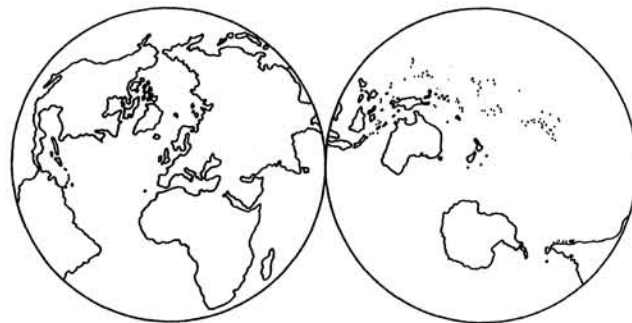

The Commonwealth Factbook



The Commonwealth

The Commonwealth is an association of independent countries which have decided to work together to advance the interests of their peoples, and to help build a better world.

Member countries also work together to advance global progress in economic development and social justice, and use the association to share ideas and expertise on developmental issues.

Fifty countries were members of The Commonwealth in mid-1992. Their populations totalled more than 1,400 million people—over a quarter of the world's population and around a third of its nation states made up The Commonwealth.

Pakistan (1989) and Namibia (1990) were the newest members, Pakistan re-joining after it had left in 1972, and Namibia becoming a member after a 25-year Commonwealth-supported struggle brought its independence.

Countries of The Commonwealth

Commonwealth countries include some of the world's largest countries, and many of its smallest; a few of its richest and many of its poorest. Some member countries are industrialised and others are rapidly industrialising, but many remain dependent on the sale of a few low-value commodities. A few produce large surpluses of food, while others cannot feed their own populations. Commonwealth countries occur on every continent, and the association includes all the world's major religions and many of its languages.

A unique product of history

The movement for decolonisation gave The Commonwealth its contemporary shape. Its member countries were once part of the British Empire, whose shared colonial past had given them a sense of kinship. They decided to use this to help themselves and each other overcome the negative legacies of colonialism. The central principles for which they strove were: partnership, equality, multiracialism, and helping the development of the poorest.

Colonialism also left positive legacies: a common language (English), similar legal, educational and administrative systems, long-standing links through sport, literature and the performing arts, and enduring bonds of friendship. Rooted in this way in a shared culture, Commonwealth links have long outlasted the involuntary bonds of colonialism. They underlie the sense of 'a family of nations', in which people find it easy, and meaningful, to work together.

The Commonwealth at the summit

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth is Head of The Commonwealth and 'the symbol of the free association of independent member nations.'^{*} Sixteen Commonwealth countries are monarchies in which The Queen is also their Head of State. Twenty-nine are republics and five have national monarchies; their allegiance to The Queen is as Head of The Commonwealth, and Her Majesty has visited almost all these countries in that capacity.

The Queen does not take part in the running of The Commonwealth as an association, although she consults with all its national leaders and has great moral authority.

Overall direction is given by Commonwealth Heads of Government, who meet for a week every two years. They met in Harare, Zimbabwe in 1991, and are to meet in Cyprus in 1993. Discussions at Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings are private. They are known, however, for their frankness and informality: no subjects of discussion are barred and decisions are reached by consensus. The meetings also include a 'retreat', usually held at the weekend, where leaders, accompanied by their spouses but without officials, meet in a more relaxed environment.

Commonwealth Ministers in charge of finance, law, health, education, youth, women and development, science and food production also meet regularly, and set the parameters for Commonwealth activities in their areas.

Administering The Commonwealth

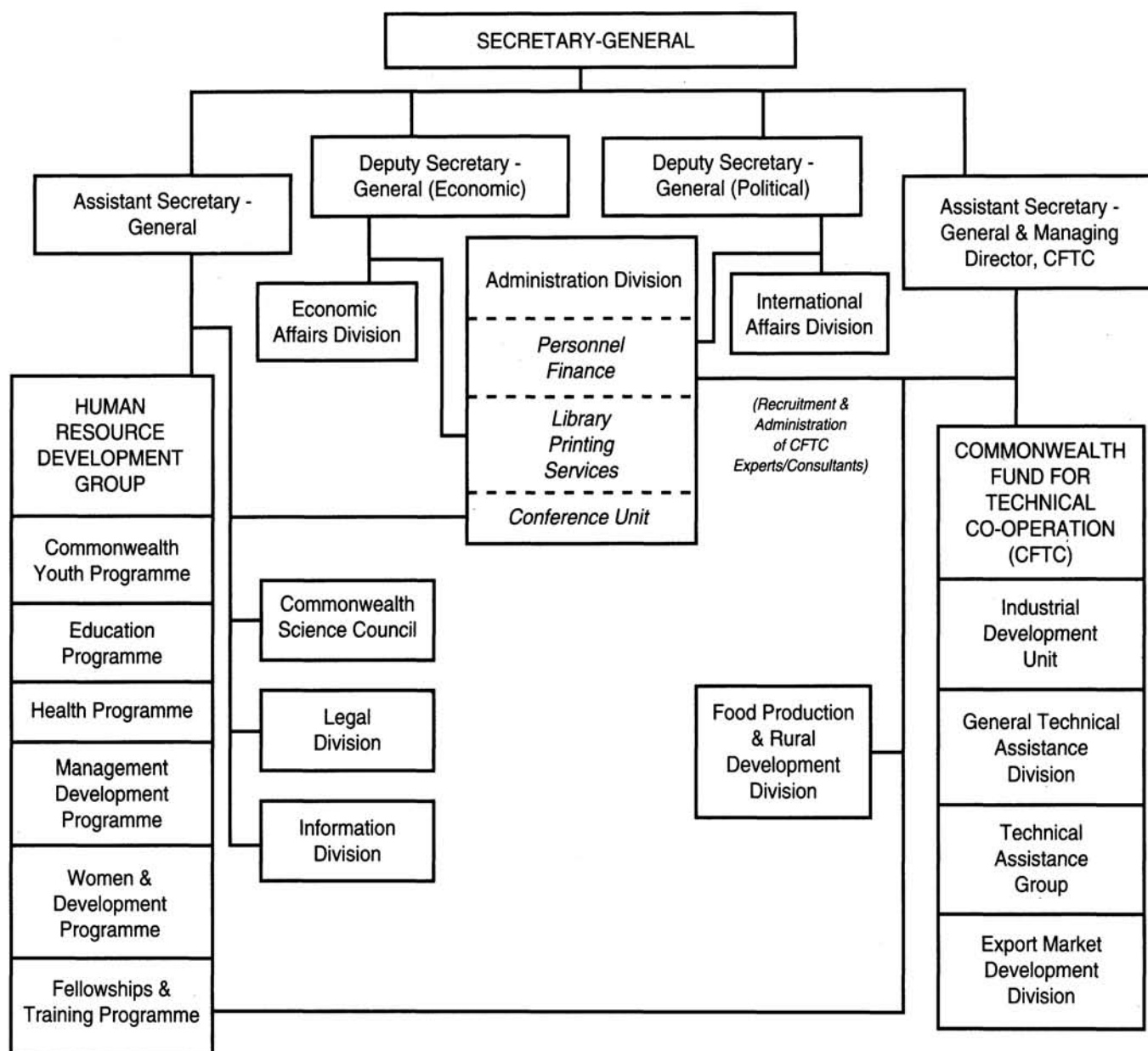
To organise these consultations of Heads of Government and ministers and carry out the programmes of co-operation set up through them, The Commonwealth has a Secretariat, based in London (see diagram of areas of work). The Secretariat includes the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation, which provides training, largely for government staff, and supplies expertise in every area of development. The Secretariat is headed by a Secretary-General, elected by Heads of Government. The present Secretary-General is Chief Emeka Anyaoku, from Nigeria. Under him serve some 400 staff from over 30 Commonwealth countries.

The people's Commonwealth

The Commonwealth's roots, however, lie not in governments but in the fellowship of peoples. This is fostered by traditions and informal links, and a network of some 250 non-governmental organisations. Many universities, for instance, have for generations opened their doors to stu-

^{*}From the Communiqué of the Meeting of Commonwealth Prime Ministers, 1949.

Commonwealth Secretariat Organisation Chart



dents from all over The Commonwealth; a high proportion of today's leaders once studied at the same centres of excellence.

Doctors, nurses and members of many other professions have formed links across The Commonwealth, working and studying in other Commonwealth countries. These networks are fostered by the Commonwealth Foundation, which supports associations linking professionals. The Foundation also assists the development of Commonwealth arts, through fellowships for artists and craftspeople and high-profile awards such as the Commonwealth Writers Prize.

Sport also brings Commonwealth people together, through such particularly Commonwealth games as cricket and (in some regions) rugby, and most notably

through the four-yearly Commonwealth Games, known for their fine sporting spirit as 'The Friendly Games'.

The Commonwealth Factbook

This book is a compilation of facts and figures on all member countries. It also includes information about associated states, external territories and dependencies which share in the work and benefits of Commonwealth consultation and co-operation.

The tables at the end of the Factbook show that Commonwealth members belong to many other regional and international bodies, including the world assembly of the United Nations and its specialised organisations. The Commonwealth remains a link between members in all their international relationships, and complements other forms of co-operation.