

Speech: PM speech at Commonwealth Leaders reception

Thank you very much to Angelique and to Leon for showing us what fantastic wealth we have in the people in the Commonwealth. And we'll be hearing more of that next year at [CHOGM](#) (Commonwealth Heads of Government). But thank you very much to all of you and I'm very grateful to all our speakers this evening. But can I first of all say that I know that our thoughts are with those affected by the recent hurricanes in the Caribbean, including our colleagues from Dominica and Antigua and Barbuda, who for this reason have not been able to join us in New York this week.

And we also keep in our thoughts all those affected by the devastating flooding in South Asia and in Sierra Leone. But this has been a wonderful opportunity this evening, to gather our Commonwealth family together and reflect on some of the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. And as we look forward to that Heads of Government meeting, which will be taking place in London and Windsor next year, we have an ambitious phase of work ahead of us. Because, as you have heard from the other speakers, together we have the chance to build a reformed and revitalised Commonwealth. That will not be the work of a single summit, it can only be built over time and by sustained effort, close partnership and positive collaboration.

The Commonwealth is indeed an organisation with deep roots and profound strengths. Over seven decades, it's helped newly independent companies develop their national institutions, make economic progress and share common experiences. Today it champions the interests of small island states, helps nations to deepen and strengthen their democracies, and enables us to work together in partnership through a common language, shared history and closely related legal systems. But we know that to remain relevant to the aspiration of its citizens in a changing world, the Commonwealth needs to change too. We face new and unprecedented joint challenges: how to make the compelling case for free trade as the best way to promote higher living standards around the world, and so create a more prosperous commonwealth; how to mitigate the effects of climate change, especially as it affects small island states, and so create a more sustainable Commonwealth; how to address new security challenges, like cyber terrorism, and online extremism, and so create a more secure Commonwealth; and how to protect and promote the values we all share and so create a fairer, freer and more tolerant Commonwealth. And we all have a responsibility, working together as partners to ensure that the Commonwealth has the institutional strength to face these challenges effectively.

Now here this week at UNGA, we've heard UN General Secretary Guterres set out the wholesale institutional reform of the United Nations, which he is leading to maintain its relevance and effectiveness for the future. Commonwealth Secretary General, you are also leading a vital reform programme, and you deserve our support in delivering it. We in the Commonwealth need an agile and responsive secretariat, which focuses its efforts where it can best add

value. All member states must ensure that the secretariat has a sustainable footing to equip it for the future. But meaningful reform cannot just be a question for government and the secretariat alone.

What makes the Commonwealth unique is not having member states and a secretariat. Human networks, people-to-people links are what define the Commonwealth. We need to recognise and nurture them. And they can reach far beyond the limits of the institution. As Angelique and Leon have reminded us, for the Commonwealth to have a future as vibrant as its proud past, it must remain relevant to its youngest citizens. Speak to the challenges they face and answer their ambitions for a better life. And that is why we will put young people at the heart of our [Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting](#) in London and Windsor next year.

The message of that summit towards a common future encapsulates our ambitions for the event. So I hope that we can come together as a Commonwealth family and seize the opportunity to drive forward the necessary reforms. The prize, if we succeed in this collaborative effort will be a rejuvenated Commonwealth, better able to answer the aspirations of its citizens, especially its young citizens. Malta started this important process in Valletta. The UK is determined to help carry forward that agenda for the long term. Thank you.