



THE ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY
Australian Capital Territory Branch

E-NEWS FROM THE COMMONWEALTH

E-Newsletter December 2023

Branch Patron: H.E. General the Hon. David Hurley AC DSC (Retd) Governor-General of Australia

2024 MONTGOMERIE AWARD FOR PROJECT ON SATELLITE TECHNOLOGY

The winner of the 2024 Phyllis Montgomerie Commonwealth Award is Cameron Jones, a PhD candidate at the Australian National University and a member of the laser communication team in the Advanced Instrumentation Technology Centre.

Cameron's project is involved in the development of advanced, ground-based instrumentation to meet increasing demand for faster Earth/Space satellite communications. This calls for communications technologies to operate at a higher bandwidth than the current radio frequency regime, in a high-noise, low-power environment, and to deal with a range of issues such as atmospheric turbulence.

For this, the project will use Free Space Optical (FSO) communication because of its many advantages over radio frequency communications. The FSO technology uses light available in 'free' space to transmit data, wirelessly, for telecommunications or computer networking, making internet connection possible for developing and remote communities in the Commonwealth and around the world. Importantly, for the next generation of Earth-Space communication, FSO can leverage existing infrastructure, free from licensing issues associated with radio frequency.

Cameron will use his \$5000 award on a research trip to Durham University in the United Kingdom. There, he will collaborate with researchers at the Centre for Advanced Instrumentation who are working on a complementary line of research, investigating the application of Applied Optics for astronomy and communication.

For a fuller description of Cameron's project visit the RCS website: www.rcscact.org



Cameron Jones

RCS BRANCH LOOKS AHEAD TO 2024

The final meeting of the RCS ACT Branch Council in December reflected on events during the past year but also on a program of activities in 2024.

President Matthew Neuhaus, who chaired the meeting, said that branch membership would be one of the priorities for attention in the coming year, aiming for greater participation of RCS members in various events.

Commonwealth Day in March will again be the focus for our traditional Multi-faith, Multi-cultural Celebration. In 2024, it will be attended by our Patron, the Governor-General, H.E. General the Hon. David Hurley. Another annual event likely to take

place in March is the Anthony Low Commonwealth Lecture, as well as the long-postponed Commonwealth vs DFAT cricket match.

There is interest from several RCS Australian branches in being represented at the Asia/Pacific RCS Regional Conference in Kuala Lumpur in June. Some members may also take part in the People's Forum at CHOGM in Samoa in October—one of a number of side events at the meeting.

To keep up-to-date on news and events, visit the ACT Branch website at www.rcsact.org where you will also find links to the websites of RCS London and the Commonwealth Secretariat.

COMMONWEALTH LAUNCHES CAMPAIGN TO END DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Female leaders from across the Commonwealth attended a conference in London in November focused on safeguarding women and girls from domestic and sexual violence.

The event was convened by the Commonwealth Secretary-General, The Rt Hon Patricia Scotland KC, and attended by H.M. Queen Camilla.

Women leaders from different professions committed to coordinate actions by individuals, in households and communities, to protect women and girls, including in hard-to-reach areas across the 56 Commonwealth nations.

Describing domestic and sexual violence as ‘a silent pandemic’ affecting one in three women in



The Hon. Patricia Scotland and Queen Camilla speaking to delegates at the conference.

their lifetimes, the Secretary-General referred to ‘the pernicious impact’ that such violence has on survivors, families, communities and economies.

Speakers, representing governments, the private sector and civil society organisations, examined three core areas in their panel discussions. These were the role of advocacy, the impact of domestic violence on the mental health of women and children, and support for survivors and their children.

Underscoring the role of advocacy, Fatima Maada Bio, wife of the President of Sierra Leone, spoke about her ‘*Hands Off our Girls*’ campaign, which has resulted in minimum sentencing for rape in her country being increased from four months to 15 years.

Speakers outlined specific measures— such as early childhood education— to dismantle harmful cultural norms, with one-stop centres offering legal and counselling support, campaigns to engage men, and legislation to enshrine equality under the law to help bring an end to violence.

Successful interventions introduced in Rwanda include one-stop centres offering free services and mobile clinics reaching remote communities. As a result, the conviction rate for violence against women and girls in Rwanda has increased from around 13 per cent to 70 per cent.

2023 QUEEN’S ESSAY COMPETITION

A record 34,924 entries from across the Commonwealth were received for this year’s Queen’s Commonwealth Essay Competition.

The topic for 2023 was chosen to celebrate the *Commonwealth Year of Youth*, with the theme, *A Youth-powered Commonwealth*. It asked entrants to explore the power young people hold within the global community and to consider how this power can be harnessed to make a meaningful impact in the world.

The winners and runners-up were from India and Malaysia. Their prize was a visit to London in November for a week-long program of educational and cultural activities. The Competition, launched in 1883, is the world’s oldest international schools’ writing contest and attracts entries from every Commonwealth nation.

GANDHI WRITING PRIZE

The Mahatma Gandhi Society in Canberra is offering three prizes of \$3000, \$2000 and \$1000 for writings on his life and message.

The entries, of no more than 1000 words with a maximum of three illustrations, can address approaches to promote ethical conduct and environmental concerns in our daily lives, including the most illuminating and inspiring incident in Gandhi’s life.

Entries will be judged by a panel of three international Gandhi scholars, from India, USA and Australia.

The deadline for entries is 26 January 2024 with the winners announced on March 12.

For more information about the competition, contact the Society’s President, Niranjan K Aggarwal at gandhi.society.0210@gmail.com

THE COMMONWEALTH MAKES ITS VOICE HEARD AT COP28

The interests of the Commonwealth's 2.5 billion people were well-represented at COP28, the international climate conference in Dubai, during 12 days of intense debate, ending on 12 December.

In spite of the final communiqué failing to meet the hopes of many vulnerable nations in agreeing to phase out fossil fuels, the Commonwealth is determined not to stray from the message it took to the conference: *No More Excuses*, nor from its resolve to keep its target of 1.5 deg. C. maximum warming.

IS IT GOODBYE TO THE COMMONWEALTH GAMES?

The sports event that began life as the British Empire Games 93 years ago when eleven countries sent teams to Hamilton, Canada, may never be held again.

Three scheduled host countries - South Africa, Australia and Canada - have now pulled out of their commitments to hold the Commonwealth Games. The reason is cost.

First it was Durban that withdrew, when the South African government was stripped of its contract to host the 2022 Games by the Commonwealth Games Federation (CGF) because it could not meet its financial commitment.

The void was then filled by Birmingham, where the Games were widely considered a success. A report in the November issue of *The Round Table Journal*, however, says that Birmingham is now bankrupt, owing about \$US950 million, about the same amount as the projected cost of hosting the Games.

Durban, due to host the 2026 Games, withdrew again, followed a few months ago by a withdrawal from Melbourne, with then-Premier, Dan Andrews saying the State simply couldn't afford it since the cost had doubled to \$2.6 billion from its original estimate.

The Commonwealth Games Federation has spoken of its 'ongoing efforts to find a host for 2026', while taking on board the news that the putative 2030 host, Alberta, Canada, has now withdrawn, perhaps mindful of the fact that Montreal did not pay off its debt for the 1976 Games until 2006.

The Commonwealth team in Dubai was led by Secretary-General, Patricia Scotland, and included policy experts and climate specialists.

In her address to conference delegates, she said: 'We are locked in a war with the planet we all share, with devastating consequences for our people, prosperity, peace and prospects.' She went on to warn that 'the stability of the earth's climate, on which humanity has depended, is in peril, with unknown consequences'.

The Secretary-General drew attention to 'the existential threat' that climate change poses for the small island states—on the frontline of climate change— which form the majority of the Small States of the Commonwealth, themselves forming the majority of its 56 member nations.

Of the Commonwealth's 2.5 billion people, 60 per cent are under 30 years old.

BOOK LAUNCH AT ANU



The latest book on human rights by Professor Jolyon Ford, *Human Rights and Populism* was launched at the ANU Law School in October. The author (*centre*) in the photo above is seen chatting with Mrs Angela Neuhaus (*left*) and Vice-Chancellor Brian Schmidt, and, with her back to the camera, Associate Professor Cecilia Jacob, a member of the discussion panel.

Professor Ford, a former RCS ACT Branch Counsellor, has had a distinguished career working on legal, human rights and governance issues in over 30 countries, including periods in London at the Royal Institute for International Affairs (Chatham House) and the Commonwealth Secretariat.

RCS ANNUAL SPRING LUNCH IN CANBERRA

Our annual Spring lunch was held at the Canberra Golf Club in October in warm sunshine, with the lovely gardens around the clubhouse bright with flowers .

As in previous years, the lunch was co-hosted with the Australia-Britain Society.

The guest speaker was Brian Tunks, who spoke about his experience as an archaeologist in Syria.



Among guests (above) at the lunch were (l to r) Mrs Diana Lipscombe, Mrs Audrey Wilson, Australia-Britain Society President, Bob Nattey, and Mrs Charlotte Nattey.

In the photo (left) guest speaker Brian Tunks is second from right, with (l to r) Professor David Plummer, RCS President Matthew Neuhaus, Mrs Angela Neuhaus, and Dr John Sutton.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

RCS CHRISTMAS PARTY

Sunday 17 December 2023 from 4 to 6 pm

at the home of Ann and John Sutton

49/9 Eastlake Parade, Kingston

Special guest: Dr Anne Gallagher, Director-General of the Commonwealth Foundation

RCS ACT BRANCH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Wednesday 28 February 2024 at 6 pm

(to be confirmed)

Wesley Centre, National Circuit, Forrest

COMMONWEALTH DAY

Monday 11 March 2024

11 am

Multi-faith, Multi-cultural Celebration

Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture, Barton

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Contact: Maureen Hickman, Editor, at rcsact@bigpond.com or RCS ACT Branch, P.O. Box 3626 Manuka ACT 2603
Membership inquiries are welcome. Website: www.rcsact.org