



# COMMONWEALTH NEWS

RCS Newsletter Summer2016-2017

Patron: HE General the Hon. Sir Peter Cosgrove AK MC (Retd) Governor-General of Australia



## INTERNATIONAL RCS MEETING ATTRACTS MEMBERS FROM 33 BRANCHES

Over 80 RCS members from 33 branches in 20 countries were in London in October 2016 for an International Meeting of RCS Branches to share experiences and knowledge, discuss the challenges facing branches and opportunities for expanding the network.

Australia was well-represented with 16 delegates from ACT, Victoria, NSW, South Australia, Queensland and Western Australia.

Representing the ACT were the President, Kanti Jinna and Mrs Jyoti Jinna and Council members Dr Elmo Jacob and Mr Colin Milner.

The three-day meeting was preceded by a two-day Youth Assembly.

As the RCS London Branch was in the process of moving into its new headquarters in Pall Mall, the High Commissions of New Zealand, Canada and Nigeria hosted various sessions in their chanceries.

Functions were held at the High Commissions of Australia and Malta, the House of Lords and Buckingham Palace and there was a tour of Westminster Abbey.

This was the first International Meeting of RCS Branches since that in Kuala Lumpur in 2011.



## 2017 MONTGOMERY AWARD SUPPORTS RESEARCH INTO PREVENTING DEMENTIA

A PhD candidate in the Centre for Research on Ageing, Health and Wellbeing at ANU is to receive the 2017 Phyllis Montgomery Commonwealth Award to support his work in dementia research.

Mr Mitchell McMaster (*above*) is conducting a randomised controlled trial of older adults with Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI). It hopes to show whether multiple factors that are known to increase the risk of dementia can be countered through physical exercise, diet, mental stimulation and increased social contact to improve cognitive function and halt further decline.

It is believed to be the first time this type of intervention has been trialled in people with MCI, one of the highest risk groups for dementia.

Mr McMaster will receive his cheque for \$5000 at the Commonwealth Dinner on 16 March.

## BREXIT AND THE COMMONWEALTH?

The preservation and strengthening of trade relationships between Britain and the Commonwealth appear to be an important plank in Britain's plans when the two-year process to withdraw from the European Union, now confirmed to begin in March 2017, is complete.

Although new trade negotiations cannot begin until 2019, the British Prime Minister, Theresa May, in her 'Brexit Speech' on 17 January at Lancaster House, London, proposed 'a clean break' with the EU, 'not half-in and half-out'. She saw Britain 'as a great global trading nation ... building free trade deals around the world', and also building relationships 'with old friends and new allies'. This included negotiating free trade agreements with EU member states, underlining her declaration that Britain was leaving the EU, not Europe. (Talks on future relationships with Australia, New Zealand and India began last year.)

The Commonwealth Trade Ministers Meeting in London in March will bring a sharp focus on the future prospects of some small Commonwealth states that have profited from EU trade preferences and a wide range of other benefits they have negotiated as part of a regional group such as the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries. *(cont. p.4)*

## FROM THE PRESIDENT . . .

Dear members,

I hope you have had an enjoyable festive season. 2016 has been a very travelsome one for me, especially since the RCS International Meeting in London in October. My double visits to Fiji and India have been quite productive from various points of view including the RCS. We will start to reap the benefits of all the trips that are already cementing our relations within the local community and our kindred organisations abroad, especially in the Pacific.

The next few weeks are going to be very busy with our AGM scheduled for 8 February when a new President will be elected to replace me after my three years in the job, and then in March, our Multi-Faith Celebration to mark Commonwealth Day and later that week, the Commonwealth Dinner. The week will conclude with the celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> year of the Anton Muttukumar cricket match between teams from the Commonwealth High Commissions and Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The match, on Sunday 19 March, will be at the Duntroon cricket oval where it all started.

Another important event will be in Adelaide in May when the National RCS Branch Executives next meet. I commend the efforts of President Lynn Ellis and her team in South Australia and hope they are well rewarded by strong representation from all our branches.

As this is my last message as President, I would like to thank the members and Committee for their assistance throughout the year. We have been fortunate in having both an excellent secretary and a treasurer in the persons of Maureen Hickman and Kevin Squair. Their efforts have been exemplary. The support of our Life Members is an asset and the ever-present support of our Patron, General the Honourable Sir Peter Cosgrove, Governor General, and Lady Cosgrove, is well appreciated, as has that of the 23 Commonwealth High Commissioners in Canberra who have responded to our invitations, hosted functions and reciprocated many a time. Thank you. We belong to a great organisation. The best we can do for it is to ensure it continues to serve its purpose through bringing people together. We can all help our Branch to flourish by supporting its President and Council and their projects. An excellent example was the way our Branch members responded so generously to the Christmas Charity box in 2016 and the way our Branch hosted last year's National Executives Meeting.

Thank you for allowing me to serve the organisation and for letting Jyoti be a part of it.

**Kanti Jinna**

## QUEEN'S CANOPY IN AUSTRALIA

Australia has committed to planting 20 million native trees by 2020 as its contribution to The Queen's Canopy, a network of forest conservation projects involving all Commonwealth member countries.

The Queen's Canopy was launched at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Malta in 2015. Its purpose is to create a physical and lasting legacy to mark the Queen's leadership of the Commonwealth while conserving indigenous forests for future generations.

Australia's contribution to the Canopy aims to re-establish green corridors and urban forests on public and private land. Britain has dedicated 200 square miles of its National Forrest, Canada 6.5 million hectares of its Great Bear Rain Forest in British Columbia, while Singapore has dedicated six hectares of its Botanic Gardens. By the end of 2016, 20 countries from all five regions had committed to the Canopy project with more countries expected to join. In the Asia-Pacific region this includes Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Singapore, Brunei Darussalam, New Zealand and Australia.

The Canopy project involves partnerships between RCS London, Cool Earth—a UK-based charity that works with indigenous villages to halt forest destruction—and the Commonwealth Forestry Association.

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## PRESIDENT'S CHRISTMAS PARTY



*RCS President Kanti Jinna and Mrs Jyoti Jinna with Mrs Angela Neuhaus at the President's Christmas Party.*

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## RCS ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The AGM of the ACT Branch will be on Wednesday 8 February (*see enclosed notice*). Members are reminded that if they wish to vote, nominate, or second a person to fill a position they must have been financial for the previous year, 2016. Renewal notices for 2017 are enclosed with this newsletter.

## LECTURE HONOURS PROFESSOR ANTHONY LOW, HISTORIAN OF THE COMMONWEALTH

An inaugural lecture in honour of the late Professor Anthony Low, former Vice-Chancellor of the Australian National University, was given by the University's current Chancellor and Australia's former Foreign Minister, the Hon. Gareth Evans, to a packed audience in the ANU's Hedley Bull Lecture Theatre in October 2016.

Professor Evans's lecture concentrated on what has become one of the Commonwealth's proudest achievements: its role in hastening the end of apartheid in South Africa, and the central part—from the beginning—played by Australia in the Whitlam and Fraser governments of the 1970s and later by the Hawke government, in which Gareth Evans served.

### Sanctions

Principally through the use of sporting and trade sanctions— which were progressively lifted as the apartheid system 'unwound'— as well as international pressure for change, and what Professor Evans described as 'the ever-mounting internal tension' combined with 'white political leadership clear-headed enough to grasp the moment', opportunity came in February 1989 when FW De Klerk replaced hardliner PW Botha as President. One year later, the dismantling of apartheid had begun, with the new government willing to negotiate on democratic and non-racial constitutional reforms, lift the bans on the African National Congress and importantly, release from prison, after 27 years, Nelson Mandela.

### Commitment

'I am sometimes still asked,' said Professor Evans, 'why it was that successive Australian governments ... committed so much effort to resolving a South African situation so little of our making. My short answer has always been that it lies in that instinct for good international citizenship which I continue to believe is part of our national psyche...

'The enforcers of apartheid, proclaiming their superiority to others on the basis of race alone, were not just another unpalatable regime, but beyond the civilised pale. If we had washed our hands of the struggle against them, we would not only have failed in our humanitarian duty, but would have debased the very values which are at the core of our sense of human dignity.'

The biennial Commonwealth Lecture, sponsored by the Commonwealth Round Table in Australia of which Professor Low was Founding Convenor, will now be known as the Anthony Low Commonwealth Lecture.



*Members of the family of the late Professor Anthony Low with Professor Gareth Evans (centre) are (l to r) Ms Georgina Neuhaus, Mrs Angela Neuhaus, Mrs Belle Low, Ms Penny Low and Mr Matthew Neuhaus. After his seven-year term as Vice-Chancellor of ANU ended in 1982, Professor Low was appointed to the Smuts Chair of the History of the British Commonwealth at the University of Cambridge (1983-94). From 1984 to 1994, he was also Chairman of the Institute of Commonwealth Studies at London University. Professor Low held many other prominent academic positions during his career and will be remembered as a distinguished scholar and renowned student mentor whose work spanned modern Asian and African history as well as Commonwealth history.*

## PUSH FOR FREE VISA ENTRY TO THE UK

An on-line petition—supported by RCS London— calling for a restoration of free visa travel for South Africans visiting Britain reached its target of 10,000 signatures within weeks of its launch and is confidently expected to be much greater by the time it is presented to officials at No. 10 Downing Street and the British Home Office in February.

The cost of a visa is currently £87 (R1500) for six months and £330 for two years. Since the visa charge was imposed in 2008, the number of South African visitors to the UK is estimated to have fallen by over one-third, about 100,000 people.

In contrast, Chinese nationals pay only £87 for a two-year visa under a recent arrangement with Britain.

South Africans have also complained about lengthy delays in issuing visas as well as their need to provide biometric data such as fingerprints, proof of employment, digital photographs and a retinal scan.

The RCS is also backing calls by the Indian community in Britain—which numbers over 1.4 million— for cheaper visitor visas to help facilitate family reunions.

## EDUCATE WOMEN AND AVOID DISASTER

A Gender Review by UNESCO, the GEM Report, says that countries in which more women have at least a secondary education have significantly lower rates of disaster fatalities. Also, when more women are in parliament, countries are more likely to ratify environmental treaties.

Education, it says, is essential for empowering women to achieve gender equality, which in turn is vital for sustainable development.

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## MALDIVES LEAVES THE COMMONWEALTH

The Maldives announced it was leaving the Commonwealth in October 2016 a few weeks after it was officially put on notice by the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) to implement a raft of democratic reforms or face sanctions, including suspension from the 53-member body.

The Maldives foreign ministry cited 'unfair and unjust treatment' by CMAG for the decision. CMAG has been scrutinising the Indian Ocean state— best-known for its luxury tourist resorts—since the former president and first democratically elected leader, Mohammed Nasheed, resigned in 2012 amid claims he was deposed at gunpoint. The following year the current president, Abdulla Yameen, was elected in a poll widely regarded as dubious. Mr Nasheed received political asylum in Britain in May 2016.

Per capita, The Maldives is reported to have supplied more jihadists to Iraq and Syria than any country outside the Middle East.

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## GAMBIAN PRESIDENT REFUSES TO QUIT

The Gambia, which left the Commonwealth in October 2013 after 48 years a member, is currently facing a refugee exodus as thousands of mostly women and children flee across the border into Senegal while Gambian President, Yahya Jammeh continues his refusal to step down when his term ends on 19 February.

In January, the travel agent, Thomas Cook, advised over 1000 tourists in The Gambia, to leave.

Yahya Jammeh was defeated in the December 2016 elections by Adama Barrow, who has said he will return The Gambia to the Commonwealth and rejoin the International Criminal Court. The African Union—a bloc of 15 West African States— says it will no longer recognise Mr Jammeh's rule after 19 February and will remove him by military force if he does not step down.

## BREXIT AND THE COMMONWEALTH (cont. from p.1)

This EU support often goes to small and vulnerable countries that include not only former British colonies but those of other EU members such as Belgium, The Netherlands, France, Portugal and Italy.

One of these arrangements, the Lomé Convention, first signed 1975 and revised several times, was a trade and aid agreement with the European Economic Community covering 71 ACP countries. The group's main objectives were sustainable development, poverty reduction and greater integration into the world economy.

In 2000, the Cotonou Agreement with the EU widened engagement with the ACP by recognising specific challenges faced by less developed nations, in particular, land-locked countries and island states. For example, in 2016, Cape Verde—a chain of volcanic islands in the Atlantic ocean and a former Portuguese possession— received €50 million for growth and poverty reduction.

The Cotonou Agreement, however, also goes well beyond Lomé to include civil society, trade unions, climate change, peace and security. With this agreement due to end in 2020, former British colonies will need to feel that their place is secure in any new arrangement between the EU and the ACP that will replace it.

### DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

- **Wednesday 8 February at 6.00 pm**  
*RCS ACT Branch Annual General Meeting* in the foyer of the Wesley Centre, National Circuit, Barton ACT.
- **Commonwealth Day Celebrations in March**  
**Monday 13 March at 11.00 am**  
*Multi-Faith Celebration* at the Centre for Christianity and Culture, 15 Blackhall Street, Barton. All welcome.  
**Thursday 16 March at 7 for 7.30 pm**  
*Commonwealth Dinner* at The Commonwealth Club, Yarralumla.
- **19 March at 12 noon**  
*Cricket Match:* The Commonwealth vs. the Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade at the Royal Military College, Duntroon, Oval. All welcome.

*Members will be advised of details of RCS events marking Commonwealth Day in a separate mailing.*

### NEW MEMBERS

The RCS ACT Branch welcomes new members Mr Rudaralingum Coopamootoo and Mrs Goindamah Coopamootoo of the Mauritius High Commission.

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The RCS Newsletter *Commonwealth News* is published four times a year. Letters and contributions are welcome. Contact:

Maureen Hickman, Editor, at [maureen.hickman@bigpond.com](mailto:maureen.hickman@bigpond.com)