

Commonwealth Secretary-General's message for Commonwealth Day 2012

7 March 2012

Statement by: Commonwealth Secretary-General Kamalesh Sharma

Connecting Cultures: celebrating our Commonwealth

Our Commonwealth family brings together 54 countries and two billion people of all the variety that the world has to offer. We are a great global community, building on the foundations of what we share in common, especially our values and principles, our history, our common traditions and our focus on young people who make up more than two thirds of our total population.

On Commonwealth Day we seek to find practical opportunities to connect and to recall our shared commitment to the young in our societies: the second Monday in March each year is Commonwealth Day because it is a day when every school in the Commonwealth is open.

Each year on Commonwealth Day, we launch a new theme as a focus for thinking and practical action to pull us together and to strengthen us worldwide. 'Connecting Cultures' is our Commonwealth theme this year. This is our opportunity to celebrate the rich cultural diversity of the Commonwealth and what this enrichment means to us as individuals.

Our various cultures and the ways we express them are what set us apart: we proudly use music, dance, literature, art and other means to express our cultural identities as individuals and communities.

'Connecting Cultures' is about appreciating and celebrating these ways in which others live their lives and express themselves. And it is about much more than that too. It is about exploring how we can bring cultures together, how we can connect them in order to learn, to deepen the appreciation we have of one another. 'Connecting Cultures' encourages us to explore how we can use culture to build bridges of exchange and understanding. We want these links to be strengthened in new and special ways in 2012.

'Connecting Cultures' also gives us an insight into the richness that makes up each individual Commonwealth citizen. By overcoming the limited way of seeing people only in terms of ethnicity, gender, faith, or some other single strand of their identity, we find common bonds that expand the sense of our identity in all its complexity and wonderful variety.

It is fitting, in this The Queen's Diamond Jubilee year, to pay tribute to the unique contribution that Her Majesty has made to promoting understanding and to strengthening links in the Commonwealth. The Queen as the Head of the Commonwealth is the symbol of our unity and free association with each other. Her Majesty's belief in our shared values and collective identity continues to inspire rising generations to build for a secure future in which there is equity and freedom of opportunity.

As Commonwealth citizens we can all find strength in our diversity as well as our commonality; we can draw on mutual support and gain from shared experience by working together in a variety of ways to multiply the collective and beneficial influence of 'Connecting Cultures'.

Kamalesh Sharma