



COMMONWEALTH NEWS

RCS Newsletter Summer 2020-21

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



RCS BRANCHES PROTEST OVER 'LICENCE' AGREEMENT FROM LONDON

Many branches of the Royal Commonwealth Society around the world are refusing to sign a 'Licence Agreement' received in January from RCS Chair, Linda Yueh, that would have the effect of paralysing their day-to-day activities.

The Agreement and its Annex (Annex A) requires all 60 or so RCS branches and affiliated organisations ('licensees') to obtain written approval from London each time they wish to use 'any name, brand, logo or symbol which are the same or in any way similar to the Society's name, brand, logo or symbol as, or as part of, its name or trading style'.

Branches would also be prevented from arranging any activities without prior permission from London (*the Royal Commonwealth Society*).

At the same time, Annex A acknowledges that branches are 'independent legal entities'.

As result of widespread dismay among branches at the ambiguous nature of the Licence Agreement and its Annex, the Chief Operating Officer of the RCS, Nathan McKenzie, sent out a 'Q and A' sheet which, in effect, said the Licence Agreement only applies when the name, logo etc. of *the Royal Commonwealth Society* was being used, for instance for fund-raising.

This communication, while assuring branches that their activities would *not* need prior permission from London as long as their use of the logo etc. made it clear it was a *branch* activity, still left many branches unwilling to sign the Agreement without an amendment making that distinction clear.

No indication was given as to the consequences for a branch if it refused to sign the Licence Agreement.

Widespread exchange of views between RCS branch

presidents across Asia and the Pacific (including Canada) since the documents were received from London in early January has caused branches to also air a range of other issues about which there is widespread dissatisfaction with their current relationship with London.

In essence, these include the wish for more transparency and 'real' consultation between London and the branches, citing as an example the recent appointment of Regional Coordinators and Working Group Chairs, most of whom, if not all, are young Associate Fellows with little or no prior connection to an RCS branch.

A joint letter from a number of Asian/Pacific/Australian branches to the RCS Chair, the Trustees, Advisors and Lord Howell (who has recently stepped down as RCS President) covers these concerns, as well as a request to take the controversial Licence Agreement 'off the table' with the focus being on collaboration between RCS in London and the branches. The letter also calls for the drafting of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that sets out mutual roles and obligations.

The ACT Branch Council, at a Special Meeting in January, endorsed a letter from the President to RCS Chair, Linda Yueh, that rejected the Licence Agreement on the grounds that, as it stands, without qualification, signing it would put us in breach of our obligations under the *ACT Associations Incorporation Act 1991*. This requires us to act 'in good faith in the best interests of the association...' (4.2 Duties of Officers, sub-section 66B Duty of good faith and proper purpose).

The Royal Commonwealth Society premises in the heart of central London (right), a popular place to meet, stay or dine, was sold in 2013 due to financial constraints and its members dispersed. A new Royal Charter granted at the time gave the Society, under its General Rules, wide-ranging powers including disbandment of branches and the imposition of fees.



INTERNATIONAL BRANCH MEETING POSTPONED

The International meeting of RCS branches planned for Melbourne later this year has been postponed due to the COVID pandemic. In a joint letter to branches, the RCS Chair, Linda Yueh, and Victorian Branch President, Lloyd Byrne, said the meeting would now be held in Melbourne in April 2022.

FROM THE PRESIDENT . . .

The good news from the past strange year of the COVID-19 pandemic has been the survival of family, friends and colleagues in our own ACT community due, in large part, to swift action by our Government on border closures and infection control, and, the compliance of our population in following instructions from health authorities. We remain ever vigilant, however, knowing that the situation could change at any time. With a few exceptions when restrictions allowed, the RCS ACT Council has held its meetings by Zoom, and largely forgo the program we had planned while hoping that the coming year will provide a clearer path. Two major events, however, have been cancelled—the Commonwealth Day Multi-faith, Multi-cultural Celebration and the Commonwealth Dinner held traditionally in the same week. Commonwealth Week will not be without events, however. Plans are well in hand for a workshop on Democracy at Government House, hosted by the Governor-General, for students from many parts of the Commonwealth. This will be followed in the evening by a reception for High Commissioners. In May, the Commonwealth Low Lecture, postponed from 2020, will be given by ANU Chancellor and former Foreign Minister, Julie Bishop. The following day, a workshop on Slavery will be held at the ANU Law School in collaboration with the Mindaroo and Walk Free Foundations. Information about these events is contained in this newsletter.

Notice of our AGM on Tuesday February 23 was sent to all members for whom we have email addresses. A notice is also enclosed with this newsletter, together with a fees reminder. It doesn't seem fair to ask for subs when we have been able to offer so little, but if we are to survive, we need your subs because they are our only source of regular income.

When this year's AGM is held, I will have just entered my 92nd year on Earth and will not be seeking another term. When colleagues asked me to stand in 2020, I promised to do a year—and now the year is up. The last six weeks have been extremely busy for me, liaising with colleagues in other far-flung branches on London's plans for us to sign a Licence Agreement which most of us have decided *not* to do for what we strongly feel is sound reason. (*see p.1*).

This issue of *Commonwealth News* will be my last, after more than 14 years. When I became a cub reporter in Sydney in 1952 I had no idea that I would still be at it today. I have two Honorary Life Memberships, the first is from my union, the MEAA, and the second from the RCS. I value them both greatly.

Maureen Hickman

UNSURE FUTURE FOR THE INSTITUTE OF COMMONWEALTH STUDIES

A short reprieve has been given to the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, marked for closure as a result of restructuring proposals by the University of London in the face of 'pressing financial challenges compounded by COVID-19'.

Postponement of the closure was announced in December pending the outcome of a review that is examining potential partnerships and funding sources.

News of the closure caused widespread dismay and concern from the academic world and others interested in the history of the Commonwealth. A petition on change.org carried thousands of signatures, while a motion in the House of Commons regretted 'the abrupt and unexpected decision'.

Adding their weight to the protest are four former Secretaries-General of the Commonwealth, Sir Shridath Ramphal, Chief Emeka Anyaoku, Sir Don McKinnon and Kamallesh Sharma who have written to the University's Vice-Chancellor expressing their 'profound shock'.

The Institute of Commonwealth Studies was founded in 1949—coinciding with the creation of the Modern Commonwealth—finding a home in the University of London's Institute of Advanced Studies. The petition on change.org, calling for a reversal of the University's decision, said the closure would 'do untold harm to Commonwealth and post-Colonial Studies throughout the UK and further afield ... the loss of research projects, academic networks and the disappearance of the hard work of dozens of scholars'.

In recent years, under the directorship of Professor Philip Murphy, the Institute has pursued a particular interest in Black British History and the Legacies of Empire and de-Colonisation, fields in which pioneering research has been carried out. Professor Murphy's publications in this field have been less than welcome by some sectors of the British establishment.

The Institute of Latin American Studies is also marked for closure by the University of London.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting of the ACT Branch of the RCS will be held at the Wesley Centre foyer, National Circuit, Forrest at 6 pm on Tuesday 23 February. A notice is enclosed with this newsletter together with a fees reminder. The notice was also sent to members by email. The positions of President, Vice-President and Treasurer are vacated each year. Members of Council are elected for three-year terms. If any RCS member feels they can contribute to the Council's work, please seek nomination on the enclosed form.

ELEPHANTS TRAMPLE FARMERS' CROPS IN SEARCH OF PROTEIN

It is the need for protein, essential for their growth, that is the main driver for elephants to raid farmers' crops during times of hunger and drought.

Award-winning ANU PhD candidate, Georgia Troup, began her investigation into elephant behaviour in Kenya two years before she started her doctoral studies when she began fieldwork with Save the Elephant campaign, a UK-based charity with a mission to preserve Africa's remaining herds from ivory hunters. The charity is also



Georgia Troup (right) with field assistant Naiya Raja, in Kenya's Tsavo National park where Georgia's research was conducted. Georgia's research was supported by the RCS ACT Branch 2019 Phyllis Montgomerie Commonwealth Award.

EVENTS IN COMMONWEALTH WEEK

Although our traditional Multi-Faith and Multi-Cultural celebration on Commonwealth Day on 8 March and the Commonwealth Dinner will not be held this year due to COVID-19 restrictions, the Week will still be marked in an important way.

We are appreciative of the interest and commitment of our Patron, the Governor-General, H.E. General the Hon. David Hurley, who asked our Branch to facilitate a workshop at Government House on the Commonwealth and Democracy on the afternoon of Tuesday 9 March. The workshop, which will be led by Professor Carolyn Hendricks of the Crawford School, ANU, will involve up to 30 students in Canberra from many parts of the Commonwealth. Dr Hugh Craft, our Branch Vice-President, is in charge of planning. This will be followed in the evening by a reception for Commonwealth High Commissioners, hosted by the Governor-General and Mrs Hurley.

Our annual cricket match between the Commonwealth and the Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade will be held on Sunday 14 March. Venue to be advised.

concerned with crop-raiding which often destroys not only farmers' crops but also houses and lives.

A novel method that works in some 'shared' areas is to place beehives at measured distances around a farm. The elephants stay away, afraid of being stung, while the farmers profit from selling the honey.

In Tsavo National Park—home to Kenya's largest elephant population and Georgia's main study area—elephants eat a wide variety of grasses, the protein content of which decreases during dry seasons, but also like to browse on acacia trees.

A chemical analysis of elephant faeces found that while elephants mostly met their nutritional needs during wet and dry seasons, stress indicators showed that crop-raiding during drought periods is most likely out of necessity. A promising sign that elephants are adapting to increasingly prevalent drought periods resulted from investigations that Georgia carried out at nearby Rukinga reserve that provides a safe refuge for elephants' when travelling outside national parks into areas of human settlement.

REMEMBERING BELLE LOW

A long-standing member of the RCS ACT Branch and a much loved wife, mother, grandmother and friend to many, Belle Low died in Canberra in November 2020 at the age of 98.

Described on the Africa Network website as 'one of the last connections with the generation of Africanists that flourished in Canberra after World War II', Belle began her African journey in Zanzibar, where she was posted in 1948 by the British Colonial Service after training as a nurse and midwife in Scotland. During the five years she was in Zanzibar, Isobel Smalls, as she was then, ran a small hospital on the nearby island of Pemba, became proficient in Swahili and sometimes gave the Sultan his insulin injections.

It was in Zanzibar that she met Anthony Low, then a Lecturer at Makerere University College in Kampala, having been drawn to Commonwealth Studies during his D.Phil at Oxford. After their marriage in 1952 in Zanzibar Cathedral, Belle and Anthony made their home in Kampala. In 1959, with three children in tow, Anthony joined the Department of History at ANU, subsequently became head of the Research School of Pacific Studies and in 1975, Vice-Chancellor. Belle's energy, warmth and kindness were a great asset in her new role. Anthony died in 2015 in Canberra, having established the Commonwealth Round Table in Australia as well as having given his strong support to the RCS ACT Branch over many years. (See notice of Commonwealth Lecture p.4)

Maureen Hickman

PLEA TO LET PREGNANT GIRLS AND YOUNG MOTHERS ATTEND SCHOOL

With a quarter of girls in sub-Saharan Africa already mothers, Sierra Leone's Education Minister, Dr David Moinina Sengeh, has called on countries in the region to follow his country's example and lift their bans on pregnant girls and young mothers attending school.

'They need our support to continue school and receive an education that empowers them, including to fulfil their sexual and reproductive health rights,' said Dr Sengeh.

The Education Minister's call follows publication of the 2020 UNESCO report* on Global Education Monitoring (GEM) that shows 180 million more girls worldwide are now in school compared with 1995, but few girls in sub-Saharan Africa will complete secondary school and up to three-quarters may never enter a classroom.

The progress since 1995 meant that while 40 per cent more girls in his own country were completing primary school, the current COVID-19 pandemic was reaping additional tolls on the most marginalised.

The Ebola crisis five years ago led to an increase in early pregnancy rates as a result of school closures. A decision to ban all pregnant girls from returning to school following the crisis had a 'devastating effect' on the most vulnerable girls, many of whom had been forced into early marriage.

Lessons learned from the Ebola crisis led Sierra Leone

to lift the bans imposed then and look for solutions to the challenges brought by COVID-19 as well as girls' education generally.

Among the challenges are patriarchy and discrimination—described by Dr Sengeh 'at the heart' of many education problems—unsafe school environments where verbal and sexual harassment, abuse and violence prevail, and the absence of water, sanitation and hygiene facilities in schools, lack of which affects 335 million girls.

In Sierra Leone, two new policies—on radical inclusion and comprehensive safety—aim to provide evidence to support girls' education.

'When girls miss out on an education, the opportunity to break the cycle of poverty is lost,' said Dr Sengeh. 'The benefits of investing in girls' education, on the other hand, accumulate. The UNESCO report calculates that the daughter of an educated mother will remain in school even longer than her mother.' He added:

'We have the chance to do better. We can narrow down on the solutions that are known to work.

'We must not let this pandemic roll back progress and fail another generation of girls.'

Dr Sengeh is Sierra Leone's Minister of Basic and Senior Secondary Education. He is a biomechanics engineer, data scientist, an Afrobeats rapper and clothing designer. He also advises the Directorate of Science, Technology and Innovation.

This report is based on a statement by Dr Sengeh published in South Africa's Mail and Guardian on 9 October 2020. **Ed.**

*The 2020 GEM Report is available at gemreport@unesco.org

COMMONWEALTH LECTURE ON SLAVERY

Modern Slavery in the Commonwealth has been proposed as the subject of the 2021 Commonwealth Low Lecture to be given by the ANU Chancellor and former Australian Foreign Minister, Julie Bishop, on Thursday 27 May. The lecture is named for the distinguished Commonwealth scholar, Professor Anthony Low, former Vice-Chancellor of the ANU who died in 2015. After ANU, Professor Low was appointed to the Smuts Chair of Commonwealth History at Cambridge. A follow-up workshop on Modern Slavery will be held the following day in the ANU Law Faculty in collaboration with the Mindaroo and Walk Free Foundations. Both events have been organised by the Commonwealth Round Table in Australia whose Convenor is Dr Hugh Craft, Vice-President of the RCS ACT Branch, a Commonwealth historian and former Australian diplomat. RCS members and Friends will receive further details of both events by email.

The RCS ACT Branch Newsletter *Commonwealth News* is published four times a year. Letters and contributions are welcome. Contact: Maureen Hickman, Editor, at maureen.hickman@bigpond.com

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Annual General Meeting

RCS ACT Branch

Tuesday, 23 February 2021

The Wesley Centre foyer, National Circuit, Forrest,
at
6.00 pm

The Commonwealth vs DFAT Cricket Match

The annual Cricket match between a team drawn from Commonwealth nations in Canberra and a team from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Sunday, 14 March 2021

Venue TBA

Inquiries: Kanti Jinna, 0421 117 430