

Speech: Commonwealth Standards Network: Statement by Ambassador and Permanent Representative Julian Braithwaite

Thank you for inviting me to join this first meeting of the Commonwealth Standards Network. It is good to be here today with you at your inaugural meeting to make sure we make the most of this exciting initiative and its potential to grow trade across the Commonwealth.

As you know, the UK Prime Minister launched the Commonwealth Standards Network at the Commonwealth Business Forum in April. This network is integral to the UK's ambition to promote prosperity in the Commonwealth and tackle non-tariff barriers to trade.

And it will work alongside other UK-funded programmes promoting trade facilitation and women's economic empowerment in the Commonwealth to deliver maximum impact.

Today, it is fantastic to see this ambitious project taking shape and to welcome so many of you from across the Commonwealth to this meeting. Many thanks to BSI for all their hard work in making this a reality.

Why is facilitating trade such an important focus of the UK's two-year Chair-in-Office of the Commonwealth? Because trade is a vital driver of economic growth and prosperity. It creates jobs, helps raise incomes and allows people to lift themselves out of poverty.

Within the Commonwealth, the scale of trade opportunity is staggering. Intra-Commonwealth trade is already worth \$560 billion per year. The costs of trade between Commonwealth partners are 19% lower than between non-members, and this is supported by our shared language, values and similar political and legal systems. This existing advantage is something we can build on. By working together, we can stimulate intra-Commonwealth trade to an even greater extent, boosting economic development.

At the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting back in April, governments committed to resist protectionism and champion a fair and inclusive multilateral trading system. They signed up to an ambitious Connectivity Agenda, which sets out a pathway to increased intra-Commonwealth trade and investment, by encouraging members to reduce trade barriers, strengthen links, and support each other to prosper.

The work done here in the international standards development community is crucial to supporting the multilateral trading system and delivering fair, safe trade worldwide.

Over recent decades, the WTO has made significant progress in reducing tariffs worldwide. That makes it all the more important that we now work together to tackle non-tariff barriers, in order to further stimulate trade flows.

International standards provide an unparalleled tool for reducing these barriers. They ensure that businesses in different countries speak a common language, enhancing trust in supply chains and giving consumers and businesses alike confidence that goods and services meet their expectations. They improve business productivity and efficiency, increase competitiveness, and offer opportunities for economies of scale.

The aim of the Commonwealth Standards Network is to boost trade between our nations by increasing use of existing international standards. By providing a platform for collaboration, the network will allow all members to share their knowledge, try out new approaches and create vital links between our economies.

The Commonwealth is the perfect forum to advance this work, given our longstanding connections and similarities. But we must not forget our responsibility to bring our learning back into the wider international standards community and use it to strengthen trading relationships with non-Commonwealth partners, too.

Growing intra-Commonwealth trade must have benefits for all. For developing countries, increasing use of international standards can support developing economies in entering global value chains and improving the business environment, helping attract investment.

But making these changes isn't easy, which is why the Commonwealth Standards Network will provide direct support in a number of developing countries to help them realise the benefits of standards for trade, investment and development.

Technical assistance work in five countries – Uganda, Zambia, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu and St Lucia – has already begun. These projects will provide on-the-ground support for development of national quality infrastructure; they aim to empower national standards bodies to participate actively in the international standards community.

National standards bodies and businesses in many more countries will receive training on use of standards to make sure the network's benefits reach those most in need.

In her speech at the Commonwealth Business Forum, the Prime Minister spoke about the importance of making the Commonwealth an organisation which works for all of us, and which shapes a future that we can all be proud of.

Today we make an important step towards doing that. The Commonwealth Standards Network must work for all members, developed and developing. It must promote open and inclusive dialogue about how use of standards can best support increased trade between our nations.

We would like to see this exciting initiative to continue beyond the UK's two-year Chair-in-Office and deliver long-term benefits for trade and prosperity across the Commonwealth.

So I encourage you all to participate actively in today's discussions, make your voices heard and let us know how standards can support your trade objectives. We need all of you to ensure that the Commonwealth Standards Network achieves its aims and becomes a lasting legacy of the 2018 Heads of Government meeting.

If we are to meet the ambition of the Commonwealth Regulatory Connectivity Agenda we must work together to make this a reality.

I look forward to seeing the Commonwealth Standards Network grow and develop over coming years.