

Celebrating the 70th Anniversary of the Commonwealth – ‘A Connected Commonwealth’

1. 2019 marks a significant milestone – the Commonwealth’s 70th Anniversary. It’s great to see such a diverse group of people in the room tonight, from honourable parliamentarians, national representatives and colleagues from non-governmental organisations to young leaders, here to take part in this dialogue to prepare them for the challenge of shaping a better world for the next generation.
2. The Commonwealth began as a family of 8 states who signed the London Declaration in 1949. In the intervening years the Commonwealth has grown to 53 member states, which is more than a quarter of UN member states. 2.4 billion people live in Commonwealth countries, which is a third of the world’s population. The Commonwealth makes up one-fifth of global trade, with the combined GDP of Commonwealth nations set to reach US\$13trillion in 2020. The potential is huge.
3. The ties that bind us in this region are deep-rooted and stretch back many years. A large number of countries in this region are members of the Commonwealth, including as Australia, Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and of course Fiji.
4. The special strength of the Commonwealth lies in the combination of diversity and shared inheritance in language, culture and the rule of law; bound together by the shared history and tradition; by respect for all states.
5. As the current Chair-in-Office, the United Kingdom is working with all member states to ensure the Commonwealth realise its potential. But what does it mean to be a Commonwealth member if you are from a Pacific country? The Commonwealth promotes shared values and inclusivity, helps harness talent, strengthens norms, amplifies the voices of small states, and helps tackle the big global challenges of the day such as extremism and climate change.
6. The UK wants to play an active role in this connected Commonwealth. At the Heads of Government meeting last year, the then Foreign Secretary, now our Prime Minister Boris Johnson, announced that the UK would be opening 9 new diplomatic missions in Commonwealth countries, thereby increasing the number of British High Commissions around the world from 38 to 47. Three of those new missions are in the Pacific: in Tonga, Vanuatu and Samoa, thereby doubling our diplomatic presence in the region. We have also doubled the number of diplomatic staff at the High Commission in Suva and welcomed a new regional development counsellor.

7. As I noted at the start of this workshop, this evening event is part of the programme for the UK-funded Young Leaders Dialogue, which provides a platform where young people can acquire and share knowledge, engage in dialogue with respective national leaders, and foster networks for progressive development. It is funded through the Pacific Commonwealth Equality Project, which aims to increase the capacity of Pacific Island Countries to drive inclusive and equitable social change through good governance, respect for human rights, and fairer opportunities for politically, socially and economically marginalised communities. 60% of the population of the Commonwealth is aged under 30 so it is vital we engage with youth – they are the inspiration and driving force for the type of world we want for the next generation and beyond.
 8. The Commonwealth and its members are also active in tackling what might be the defining issue of our time and that is the threat of climate change. As Commonwealth nations, we recognise that we live on a shared planet with finite, common resources that must be managed for the benefit of all. The Commonwealth Blue Charter is encouraging sustainable development and protection of the ocean, along with initiatives such as the Commonwealth Marine Economy Programme, and the Commonwealth Clean Oceans Alliance. The UK is proud to be at the heart of these initiatives and we look forward to COP25 in Chile and beyond that to COP26 in Glasgow, key opportunities for us to drive global ambition.
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Sale of Thomas Cook's UK retail estate

The agreement will see [Hays Travel](#) acquire a total of 555 stores around the UK, providing re-employment opportunities for a significant number of former employees of Thomas Cook's retail operations who were made redundant following the appointment of the Official Receiver as liquidator on 23 September 2019.

Hays Travel is the country's largest independent travel agent. The company also runs the Hays Travel Independence Group, a consortium of independent travel agents, in addition to operating a subsidiary business, Just Go Travel, which trades under the Hays Travel brand predominantly across the North West of England.

Following the appointment of the Official Receiver last month, Hays Travel have already recruited 421 former Thomas Cook personnel and have further offers outstanding to former employees.

David Chapman, Official Receiver, said:

I am pleased to announce we have reached an agreement with Hays

Travel to acquire Thomas Cook's entire UK retail estate, comprising 555 stores across the country. This represents an important step in the liquidation process, as we seek to realise the company's assets.

Jim Tucker, Partner at KPMG and Joint Special Manager of Thomas Cook's Retail division, said:

This is an extremely positive outcome, and we are delighted to have secured this agreement. It provides re-employment opportunities for a significant number of former Thomas Cook employees, and secures the future of retail sites up and down the UK high street. We are pleased to have achieved this in a short time frame and in the context of a complex liquidation process, which is testament to a lot of hard work from a number of parties.

Over the weeks ahead, we will work closely with Hays Travel and landlords to ensure a smooth transition of the store estate.

John and Irene Hays, Managing Director and Group Chair of Hays Travel Limited, said:

Thomas Cook was a much-loved brand employing talented people. We look forward to working with many of them.

Further information on the liquidation of Thomas Cook is available on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk).

Contact Hays Travel

For media enquiries of Hays Travel, contact Susan Wear:

Contact Insolvency Service press office

You can also follow the Insolvency Service on:

[North Atlantic Council visits Georgia](#)

The Deputy Secretary General Ms. Rose Gottemoeller chaired a meeting of the NATO – Georgia Commission with Prime Minister of Georgia Mr. Giorgi Gakharia in Batumi. Deputy Permanent Representative Nick Pickard represented the United Kingdom during the visit.

The Deputy Secretary General and the NATO Permanent Representatives held meetings with Ms. Salome Zourabichvili, the President of Georgia; Mr. Vakhtang Gomelauri, the Minister of Internal Affairs; Mr Irakli Garibashvili, the Minister of Defence; as well as with the Mr. Archil Talakvadze, Chairman of the Parliament, and Georgian Parliamentarians. The NATO Ambassadors had a working lunch with Foreign Minister David Zalkaliani, met with civil society representatives, and visited two Georgian coast guard vessels.

[The Deputy Secretary General delivered a speech to students](#) at the Batumi State University.

[More information of the NATO-Georgia Commission's meeting is available here.](#)

International Trade Secretary WTO address

Britain & free trade

We know that free trade, facilitated by the rules based multilateral trading system, is an engine of global growth and prosperity.

When the UK leaves the EU later this month, we will have a golden opportunity to determine our own trade policy for the first time in almost half a century and retake our seat at the WTO as a fully independent, sovereign nation.

And we will use our new-found freedom to champion free, fair, rules-based international trade with the WTO at its centre.

Because there is no greater ally of the WTO than the United Kingdom.

From the repeal of the corn laws in 1846, to hosting the world's first industrial revolution, to being one of the original signatories of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, signed here in Geneva in 1947, the UK has long been a champion of free trade and trade liberalisation.

For those of you worried about where we might have been for 45 years, let me reassure you Britain is back.

Some may be content to live in a world of rising trade tensions and tit-for-tat tariffs, a world in which, for example, the good people of America are deprived of the chance to sample excellent Scotch whisky.

But this is not a world that I want to see, and when we take our independent seat around the WTO table, I can assure you we will be unapologetic in fighting the forces of protectionism, in favour of genuinely free trade.

Reforming and modernising the WTO

Since its inception, the WTO has been the ultimate heavyweight freedom fighter for a multilateral approach to trade liberalisation and a more prosperous world.

But though successful in many bouts, the WTO now needs to prepare for the new battles of the modern globalised world.

I would like to see reform of the dispute settlement system, and I was encouraged that at both of the major G20 and G7 summits this year, world leaders committed to addressing this issue.

President Trump has said he wants the WTO to modernise, and I agree. We must work together to resolve the Appellate Body impasse and we fully support the Walker process aimed at finding solutions that all members can be happy with.

In particular, we should look to ensure that time limits are met for Appellate Body adjudication on appeals to avoid future unauthorised overrunning of cases.

And clarification must be made that the Appellate Body's role in jurisdiction should be constrained to issues of law, and not drift into reviewing issues of fact.

There is also an urgent need to strengthen the rules on industrial subsidies, state-owned enterprises and forced technology transfer. Addressing these issues will not only level the playing field for the vast majority of member states, it will help tackle the underlying tensions which threaten the survival of our global trading norms.

And as the world's second largest services exporter, and Europe's preeminent destination for tech investment, it will come as no surprise that the UK is particularly interested in the WTO's work in services and digital trade.

We believe it is high time to reform digital trade rules so that they are fit for the 21st century, reducing restrictions to market access to support e-commerce and ensure the free flow of data across borders.

We also want to see progress in the fisheries subsidies negotiation, tackling the causes of illegal fisheries, over-fishing and overcapacity.

As an island nation of seafarers and fishermen, the UK has a strong interest in this area. Indeed, one of the key arguments made for leaving the EU was to reinvigorate our fishing industries— and we want to see fair and effective rules in force.

We also intend to work with all WTO Members to foster greater transparency in our global system, as part of our commitment to free and fair cross-border trade.

We would like to see more progress on domestic regulation in services, investment facilitation, supporting micro, small and medium-sized enterprises

and especially on advancing e-commerce.

And we intend to engage meaningfully with our partners in each of these areas prior to the next WTO Ministerial Conference in Kazakhstan in June 2020.

Delivering on our aims

So there is much to do – and in the UK, the WTO has a steadfast friend. Britain can be relied upon to be a strong voice in all these discussions: both here in Geneva and through our global networks.

We will be leveraging our strong bilateral relationships with other major world powers and we will be using our leading roles in international fora to drive the change we want to see.

For instance, tomorrow in London, I will be making the case that the Commonwealth can be a powerful voice in supporting the rules-based international system.

The Commonwealth's 53 member states comprise 2.4 billion people with a shared heritage, shared values and a shared desire to drive prosperity. I believe this historic organisation represents a real opportunity to remake the case for free trade within the multilateral system that we all depend on.

Working together

It is up to all of us not to pull our punches, and fight the siren calls of protectionism with all our might.

But Governments can't do it alone. That's why the work of the International Chamber of Commerce is vital in championing this cause.

Whether it's setting rules for buyers and sellers around the world; providing leadership on the biggest global issues like climate change and sustainability; or your important role as the leading arbitration institution, the ICC is on the front line in the world's trading battles.

It will take time, energy and determination, but by working together, I am confident we can deliver a knockout blow to the forces of protectionism and usher in a new golden era of free trade. In all these fights ahead, Britain is in your corner.

Home Office announces first wave of 20,000 police officer uplift

The Government has today confirmed the police officer recruitment targets for every police force in England and Wales for 2020-21.