war in Gaza has taken yet another extraordinary twist, ushering in the first phase of the ceasefire. Ordinary Gazans, clutching their sparse possessions, have been streaming back into Gaza city, although most homes are now in ruins. UN humanitarian aid has resumed on a massive scale, to break the hold of famine across the territory. If this first vital phase is successfully completed, the way should be open to a more lasting peace.

This hugely welcome news is markedly different from the images and reports reaching CA members during the summer. At two UK events – the memorial service and lecture in honour of the late Sir Sonny Ramphal on 1 July and at the online AGM at the end of that month - a succession of members expressed their concern and pressed for some kind of Commonwealth intervention in what was already a grotesque humanitarian crisis.



Max Gaylard, our Chair, has particular knowledge and experience of the Middle East, having served for five years as UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator to Palestine, and Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General to the Middle East Peace Process. As a result of the discussion at the AGM, the ExCo prepared a position paper which reviewed the history of the Commonwealth's engagement with Palestine, and suggested that circumstances had changed significantly since 1997, when the Commonwealth considered Palestine's application for Commonwealth membership. At that time, the Oslo Peace Process was underway and only a minority of members recognised Palestine as a state, and Palestine's application was 'laid on the table' for future consideration.

Since then, more than 80% of Commonwealth member states now recognise Palestinian statehood, with the UK, Australia and Canada among the most recent to announce recognition. With the Palestinian population in Gaza facing an existential threat and Jewish settler expansion and violence in the West Bank diminishing the viability of any future Palestinian state, Commonwealth membership could bind in another global multilateral organisation in standing by the Palestinian people and working for peace and a two-state solution. It was along these lines that the CA contacted the Commonwealth Secretary-General and a range of Commonwealth governments over the course of September and October.

However, to general surprise, the first stage of a US-brokered peace agreement is now taking root. A transition period, temporary governance structures and a multinational regional peacekeeping force are all likely to feature in any final agreement. In these changed circumstances, Commonwealth membership might again become a future objective, coupled with the establishment of a special fund for Palestine, involving Commonwealth and Arab countries donors. (Stuart Mole's full article can be read [here](#).)

The CA Membership

Membership of the Association has increased and now stands at 118. Approximately 10% are overseas members. The Association continues its efforts to attract new members.

Collaboration with Commonwealth Sport (previously Commonwealth Games Federation)

The ExCo continues to have a good working relationship with Commonwealth Sport which was rebranded on Commonwealth Day, 10 March 2025. An ExCo member, who is serving as a member of its Development Committee, proposed a strong engagement with Commonwealth High Commissioners in London ahead of the 2026 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow from 23 July - 2 August. As a result, a successful and well-attended event was hosted on 10 September 2025 at Marlborough House by Commonwealth Sport and the ComSec in partnership with the Glasgow 2026 organisers. It brought together High Commissioners, athletes and other stakeholders to discuss the Games' powerful vision of unity, youth empowerment and engagement, environmental sustainability, inclusion as well as athletic partnerships to generate economic opportunities, cultural exchange, and social transformation.

The CA Website

The CA website continues to be enhanced. Members are welcome to contribute experiences and articles.

Partnership with Commonwealth Businesswomen's Network (CBWN)

The ExCo works closely with CBWN which focuses on women's economic empowerment. An ExCo member who serves as its Investment Adviser is currently working with CBWN and other commercial partners on "Commonwealth Scale: A Pan-Commonwealth Angel Network for Women Entrepreneurs" which works to identify, fund, and systematically nurture the most promising women-led startups across member nations. This initiative is strategically aligned with the Commonwealth Investment Action Plan, launched at the 2024 CHOGM to mobilise



investment where it is most needed. CBWN is working closely with the FCDO (Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office) which is seed funding the Commonwealth's Investment Network.

ExCo Meetings

The CA's ExCo meets at least quarterly to plan future activities and to follow up on committed plans.

Membership of the Independent Forum of Commonwealth Organisations (IFCO)

An ExCo officer, who is a member of the Steering Group of IFCO as well as a small group undertaking a major review of IFCO's governance arrangements, has also been appointed as its Interim Vice Chair. IFCO was created in 2015 to enable civil society organisations in the Commonwealth to network, share ideas, activities and experiences, to jointly respond to issues of importance under the Commonwealth Charter. It makes the experience, knowledge and skills of Accredited Organisations more accessible to governments and Commonwealth Inter-governmental Organisations to promote Commonwealth development.

To address the concern regarding reported plans to reduce the number and/or frequency of Commonwealth Ministerial Meetings, IFCO has sent a note to the SG underscoring the need to maintain these ministerial meetings in a reformed format as they play a vital role in the functioning of the Commonwealth.

Sonny Ramphal Memorial Service and the Fifth Patsy Robertson Memorial Lecture, 1 July 2025

The Association was the lead organiser for the Memorial Service for Sonny Ramphal. It took place in the Queen's Chapel, a beautiful building which is part of St James's Palace and backs onto Marlborough House. The memorial service had been put together

with great skill by Stuart Mole in association with the Ramphal family. It was attended by Sir Sonny's family, friends, colleagues and dignitaries that included Baroness Patricia Scotland and The Right Hon David Lammy who represented the Head of the Commonwealth and the UK government respectively.



Queen's Chapel



Lecture by Sir Ronald Sanders

The hymns and music, led by the Choir of the Chapel Royal, were a mix of classical and contemporary pieces, and were beautifully sung. 'Guyana with Love', the piece composed and performed by flautist Dr Keith Waithe was particularly moving.

There were two tributes to Sonny from people he knew well – Chief Emeka Anyaoku, his successor as Secretary-General and Amanda Hennessy, Sonny's younger daughter, the text of which can be downloaded from the CA website. The new Secretary-General, Hon. Shirley Botchwey, also paid tribute to him.

The afternoon's main attraction, the *Fifth Patsy Robertson Memorial Lecture*, was delivered by Sir Ronald Sanders, Ramphal's son-in-law. His scholarly and penetrating analysis, extending beyond the Commonwealth to both Sonny's international work and his service to his beloved Caribbean, had his audience enthralled. Further information about both the events, including pictures and a video of the lecture can be viewed and downloaded from the CA website at comassoc.org.

Membership of Commonwealth Communicators Group (CCG)

ExCo members continue to attend quarterly CCG meetings and contribute to its work. The CA is a **founder member of the CCG**, which was set up by the ComSec in February 2025 to enhance the Commonwealth's impact, influence and reputation across the 56 Commonwealth member countries and beyond.



SAVE THE DATE: Christmas Social on 12 December 2025, 12 noon-4 pm



This year's Christmas Social will take place on Friday 12 December in the Atrium at Marlborough House. As space is limited, the event will be restricted to paid-up members only who can register (on a first come first served basis) through Eventbrite. An Eventbrite link will be sent out shortly.

