

Harare Declaration

Canada was among the countries of the Commonwealth attending the 11th Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Harare, Zimbabwe that approved the Harare Declaration on October 20, 1991.

Summary information

The Harare Declaration builds on the Singapore Declaration of 1971 which enunciated ethical standards that had been developed by Commonwealth leaders over the previous decades. The Singapore Declaration focused on equal rights for all, a commitment to democratic self-determination and non-racialism, world peace and an end to gross inequity and a commitment to practice international co-operation in pursuit of these goals.

The Harare Declaration pledges the Commonwealth countries to work to protect and promote the fundamental political values of the Commonwealth including democracy, the rule of law, fundamental human rights, universal access to education, sustainable development and the alleviation of poverty. Other important goals include taking action to alleviate the debt burdens of developing countries, effective bilateral and multilateral co-operation, the protection of the environment, action to combat drug trafficking and communicable diseases and support for the United Nations and other international institutions in the world's search for peace, disarmament and effective arms control.

The Singapore Declaration and the Harare Declaration are the two key documents which define the core Commonwealth beliefs.

History

Between 1944 and 1969, Prime Ministers of the British Commonwealth of Nations (renamed simply the Commonwealth of Nations in 1949) attended 17 Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conferences. Through this period, the Commonwealth leaders released statements of position and action at the conferences that contributed to the development of ethical standards central to the Commonwealth. For example, at the conference in 1951 the "leaders made a pledge to peace, and announced that the achievement of true peace depended on resolving problems of poverty" and in 1961, they "pledged to work towards total global disarmament."

In 1971, the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conferences were replaced by the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings, with the first one held in Singapore that year, where the Canadian delegation was headed by Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau. The meeting in Singapore resulted in the *Declaration of Commonwealth Principles* – the Singapore Declaration – which codified the ethical standards already

enunciated previously by the leaders. The Singapore Declaration is one of the two key documents which define the core Commonwealth beliefs – the other being the Harare Declaration.

The Singapore Declaration was signed by 31 Commonwealth countries on January 22, 1971. The core principles expressed in the Declaration embrace equal rights for all regardless of race, colour, creed or political belief, a commitment to democratic self-determination and non-racialism, world peace and an end to gross inequity and a commitment to practice international co-operation in pursuit of these goals. It is “a set of ideals which are embraced by all members and provide a basis for peace, understanding and goodwill among all nations and people.”

Key principles included the following:

- belief that international peace and order, global economic development and the rule of international law are essential to the security and prosperity of mankind;
- belief in the liberty of the individual under the law, in equal rights for all citizens regardless of gender, race, colour, creed or political belief, and in the individual's inalienable right to participate by means of free and democratic political processes in framing the society in which he or she lives;
- recognition that racial prejudice and intolerance as a dangerous sickness and a threat to healthy development, and racial discrimination as an unmitigated evil;
- opposition to all forms of racial oppression, and a commitment to the principles of human dignity and equality;
- recognition of the importance and urgency of economic and social development to satisfy the basic needs and aspirations of the vast majority of the peoples of the world, and the need for the progressive removal of the wide disparities in living standards amongst our members.

The Singapore Declaration ends with the following:

“We believe that international co-operation is essential to remove the causes of war, promote tolerance, combat injustice, and secure development among the peoples of the world; we are convinced that the Commonwealth is one of the most fruitful associations for these purposes.

In pursuing these principles the members of the Commonwealth believe that they can provide a constructive example of the multi-national approach which is vital to peace and progress in the modern world. The association is based on consultation, discussion and co-operation.

In rejecting coercion as an instrument of policy, they recognise that the security of each member state from external aggression is a matter of concern to all members. It provides many channels for continuing exchanges of knowledge and views on professional, cultural, economic, legal and political issues among the member states.

These relationships we intend to foster and extend, for we believe that our multi-national association can expand human understanding and understanding among nations, assist in the elimination of discrimination based on differences of race, colour or creed, maintain and strengthen personal liberty, contribute to the enrichment of life for all, and provide a powerful influence for peace among nations.”

Subsequent Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings addressed many crucial issues including support for the international treaty banning nuclear weapon tests in the atmosphere, in outer space and under water and an appeal for a total ban on nuclear weapon tests (1973), the expression of abhorrence of all forms of racism, including in members’ own societies (1979), denunciation of the Cold War and the extension of nuclear arsenals, and a call for the transfer of resources from weaponry to partnership in development (1983), provision of a detailed program to increase pressure, through sanctions and other measures, to force an end of apartheid (1985), a statement specifically to include environmental protection as a vital factor in development (1989) and an expression of concern at the damage to women and the family by structural adjustment measures affecting peasant agriculture, food prices, health and education, and a request for such measures to be redrawn to avoid damage to the most vulnerable sectors of society (1991).

Then, also in 1991, the Commonwealth Heads of Government issued the Harare Declaration – the second general statement of beliefs following the Singapore Declaration, which reinforced and updated the earlier declaration so as to define “the core values to take the Commonwealth into the 21st century and beyond.”

Key Provisions

The Harare Declaration begins by affirming that the Commonwealth is “a voluntary association of sovereign independent states, each responsible for its own policies, consulting and co-operating in the interests of their peoples and in the promotion of international understanding and world peace”, that the “special strength of the Commonwealth lies in the combination of the diversity of its members with their shared inheritance in language, culture and the rule of law” and that the “Commonwealth way is to seek consensus through consultation and the sharing of experience.”

The Declaration then reaffirms the commitment of the member countries of the Commonwealth to the principles expressed in the Singapore Declaration and to apply those principles in the contemporary situation and into the future. While acknowledging progress in economic and social development, the Declaration also recognizes that “[m]any Commonwealth countries are poor and face acute problems, including excessive population growth, crushing poverty, debt burdens and environmental degradation” and that “[o]nly sound and sustainable development can offer these millions the prospect of betterment.”

The Declaration pledges the Commonwealth countries to “work with renewed vigour”, on many fronts including:

- the protection and promotion of the fundamental political values of the Commonwealth including democracy, the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary, fundamental human rights including equal rights and opportunities for all citizens regardless of race, colour, creed or political belief, equality for women so that they may exercise their full and equal rights and the provision of universal access to education;
- the promotion of sustainable development and the alleviation of poverty in the countries of the Commonwealth through a stable international economic framework, sound economic management recognising the central role of the market economy, effective population policies and programs and sound management of technological change;
- the freest possible flow of multilateral trade on terms fair and equitable to all taking account of the special requirements of developing countries, ensuring an adequate flow of resources from the developed to developing countries and taking action to alleviate the debt burdens of developing countries most in need;
- effective and increasing programs of bilateral and multilateral co-operation aimed at raising living standards;
- the protection of the environment through respect for the principles of sustainable development;
- action to combat drug trafficking and abuse and communicable diseases;
- support of the United Nations and other international institutions in the world's search for peace, disarmament and effective arms control and in the promotion of international consensus on major global political, economic and social issues.

The Declaration also expresses the intention of “strengthening the capacity of the Commonwealth to respond to requests from members for assistance in entrenching the practices of democracy, accountable administration and the rule of law” and invites “the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and non-governmental Commonwealth organisations to play their full part in promoting these objectives.”

Canada’s Commitments and Responsibilities

Canada was among the countries of the Commonwealth that approved the Harare Declaration on October 20, 1991 in Harare, Zimbabwe. Prime Minister Brian Mulroney headed the Canadian delegation.

International Monitoring and Implementation

Harare Declaration is not a treaty whose implementation involves a dedicated monitoring mechanism.

However, in 1995, the Millbrook Commonwealth Action Programme on the Harare Declaration provided an “operating structure for the two central declarations: the Declaration of Commonwealth Principles and the Harare Commonwealth Declaration. It also defined the Commonwealth’s role in global and national affairs. The Millbrook Programme covers democratic and humane government, co-operation for development, and Commonwealth partnership on agreed positions in international forums.”

References

Commonwealth Statements and Declarations

Singapore Declaration of Commonwealth Principles

Harare Commonwealth Declaration 1991

Millbrook Commonwealth Action Programme on the Harare Declaration, 1995