

PRIME MINISTER

COMMONWEALTH PEOPLE'S FORUM OPENING CEREMONY HYATT REGENCY HOTEL, PERTH TUESDAY, 25 OCTOBER 2011

It is my great honour to be here this afternoon for the opening ceremony of the 2011 Commonwealth People's Forum.

I welcome all of our visitors from across the Commonwealth and especially those who will be participating in the People's Forum over the next three days.

The Commonwealth is one of the world's great associations, with a strong legacy and an optimistic future.

It is first and foremost a free association of nations, working together to promote democracy and the rule of law, in fair and open societies providing opportunity for all.

These values go to the heart of civil society, which is the lifeblood of the Commonwealth.

Because in the final analysis, the Commonwealth is its people.

In fact, I am told that The Queen recently dubbed the Commonwealth "the original world wide web"

We are a family of two billion people from different races, languages and faiths.

From our diversity we gain strength.

We gain also strength from our pasts, because our journeys to nationhood have not always been easy.

So when we speak of our Commonwealth values, we speak from hard won experience.

And our experience makes us a force for good in the world.

Friends, civil society brings Commonwealth values to life on a daily basis.

You bring creativity and imagination to bear on some of our most difficult social problems.

I know that across the Commonwealth, NGOs number in their millions.

Here in Australia alone we have 600,000 not-for-profit organisations.

Each making a difference.

Each helping people in need.

Each a beacon of resilience and hope.

The theme you have chosen for this forum is *Driving Change for a Dynamic Commonwealth*.

I am pleased that this theme links clearly with the reform agenda my fellow leaders and I will discuss here in Perth.

I also acknowledge your Civil Society Statement, an important snapshot of the fundamental concerns and priorities facing the people of the Commonwealth.

I thank you all for your hard work in preparing this Statement, including your wide consultations across the Caribbean, Africa, Asia, Europe and the Pacific.

In your statement you say that the time has come to review and refresh the Commonwealth - and you are right.

So I will be asking my fellow leaders to consider carefully the opportunity for reform presented by the Eminent Persons Group.

Its recommendations align with many contained in your own Civil Society Statement, including how we can improve human rights, good governance, economic development, and respond to climate change.

I believe we can bring about change.

For example, by welcoming EPG recommendations to strengthen the core values on which the Commonwealth rests.

By urging members to implement all major international human rights instruments.

By meeting development challenges like polio, which should have been relegated to the pages of history long ago.

By doing more unlock the tremendous potential of our citizens, including women and youth, who make up so much of the Commonwealth.

Our ambition is nothing less than to change the world.

And to believe that we can be part of that change:

~ in the nations and organisations we represent,
~ in the cities, towns and villages where we live,
~ and through the courage and conviction we show in our daily lives.

Friends, a vision for a better Commonwealth has brought you here.
I know you would not have travelled so far if your ambitions were not so high.

Good luck as you work through your impressive program over the next few days.

You will achieve great things here in Perth.

And I'm sure you will return to your home countries enriched and emboldened, knowing that when people call for change and ask where it will come from, we will be ready.

Because we know the answer: The change will come from us.

It gives me great pleasure to declare the 2011 Commonwealth People's Forum officially open.