

**SPEECH BY THE COMMONWEALTH SECRETARY-GENERAL,
THE RIGHT HONOURABLE PATRICIA SCOTLAND KC,
AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE PAN-AFRICAN PARLIAMENT**

Monday, 31 October 2022

South Africa

[CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY]

Your excellency, the President of South Africa Cyril Ramaphosa, represented by the Honourable Minister of Justice and Constitutional Development of South Africa;

Honourable President of the African Parliament;

Secretary-General of the Pan-African Parliament;

Honourable members of the African Parliament;

Honourable Speaker of the Palestinian National Council;

The Right Honourable Speaker of the ECOWAS Parliament;

Friends, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen;

My dear brothers and sisters;

Today is an historic day. It is an historic day for the Commonwealth, and it is an historic day for the African Union Parliament.

It is, I believe, the first time the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth has ever addressed this august body.

It is both a privilege and a pleasure for me, the sixth Secretary General of the Commonwealth of Nations, and the first woman to hold this position in history, to address you representing as I now do, 56 countries from 5 regions of the globe, 2.5 billion people 60% of whom are under the age of 30.

We in the Commonwealth are your family and your friends. The role of parliamentarians in these turbulent times has never been more important to our citizens than today.

Our citizens have never needed your courage, wisdom and acuity more than they do today. And we thank you for being willing to take up this burden. We salute you.

We lawyers, like parliamentarians, are considered a dangerous breed; we challenge, we refuse to let anarchy and unfairness and inequity reign.

We stand in the gap. We refuse to be silent. We fight. Not with arms, but with words.

We use the law as our weapon, and we wield it with skill and determination.

And we must teach the next generation to do the same.

You play a central role in setting the parameters for the next generation of parliamentarians who will have the formidable task of safeguarding the rule of law in the new and challenging context in which we now live.

The context has changed and so has the Commonwealth.

The Commonwealth transformed itself from being an institution that was built on the bones of many for the privilege of a few, to an institution advocating for the privilege of many despite the suffering of a few.

The tides have changed. The modern Commonwealth came into being as a result of combined vision: that it was possible to heal the wounds of the past to work together as equals both of regions and races and that we could together form a better world.

Her late Majesty the Queen in 1953 expressed it succinctly: **‘no relation to the empires of the past...’** An entirely new concept built on the finest qualities of man- kindness, friendship and partnership.

There were **4 key leaders** who brought the vision of the modern Commonwealth vision to life by their insistence upon the creation of an independent Secretariat staffed by people from around the Commonwealth who would be put at the service of all.

Kwame Nkrumah, Kenneth Kaunda, and Julius Nyerere supported radical changes to the Commonwealth embodied by the Singapore Declaration.

These changes witnessed the end of the British Commonwealth and the birth of a new Commonwealth, modern, inclusive, independent, and energetic.

Kwame Nkrumah saw the Commonwealth as a platform to advance Pan-Africanism.

Inspired by Kwame, President Julius Nyerere thought of the Commonwealth as a platform to mount opposition and campaign against Apartheid in South Africa.

And Kenneth Kaunda pushed for an independent Secretariat.

Her Majesty the late Queen Elizabeth II, who understood the thirst for change, supported and facilitated it by creating a home for the Commonwealth and its Secretariat by giving them her home in London-Marlborough House. Which remains our home, even today.

Our history has seen us face the challenge of Apartheid and defeat it.

We took up arms against the threat posed by climate change in Langkawi in 1989 and declared it for what it was - an existential threat to humanity. This set the parameters which lent to the formation of the UNFCCC.

The fight for climate justice and equity, which was started more than 30 years ago, continues.

The Commonwealth Blue Charter, the Common Sensing Initiative, the Disaster Finance Portal, the Climate Finance Access Hub, and the Living Lands Charter - all are testament to the determination of the Commonwealth family of Nations to defeat the threat which we now face, daily.

21 member states of this Parliament are members of our Commonwealth family of Nations. And they are the largest regional bloc of our family and represent the voice of Africa. Everything we do and have is therefore yours. When I speak of Commonwealth, I speak of Africa.

We are all facing the same storm, but we are definitely not all in the same boat, as the exogenous shocks we face are daunting. COVID-19 has put its tentacles into all our regions, countries and homes wreaking havoc with the world as we know it.

On our own, we each have insufficient human and financial resources to meet the demands made of us by our citizens.

At the 2015 CHOGM meeting, the women of the Commonwealth said: **'Alone we are invisible; together we are invincible'**.

This Parliament has made it clear that the issues we face including those on our trade and development are similar to the Commonwealth's Connectivity Agenda, which has been crafted to support our countries to accelerate growth to meet the needs of our people, gives voice to our determination to bridge the gap in funding for the delivery of the SDGs.

We have precious little time left to defeat the ills which plague us. We need solidarity. We need to work together if we are to defeat corruption, deliver good governance, and create smart solutions to our joint problems.

We are at code red on climate change, debt is spiralling, the international financial system is fracturing, interstate conflict is on the rise and areas which have long been peaceful are showing shockingly dangerous tendencies to implode.

We all hoped the risk of serious conflict in Europe was a thing of the past, yet the conflict in Russia and Ukraine is leading to serious global disruption- not least in food chains.

This is at the heart of the African Union's theme for 2022, these factors have combined to trigger a crisis in the price and availability of

food, which has pushed at least 50 million people to the brink of starvation.

According to the World Food Programme, this is the year of unprecedented hunger.

They describe a *Ring of Fire* stretching around the world. This ring of fire contains many Commonwealth countries - and many of them are in Africa.

We are going through a profound political, economic, social, and moral crisis.

Of the 42 Commonwealth member countries which are net importers of food, 39 are developing countries.

We know that the most comprehensive solutions for food insecurity are long-term, but urgent action is needed to alleviate the immediate crisis - and I support all efforts to mobilise international support and ensure it is targeted at the most vulnerable,

We must correct and prevent trade restrictions and distortions in world agricultural markets.

And we must keep supply chains open to ensure a smooth flow of food and agricultural products.

But for the long term, we must continue to strive for a world in which everyone has enough - not just to survive, but to thrive.

A world in which the way we produce and consume food is in concert with the planet, not in conflict with it.

And a world in which our food systems are resilient and able to withstand external shocks.

We need a paradigm shift - and the starting point for any paradigm shift is **smart, specific, targeted practical action.**

I want to highlight three areas which are vital to delivering food security, and where the Commonwealth is taking practical steps to support our member countries:

First is land: Climate change is putting unprecedented pressure on soil health and biodiversity, which has huge implications for agriculture.

Africa's food systems are especially vulnerable to climate change due to multiple stresses and low adaptive capacity. Given that agriculture accounts for 20% of Africa's GDP, this is a huge challenge.

Yet Africa is estimated to hold 60% of the world's uncultivated arable land and over one-third of the world's degraded land with the potential for restoration. This illustrates the huge potential of the continent to lead in developing climate-resilient food systems.

Our flagship Commonwealth Living Lands Charter, ratified by Heads of Government in Kigali in June, coordinates action to help Commonwealth countries deliver against the three Rio Conventions on Climate Change, biodiversity and land degradation.

And second is trade: We need to help countries produce more of the food they need locally, but even with more local development the food system will remain global.

The annual value of global food trade during 2019-2021 was \$1.6 trillion - almost 10% of total merchandise exports. In each of these years, Commonwealth countries imported food worth more than \$211 billion.

We are supporting our member countries with technical analysis, advice, and assistance - especially through our Connectivity Agenda for Trade and Investment - to help them exchange best practices and experiences in trade and investment, undertake domestic reform, and speak with one voice within global trade negotiations.

But third, to maximise our success, we must maximise our ability to deploy technology.

Harnessing data is essential.

There is a \$180 billion financing gap in agriculture in Sub-Saharan Africa. A data-driven agricultural sector can attract the private capital needed to fill this gap.

Technology and digitalisation is changing the global landscape in terms of how we live, work and trade. New forms of statutory and regulatory provisions are needed if this change is to be undertaken in a way which is fair, transparent and which leaves no one behind.

The digital divide continues to challenge development, connectivity, education, and health. Better access to broadband internet through public access and cheaper rates means a radical change.

If this penetration were to reach just 50 per cent of the population the Commonwealth would raise the combined national income of members from \$74 billion to \$263 billion.

We need to work vigorously to unleash the potential of the Commonwealth by narrowing the digital divide through public-private partnerships and South-South cooperation.

- The widespread acceptance of digital trade documents could generate an additional US\$1.2 trillion in trade among Commonwealth countries by 2026.

The digitalisation of trade has been my top priority to further boost the intra-commonwealth trade and make it even more advantageous from the present level of 21% advantage of trade within the commonwealth over the trade with other countries.

This will also boost the generation of employment for the young people in the Commonwealth.

- We are working with our members for greater and more efficient trade and investment facilitation under the Digital Commonwealth.

We will make Commonwealth members the trade and investment destination of choice within as well as outside the Commonwealth.

- Women often suffer from a “double digital divide” in poorer countries, where they are 14 per cent less likely than men to own a mobile phone.

This means 200 million women are locked out from the benefits of mobile money services and access to information.

Women have always been my focus in our digital Commonwealth agenda through mainstreaming and integrating them as the backbone of the family unit and a critical workforce in the country’s economy.

I will continue to work with a passion for women’s empowerment through digital literacy and financial inclusion.

- A 1 per cent increase in skills, measured using a human capital index, can increase the impact of internet penetration on manufacturing labour productivity in the Commonwealth by roughly 7.4 per cent, on average.

Digital skilling and the young commonwealth population will be skilled using an integrated Commonwealth Digital platform. 60% of our Commonwealth citizens, who are below the age of 30, will be skilled.

- Tech start-ups continue to be game changers. Under the Digital Commonwealth, we are working with Commonwealth universities to create a virtual innovation hub for start-ups.

This will enable the organic growth of start-ups within Commonwealth countries under a conducive ecosystem. A virtual mentorship program for start-ups for young tech entrepreneurs will be created.

We in the Commonwealth in November, at our Law Ministers’ Meeting, will be exploring how to craft the appropriate regulatory and statutory frameworks, which would enable us to work interoperably, to secure a safe space for contracting parties to work.

If we succeed, we will, in accordance with a long tradition in the Commonwealth, have created a platform for global partners.

We hope to cover amongst other things, licencing, disclosure requirements, prevention of market abuse, and environmental sustainability requirements; also, an aligned implementation of the FATFs (Travel rule), which is the requirement, in most circumstances, to identify information of the sender and receiver in crypto transactions.

They are grounded in the principle of ‘same activity’, ‘same risks’, and ‘same regulation’.

Honourable Members, today I place before you four challenges. I hope you can take them to your countries and use them to push for a true Pan-African transformational agenda:

1. **First, the Challenge of Governance:** In the Commonwealth, we have trained more than 2,000 senior Public Service Ministers, Permanent Secretaries and Directors on a SMART approach to Performance Management for the Public Service. Oversee transformation from archaic systems to quality and accountable governance, good governance.
2. **Second, the Challenge of corruption.** A recent study by UNECA estimates that more than \$84bn is lost in illicit financial flows from Africa each year. “This is more than the annual health financing gap, twice the needs of the education finance gap, and it is almost equal to the amount Africa receives in remittances each year.” And more than 1.5 times what Africa receives in aid. The Commonwealth has developed the **Commonwealth Anti-Corruption Benchmarks** to promote honesty, impartiality, accountability, and transparency and provide for specific anti-corruption measures. In cases where there may be no recognised international good practice, benchmarks propose measures and solutions. It is a toolkit that makes corruption more expensive than honesty by improving systems and processes.
3. **Third, the Challenge of Trade.** Will you help to ensure Africa makes the *African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement* work. Africa remains underrepresented in global trade. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) can reverse this trend.

Concluding negotiations on the agreement on rules of origin and protocols on trade in e-commerce and the Pan-African Payment and Settlement System services is urgent.

4. **Fourth, the challenge of justice.** There is no peace without justice and no justice without peace. Access to justice and justice transformation is not only essential but urgent. The Commonwealth is working on innovating solutions to help our countries reconceptualise justice in a holistic manner and make SDG 16 a reality.

We are already partners. Your issues are our issues. Your hurts are our hurts. Your hopes are our hopes. Your children are our children. Your future is our future.

As the great Nelson Mandela put it, “it is not our diversity which divides us; it is not our ethnicity or religion or culture that divides us. Since we have achieved our freedom, there can only be one division amongst us: between those who cherish democracy and those who do not.”

Freedom is the most beautiful fruit of respect. And respect fosters unity in diversity.

Diversity with a common purpose is democracy in action; and this is ladies and gentlemen, what this great Parliament is called to defend across these beautiful lands.

On our own we are invisible. Together we could be invincible.

So, let's build a better, bigger and fairer boat so we can all survive the storms ahead.

God bless Africa, God bless the Commonwealth, God bless the Pan-African Parliament.

I thank you.

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