**United for progress**

Lord David Cameron

Monday, Mar 11, 2024

Today, on March 11, some 2.5 billion of us will come together to celebrate the Commonwealth family. Seventy-five years after the London Declaration, I will join this family’s many nations, faiths and communities at a service at Westminster Abbey.

I was prime minister when the Commonwealth agreed to a new charter, a milestone in our family’s history. For the first time, we had a single document setting out our core values and shared goals.

Today, as foreign secretary, I want our family of nations to work in partnership to uphold these values and fulfil these goals. I am proud of the work Commonwealth members do in partnership in areas ranging from rule of law to protecting the environment.

We are bound together by our many connections and inspired by our incredible diversity. This makes us a strong and respected voice in the world, capable of addressing global challenges. It means all our citizens can benefit from belonging to this family in their daily lives.

Thanks to our strong ties, the cost of trade between Commonwealth members is more than 20 per cent lower than the costs of trading with non-Commonwealth members.

We have made enormous strides in recent years in empowering women and girls, backing 4,000 businesses owned by women across the Commonwealth to become more competitive.

And we are working hard together to promote our values. The Commonwealth came together to stand by Guyana when it was threatened. And Commonwealth missions have observed dozens of elections since we agreed on our new charter.

The bonds our family shares matter all the more as we face great global challenges. I believe this is especially true for our small island members. Our charter recognized their particular needs in building their resilience, especially in the face of climate change. This global challenge impacts these states relatively more given their geography.

It is to our families that we turn when we are most in need. I want these states to know they can turn to their Commonwealth family today.

We have a major opportunity this year. The Commonwealth Heads of Government will be meeting in a Pacific island country for the first time, gathering in Samoa this October. This gathering takes place a few months after the once-in-a-decade UN Small Island Developing States Conference in Antigua and Barbuda this May.

These states are already harnessing the power of nature to tackle the causes and impacts of climate change. Just look at Papua New Guinea, protecting some of the world’s most important forests, on which we all depend. Or take the sixteen Commonwealth small island states working as part of the global coalition committed to protecting at least 30 per cent of the world’s ocean by 2030.

We can offer much more support to these efforts. Britain is doubling its provision of international climate finance. And last autumn, the prime minister made our biggest-ever contribution to the Green Climate Fund, the largest global fund to support developing countries in responding to climate change.

This will help. However, the biggest challenge these states face is accessing the international funding itself. Despite being low emitters uniquely exposed to the threat of climate change, they receive a minuscule proportion of such funding.

So many of these states said to me at COP: “We keep hearing announcements about green finance, but it seems so hard to get hold of the money and get projects financed.” That is what I want to fix.

A dedicated Commonwealth hub has helped mobilize more than $310 million of climate finance for our small island members since 2016. This year, as members of the same Commonwealth family, let’s build on this and go much further.

Britain has particular leverage as a major donor to the big multilateral development funds and banks. We are working particularly closely with these banks to scale up by hundreds of billions of dollars the funding they offer developing states.

But all members can play a role. Many of us are donors. Others have experience to share in accessing finance from such funds and banks themselves, and making best use of them on the ground.

This year, in Samoa, we have a chance to show them and our other small island members just what the Commonwealth means. An effective association. A unique network. A reliable source of support. In short, a family.

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