

Speech: PM opening statement at first CHOGM Executive Session: 19 April 2018

Prime Minister Theresa May said:

Good morning everybody, can I welcome you again to London, and welcome you to the first session of the 2018 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting.

This is the 25th time the leaders of Commonwealth nations have gathered to address the great issues of the day – although for many of us, myself included, this is the first time we've attended as heads of government. So let me extend an especially warm welcome to all the first-time attendees, and in particular to President Adama Barrow, bringing The Gambia back into the Commonwealth fold. Welcome.

I'd also like to formally thank Prime Minister Joseph Muscat of Malta for his work as Chair-in-Office. Your steady leadership delivered a very successful tenure, and it's a pleasure to receive the baton from you at today's meeting. Thank you.

It's a meeting that takes place at a time of significant global challenges. The rules-based international system, which has consistently delivered both prosperity and peace, faces threats in many forms and on many fronts. Climate change and extreme weather continue to take lives and damage livelihoods across the Commonwealth. And the new opportunities afforded by the digital world have brought with them new risks, with our cyber security under attack from individuals and state actors.

All these issues and more will be addressed in a series of meetings over the next two days, both here at Lancaster House and in the retreat at Windsor.

The great strength of the Commonwealth is that all our members have equal status, an equal voice, and an equal right to make that voice heard. So as we tackle these challenges, I want to hear from everyone, and everyone will have chance to speak.

We face many challenges in the world today. But the Commonwealth is a unique organisation and, at this summit, we have an opportunity to deliver lasting change that benefits all of our 2.4 billion people. I'm looking forward to working with you all as we move the Commonwealth towards our common future.