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Excellencies, colleagues, friends, welcome to this party! We're having it because we're celebrating the relaunch of our organisation – the Commonwealth Foundation.

In Perth last year Heads of Government laid down a challenge. They called for the relaunch of the Commonwealth Foundation so that it could better mobilise civil society behind Commonwealth principles and priorities.

I am proud to say that we in this room have collectively responded to that call and this evening is about marking that achievement.

The relaunch is about style and substance. We have a new constitution, a new strategic plan and as you can see a new brand and visual identity. The substance of the plan sets us on an exciting new path – one that has elicited applause from across the Commonwealth.

I appreciate that talk of participatory governance is not guaranteed to set the pulses racing, but what we aim to do over the next four years is animate this central theme, by encouraging people to come together to discuss why and how they should engage with the institutions that shape their lives. At the same time we'll be providing support to those institutions to help them respond to the need to engage with citizens.

We're committed to this because we believe in improving the quality of development outcomes for Commonwealth people. In our analysis that requires their voice and participation in development processes.

We could not have concluded what is only the first step of our new journey without hard work. I thank our staff, who have worked tirelessly to deliver what you see before you. We have had help and I would like to publicly thank Patrick Spaven for his guidance throughout the strategic planning process; and Cog Design for creating our new brand and their associates Tincan for building our new website.

On the subject of brands, we're building on the success of Commonwealth Writers, our sub-brand, by broadening its remit to include a range of artists and writers to engage in the decision making processes which affect their lives. This year's Commonwealth Writers' Prizes are open for entries from today. We're pleased to welcome the Chair of the Commonwealth Short Story Prize, international broadcaster Razia Iqbal.

One of the things we have learned is that a new brand is much more than a new logo. It is about taking your values seriously and we have aimed to reflect that in the way this evening has been put together:

We took time to choose this venue: St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace. It combines the old and the new in a way that speaks to the future of the Commonwealth. Their strapline is "Building relationships across divisions" which speaks to one of our new themes. The catering company is called Comfort's Kitchen, which is a not-for-profit company run by refugees

from East & West Africa, Afghanistan and Pakistan, which speaks to this year's Commonwealth Theme: Opportunity through Enterprise. Let me also thank the Gambian kora player Jally Kebba Susso (performing throughout the evening). Even the drinks relate to our values: Special thanks to the High Commissions of Australia and South Africa which donated the wine; Bahamas the rum; and Namibia the beer. That's the spirit of partnership.

What we wanted to do tonight is give you an insight from one of our development partners and we are delighted that we are joined by Irina Cattalini, the Director of the West Australia Council for Social Service based in Perth, Western Australia. We worked closely with Irina to bring civil society voices to the last Heads of Government Meeting so she knows what we're capable of. I'm going to ask her to share her thoughts on our plans with you now.