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Press Release

Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting Opening Ceremony: speech by Commonwealth Secretary-General Kamallesh Sharma.

Theme: ‘Growth with Equity; Inclusive Development’

Colombo, 15 November 2013 - Your Royal Highness, President Rajapaksa, Prime Minister Abbot, distinguished Heads of Government, representatives from the Commonwealth family, and guests: a warm welcome and greetings!

It is very good to see CHOGM back in Asia, home to three-quarters of the people of the Commonwealth. The first-ever CHOGM took place in Singapore in 1971, but it is almost a quarter of a century since a CHOGM was last held in the Asia region: that was in Kuala Lumpur in 1989.

We thank the government and people of Sri Lanka for the generosity, enthusiasm and warmth of their welcome. As one of the eight original members of the modern Commonwealth, Sri Lanka has shown enduring energy and commitment as a member of our global Commonwealth family.

That involvement now intensifies as the Commonwealth entrusts to Sri Lanka the leadership role and responsibility of serving as Chair-in-Office.

The goodwill and commitment of all our member states to seeking and finding common ground has long been our Commonwealth strength, and remains our springboard for the future. Painstaking at times, its rewards are immeasurable.

Wisdom, and discovering where we can add to the global good, is our continuing Commonwealth gift to the world. Ideas and action flowing from meetings of Commonwealth leaders are remarkable in particular for the distinctive way in which they are right for the moment; and they change the moment.

We recall the visionary yet applied understanding of the Commonwealth Commission on Respect and Understanding, and its essential message to undo what divides us and to do what unites, to see each other not through a reductionist lens, but through a prism in which our unique individual identities with their full richness and complexity can be valued and respected and celebrated. It remains a Commonwealth message and balm for all our societies, in their diversity, and to the world.

Our Commonwealth approach is to see democracy, development, and respect for diversity, as mutually supportive and melding to form the bedrock of national harmony, and progress for all our people. For us, it is not a matter of our political values at one end of a spectrum and our development values at the other. All are found indivisibly in our Commonwealth [Charter](#).

It is in embracing this spirit of inclusiveness that our hosts and leaders have settled on a theme for this Meeting, which connects growth with equity. All in our societies should be better able to share the fruits of prosperity. None should be left behind. This has ever been our Commonwealth conviction.

In this CHOGM, it is also a very rich agenda that will be addressed:

- Debt management, solvency and resilience in our small member states;
- Climate finance for small and vulnerable states;
- Practical trade measures to help increase exports, including finance and advocacy that can help shape the global trade agenda;
- Unlocking the potential for member governments to assist each other directly, giving fuller meaning to the notion of our common wealth;
- The discourse on the global development agenda at the end of the term of the Millennium Development Goals, focussing on the added practical value we can bring together into the post-2015 world;
- A proposed Commonwealth Plan for Broadband Inclusion, to open new vistas for being connected and networked to advance our economic and social goals; and,
- In a Commonwealth of the people, a fresh examination of how Commonwealth borders can be opened to promote exchanges between our citizens.

Your Royal Highness, your longstanding commitment to a sustainable environment, as well as innovative approaches to training for employment and mentoring for business enterprise, are well known in the Commonwealth. Winning the gigantic challenge of youth employment is vital to the wellbeing of our societies.

We are delighted to welcome you here to represent the Head of the Commonwealth, Her Majesty The Queen.

Distinguished guests, deep awareness that our destinies are joined drives us forward in seeking together for practical solutions to the many great tasks before the Commonwealth, and the world at large. In these times of flux and rapid alteration, a shared vision of our collective striving and resolve are needed more than ever.

That is the role of all CHOGMs - to bring us closer as a family and to move us forward together. We turn to our heads gathered here to lead us forward in that spirit and purpose. We are the world's North, South, East and West. And we illustrate to the wider world that the Commonwealth closes the distance between them.

Bohoma isthuthi; romba nanri; thank you very much.



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