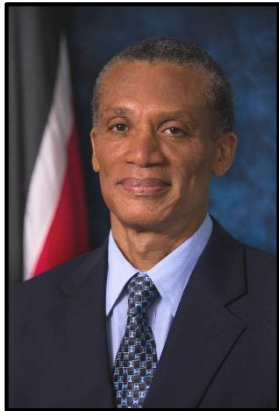




Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago
Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs

**STATEMENT BY SENATOR THE HONOURABLE DENNIS MOSES,
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AND CARICOM AFFAIRS, IN OBSERVANCE OF
COMMONWEALTH DAY 2019**



As the Commonwealth celebrates its 70th anniversary on March 11th 2019, this year's theme of "A Connected Commonwealth" underscores the benefits and value of the Commonwealth's global engagement in all aspects of society and the rich diversity of the Commonwealth family of nations and its enduring commitment to persevere and collaborate in a spirit of friendship and goodwill. It gives recognition to the Commonwealth's determination to connect people, institutions and governments through education, concern for the environment, economic and trade cooperation, sport, the promotion of peace and good governance, and outreach to youth, women and marginalised communities.

Over the course of 70 distinguished years, the Commonwealth has transitioned from the old into the new with its unwavering focus on sustainability and inclusion for all within the Commonwealth fold. Despite the complexity and gravity of the challenges encountered in today's global landscape, from mushrooming security threats and conflict to evolving health risks to extreme weather events and climate impacts to continued abuses on the rights of women, children, minorities, the differently abled and other marginalised groups, the Commonwealth remains firmly planted in the foundation of the Commonwealth Charter and dedicated to fostering meaningful development for the Commonwealth's 2.4 billion citizens across some 53 Member States.

2018 was a year of exceptional global challenges and opportunities, marked by action on the part of the international community to substantively address climate change, environmental degradation, socioeconomic exclusion and migration, with a view to creating a roadmap for achieving sustainable development at the global level. It was in that spirit of cooperation, partnership and common purpose that Commonwealth Heads of Government converged in London and Windsor in April 2018 under the theme "Towards a Common Future", in order to bring to bear years of accumulated Commonwealth knowledge and experience, as well as strategic influence, on the outcome of global conversations taking place in other international fora that directly impact the standard of living and quality of life of the peoples of the Commonwealth, the majority of whom live in impoverished conditions in developing countries.

Bearing in mind that Commonwealth populations represent a third of the global population, 60 percent of which are young people under the age of 30, the 2018 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) featured multi-dimensional discussions by the Heads of Government on how to better pursue shared goals of fairness, sustainability, security and prosperity and produced outcome documents which highlighted the advocacy and practical contributions of the Commonwealth in finding durable solutions to major challenges and concerns. In addition to the new and expanded mandates emerging from CHOGM 2018, the convocation of Commonwealth Heads demonstrated collaboration, leadership and innovation through the launch of strategic initiatives designed to strengthen the economic and developmental prospects of Commonwealth Developing States, including the Commonwealth Blue Charter, the Commonwealth Cyber Declaration and the Declaration on the Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda for Trade and Investment.

CHOGM 2018 was significant in that it took cognisance of the pressures of ocean warming; acidification; climate change; marine pollution (in particular plastics pollution); biodiversity loss; unsustainable fisheries and international marine wildlife crimes, resulting in the adoption of the Commonwealth Blue Charter, thereby building on the body of existing international commitments towards sustainable ocean management, including the first United Nations Oceans Conference, the Caribbean Challenge Initiative, the Barbados Programme of Action, the Mauritius Strategy and the SAMOA Pathway. Commonwealth leaders agreed to cooperate with one another in meeting ocean-related commitments through the sharing of knowledge, expertise and good practices, and to mobilise Action Groups to deal with specific threats and challenges affecting Member States. The Blue Charter further acknowledged the unique vulnerability and capacity challenges faced particularly by least developed, small coastal and island states, and landlocked states, and therefore reiterated the importance of intra-Commonwealth cooperation. Trinidad and Tobago has embraced the Commonwealth's efforts towards conservation and responsible management of oceanic resources and joined the Blue Charter Action Groups on the Blue Economy, Aquaculture, Ocean and Climate Change, Mangrove Restoration and Marine Plastic Pollution. The Commonwealth was represented at the first global Sustainable Blue Economy Conference in November 2018 which brought together governments, businesses, organisations, community and civil society leaders, academics, scientists/researchers and innovators in Nairobi to formulate concrete commitments and practical actions that can help countries to explore the opportunities of the blue economy.

Mindful of the rapid pace of change and evolution in the global cyber domain, the Commonwealth turned attention to strengthening the use of information and communication technologies; enhancing cyber security; protecting the security of networks, data, users and systems; and mitigating threats to the stability and integrity of critical cyber infrastructure through commitments expressed in the Commonwealth Cyber Declaration, as leaders resolved to promote a cyberspace that supports economic and social development and rights online, to build the foundations of an effective national cyber security response, and to foster stability in cyberspace through international cooperation, building on the principles established in the 2014 Commonwealth Cyber Governance Model adopted by the Commonwealth ICT Ministers Forum and the values upheld in the Commonwealth Charter.

The importance of international trade and investment in boosting employment, attracting revenue and growing economies was reiterated through the Declaration on the Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda for Trade and Investment. Trade and investment were identified as drivers of inclusive and participative economic growth and as critical activities to propel the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. Commonwealth leaders reiterated their commitment to fostering free trade in a transparent, fair, inclusive and open rules-based multilateral trading system, taking into consideration the needs of small and vulnerable economies and least developed countries and with a special focus on developing the blue and green economies. The Connectivity Agenda for Trade and Investment will create a facility to provide some USD 100 million in incremental finance to Commonwealth small states. The Commonwealth is also implementing a debt management programme to assist Member States with elaborating strategies for effectively managing debt.

On the issue of climate change, Commonwealth leaders welcomed ratification by all Member States of the Paris Agreement and encouraged countries that had not yet done so to consider ratifying and implementing the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol and the Doha Amendment for parties to the Kyoto Protocol. It will be recalled that the Paris Agreement was preceded by the Commonwealth Heads of Government Statement on Climate Action of November 2015, which referenced the '1989 Langkawi Declaration on the Environment' and the '2009 Port of Spain Climate Change Consensus: The Commonwealth Climate Change Declaration'. Of particular importance to the CARICOM region is the issue of disaster preparedness and the Commonwealth's renewed commitment to the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, as Heads encouraged urgent and concrete action and global support initiatives that will assist vulnerable countries in finding mechanisms for building resilience, adaptation and mitigation. The Commonwealth continues to propel the establishment of a resilience-building programme to the forefront of international dialogue to ensure that the Caribbean countries affected by hurricanes Irma and Maria are not forgotten and that the international community remains vigilant in addressing the issue of vulnerability in the face of natural disasters. In line with Trinidad and Tobago's National Development Strategy: Vision 2030, with its aim of "Placing the environment at the centre of social and economic development", Trinidad and Tobago ratified the Paris Agreement on February 22, 2018. Trinidad

and Tobago has dedicated the Arena Forest Reserve Project to The Queen's Commonwealth Canopy initiative, a forestry conservation initiative for Commonwealth Member States.

The Commonwealth has echoed its support for the United Nations Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism and welcomed the commemoration of 2019 as the International Year of Moderation, urging greater cooperation with the Secretariat's Countering Violent Extremism Unit in preventing and countering violent extremism. Calls have been made for effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking, and to secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour in all its forms by 2025. In 2018, Trinidad and Tobago joined the WePROTECT Global Alliance to End Online Child Sexual Exploitation and it is anticipated that Commonwealth training in this critical area will be unveiled in the coming months.

The Commonwealth Electoral Observation Programme has contributed to promoting peaceful transitions of government and advancing transparency and inclusive and accountable democracy across Member States. Trinidad and Tobago can be proud of its nationals who have hearkened to the call for "A Connected Commonwealth" through their contributions to the Commonwealth Youth Council, the Commonwealth Advisory Board on Sport and the Commonwealth Platform for Girls' Education, launched in September 2018. This Platform which seeks to eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education, in recognition of the right of girls to access educational opportunities and to learn in a safe and nurturing environment.

In keeping with the spirit of dialogue and inclusion, various civil society fora were convened ahead of CHOGM 2018 i.e. the Commonwealth Business Forum, the Commonwealth People's Forum, the Commonwealth Youth Forum and the Commonwealth Women's Forum, producing key outcome documents and statements to influence and shape Commonwealth policy-making and future action plans. The Commonwealth's consistent interaction with civil society partners and its openness to seeking solutions from every segment of society demonstrate a commitment to development premised on respect and equality and the pursuit of an informed, dynamic, responsive and truly connected Commonwealth.

Most critically, the Commonwealth continues to devise ways and means of addressing inequalities, bridging disparities, empowering the disadvantaged, building capacity and resilience, and ultimately connecting people through the provision of technical assistance, the transfer of expertise and technologies and a repository of people-centred tools, learning resources and programmes which facilitate the creation of enabling environments in member countries. The Climate Finance Access Hub began in 2016 with initial funding of AUD 1 million with the aim of addressing the constraints that prevent small and vulnerable states from accessing climate finance. Today, plans are underway to mobilise further financing of GBP 201 million in the Hub. The Commonwealth's robust efforts to pursue climate change reversal and sustainable management of oceanic resources through cutting-edge initiatives have given rise to the Common Earth Programme which seeks to regenerate and restore the land, atmosphere and seas from adverse climate impacts and collaborative participation in the First Descent Programme, a joint initiative of the oceanic research body Nekton and its partners to conduct multidisciplinary research into unexplored ocean territory. Even as the Commonwealth continues to avail its Law and Climate Change Toolkits to Member States and to embark on the creation of a Disaster Risk Financing Portal which would make financing available to disaster-ravaged Member States in the future, it underscores the vital need for a Universal Vulnerability Index which would serve to gauge states' vulnerability in order to efficiently channel development assistance.

At the milestone of 70 years, the Commonwealth emerges as a family of nations which is bound by shared inheritances, enlightened by diversity, guided by the lessons of experience and history and emboldened with a renewed mandate and sights set on shaping a tomorrow that is fairer, safer, more productive and more sustainable than yesteryear. As the Commonwealth enters the next decade of its existence and CHOGM 2020 beckons with promise and potential, the Commonwealth connection must be leveraged to serve as a catalyst for positive change and development and a wellspring of innovation and opportunity.