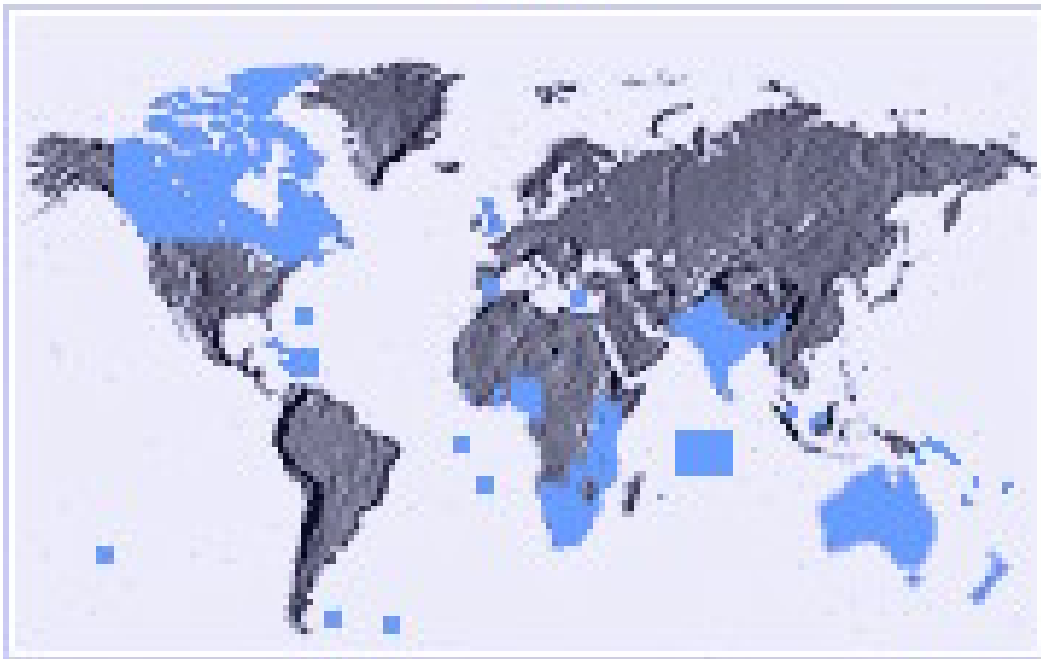


# The Commonwealth Of Nations (1949 – Present)





**The Commonwealth has grown massively in the last few decades. Above, the 10 representatives in 1958, below, the over 50 members in 2000**

The Commonwealth is a voluntary association of currently 53 independent countries, almost all of which were formerly under British rule. While remaining entirely responsible for their own policies, member countries choose to consult and co-operate in certain areas such as strengthening democracy by good government, promoting human rights and working for social and economic development of poorer countries. Much of the strength of the Commonwealth is derived from its non-governmental and informal links, such as teacher-training schemes, youth ministries, distance education, science and environmental projects, shared sports and arts festivals. This means that it is as much a commonwealth of peoples as of governments. Commonwealth countries exchange High Commissioners to each other instead of ambassadors to recognise the special and closer relationship they have.

Created in 1949 in its present format after India became a republic, replacing the British Commonwealth formed in 1931, the Commonwealth of Nations is a remarkable organisation which remains a major force for change in the world today. A permanent Secretary General of the Commonwealth was established in 1965, starting with Canadian Arnold Smith. The 1.6 billion people of Commonwealth countries make up over a quarter of the world's population, and over 50 per cent of the population of the Commonwealth is under 25. The great majority of Commonwealth members are parliamentary democracies. In the 1950's, even France and Norway unsuccessfully applied to join the Commonwealth.

Membership of the Commonwealth has, since its beginning, been open to any independent state which was once ruled or administered by Britain or other Commonwealth countries, and recognises The Queen as Head of the Commonwealth. (In 1995, Mozambique became the first country to join which had not previously had such links with Britain, being a former Portuguese colony.) Almost all countries, when they became independent of the United Kingdom, have chosen to join the Commonwealth but, since the link is entirely voluntary, any member can withdraw at any time - the Republic of Ireland did so in 1949, as did South Africa in 1961 (subsequently rejoined in 1994). Zimbabwe withdrew in 2003.

There are 53 member countries of the Commonwealth, listed below, with the years in which they joined the Commonwealth. Also listed is their constitutional status: 'realm' indicates a Commonwealth country which retained a monarchical constitution, recognising The Queen as Sovereign; 'monarchy' indicates an indigenous monarchical constitution; 'republic' indicates a constitution with a President as head of state.

<b>Country</b>	<b>Date Of Joining The Commonwealth</b>	<b>Status</b>
Antigua and Barbuda	1981	Realm
Australia	1942 by Statute of Westminster	Realm
The Bahamas	1973	Realm
Bangladesh	1972	Republic
Barbados	1966	Realm
Belize	1981	Realm
Botswana	1966	Republic
Brunei	1984	Monarchy
Cameroon	1995	Republic
Canada	1931 by Statute of Westminster	Realm
Cyprus	1961	Republic
Dominica	1978	Republic
Fiji Islands	1970 (left in 1987, rejoined in 1997)	Republic
The Gambia	1965	Republic
Ghana	1957	Republic
Grenada	1974	Realm
Guyana	1966	Republic

India	1947	Republic
Jamaica	1962	Realm
Kenya	1963	Republic
Kiribati	1979	Republic
Lesotho	1966	Monarchy
Malawi	1964	Republic
Malaysia	1957	Monarchy
The Maldives	1982	Republic
Malta	1964	Republic
Mauritius	1968	Republic
Mozambique	1995	Republic
Namibia	1990	Republic
Nauru	1968	Republic
New Zealand	1947 by Statute of Westminster	Realm
Nigeria	1960	Republic
Pakistan	1947	Republic
Papua New Guinea	1975	Realm
St. Christopher and Nevis	1983	Realm
St. Lucia	1979	Realm
St. Vincent and the Grenadines	1979	Realm
Samoa	1970	Republic
Seychelles	1976	Republic
Sierra Leone	1961	Republic
Singapore	1965	Republic
Solomon Islands	1978	Realm
South Africa	1931 by Statute of Westminster (withdrew in 1961, rejoined in 1994)	Republic
Sri Lanka	1948	Republic
Swaziland	1968	Monarchy
Tanzania	1961	Republic
Tonga	1970	Monarchy
Trinidad and Tobago	1962	Republic
Tuvalu*	1978	Realm
United Kingdom		Monarchy
Uganda	1962	Republic
Vanuatu	1980	Republic
Zambia	1964	Republic

\* Tuvalu is a special member, with the right to participate in all functional Commonwealth meetings and activities, but not to attend meetings of Commonwealth Heads of Government.

Remaining Dependent Territories of the United Kingdom consist of:

Anguilla, Bermuda, British Antarctic Territory, British Indian Ocean Territory, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Falkland Islands, Gibraltar, Montserrat, Pitcairn, St. Helena, South Georgia, Special Base Area Cyprus, Turks and Caicos Islands

Niue and Cook Islands are Associated States of New Zealand.



Pre-Second World War British Empire territories which are not members of the Commonwealth today include: Bahrain, Burma (Myanmar), Hong Kong (part of China since 1997), Iraq, Ireland, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Somalia, Sudan, United Arab Emirates, Yemen, Zimbabwe.

As Head of the Commonwealth, The Queen's role is symbolic and has no constitutional functions attached to it. The Monarch personally reinforces the links by which the Commonwealth joins people together from around the world. This is done through Commonwealth visits, regular contact with the Commonwealth Secretary General and his Secretariat (the Commonwealth's central organisation, which co-ordinates many Commonwealth activities and which is based in London) and Heads of Government, attending the Commonwealth Day Observance in London, broadcasting her annual Christmas and Commonwealth Day messages, acting as patron for Commonwealth cultural events and often attending the Commonwealth Games to open or close them.

The Commonwealth adopted a new flag in 1976 containing a stylised globe surrounded by a large letter 'C' for Commonwealth. This replaced the traditional use of the British Union Flag as the flag of the Commonwealth, which was felt was no longer appropriate as it had been the symbol of the former British Empire. Commonwealth countries were independent and most were republics, so a new symbol was needed to reflect that fact.

During her reign, The Queen has visited every country in the Commonwealth (with the exception of Mozambique and Cameroon, who joined in 1995) and made many repeat visits, either as a multiple visit (e.g. Anguilla, Dominica, Guyana, Belize, Cayman Islands, Jamaica, Bahamas and Bermuda in February/March 1994) or to one country (such as Canada in June/July 1997, which included the celebration of Canada's National Day, and Jamaica in 2002). The Queen also visited India and Pakistan in October 1997, to mark the fiftieth anniversary of their independence from Britain, which led to the formation of the modern Commonwealth. One third of The Queen's total overseas visits are to Commonwealth countries. The Queen visited Canada in 2005 for the centennial anniversaries of the Provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan. The Duke of Edinburgh, The Prince of Wales and other members of the Royal family also pay frequent visits to the Commonwealth.

A meeting of the Commonwealth Heads of Government (CHOGM) is usually held once every two years, at locations throughout the Commonwealth. The Queen is normally present in the host country, during which she has a series of private meetings with the Commonwealth countries' leaders. The Queen also attends a reception and dinner during the conference period at which she makes a speech. These meetings began as Colonial Conferences in London in 1887, being restyled as Imperial Conferences in 1911, continuing as such until 1937, then stopping due to the Second World War. They were resumed in 1944 as British Empire and Commonwealth Conferences, becoming just Commonwealth Conferences in 1949. In 1973, they began to be held in different parts of the Commonwealth and took on the title of CHOGM (Commonwealth Heads Of Government Meeting).

Since 1977, Commonwealth Day is celebrated throughout the Commonwealth on the second Monday in March; this was approved by Heads of Government as a day when children throughout the Commonwealth, for whom the day is particularly intended, would be at school. To mark the day, The Queen broadcasts a Commonwealth Day message which, like the Christmas Message, is delivered by The Queen as Head of the Commonwealth to the peoples of the Commonwealth as a whole. These messages are unique in that they are delivered on The Queen's own responsibility, drafted without Ministerial advice. Each year, The Queen also attends an 'Observance for Commonwealth Day' which is an interdenominational service held in Westminster Abbey, followed by a reception hosted by the Secretary General (the Head of the Commonwealth Secretariat).

In 2005, the Commonwealth Business Council recommended that the Commonwealth must strengthen its economic position in the world and that by working together, the Commonwealth has the potential to be a giant in world economics. There is great interest in the Commonwealth around the world. Some countries that have left it have also returned. South Africa left in 1961 and returned in 1994, Pakistan left in 1972 and returned in 1989 and Fiji left in 1987 and returned in 1997. Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Yemen and Sudan are former British Empire territories that never joined the Commonwealth. Yemen and Sudan have applied to join by 2009. Israel and Palestine have expressed interested in joining. When a Civil Administration takes power in Myanmar (Burma), it might also apply to join. Somaliland wants to join the Commonwealth also if it gains international recognition. Mozambique, a former Portuguese colony in Africa, was allowed to join the Commonwealth in 1995 as a special case due to its interaction with surrounding Commonwealth members.

The Commonwealth has evolved three times. The original British Commonwealth formed in 1931 contained only autonomous dominions of the British Empire, the Commonwealth of Nations formed in 1949 includes republics and national monarchies as well as realms. In 1995, the first non-former British Empire country joined. In 2007, membership criteria was reviewed and changed to requiring only an historic constitutional connection with an existing Commonwealth member, as well as adherence to democracy and civil rights, official use of English and accepting the Queen as Head of the Commonwealth. Some more non-former British Empire countries may now join.

Rwanda, Algeria and Madagascar, which are all nations with no historical links to the British Empire, similar to Mozambique, have applied to join the Commonwealth by 2009. Senegal, East Timor and Cambodia have also expressed an interested in joining the Commonwealth. In the future, the world may see a Commonwealth that has grown far beyond the countries of the original British Empire.

Some Commonwealth member nations are also members of other post-colonial associations because of previous historical links with other European Empires. Currently, Canada, Saint Lucia, Mauritius, Seychelles and Vanuatu are also members of La Francophonie, which is the French-speaking equivalent to the Commonwealth, and Mozambique is also a member of the C.P.L.P. (the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Nations). The United Kingdom, Cyprus and Malta are also members of the European Union.



Queen Elizabeth II, the Head of the Commonwealth, with Commonwealth leaders at CHOGM (Commonwealth Heads Of Government Meeting) in Kampala, Uganda in 2007.

# FLAGS OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF NATIONS TODAY



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