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VOICE FILE NAME: COHP (Kamalesh Sharma)

Key:

SO: Sue Onslow (Interviewer)

KS: Kamalesh Sharma (Respondent)

Interview Two:

SO: This is Dr Sue Onslow talking to Secretary General Kamalesh Sharma on Tuesday, 29th March 2016. Sir, in our first discussion, you addressed the political challenges of your time in office, but we didn't have time for you to talk about the economic aspect.

KS: Sue, yes, last time we spoke about politics but I agree it would be important to talk about the economic side as well. Growth is the goal of all Commonwealth developing countries. The Commonwealth has also been a little different from other national and multilateral settings, where the debate between democracy and development, or governance and growth, takes place, because the Commonwealth has succeeded in removing polemics out of what is, in many other places, a polarity and where a balance is not easily struck. The Commonwealth has internalised the conviction that meaningful social and national advance has to be comprehensive, coherent and values-based. Good growth and good governance are inseparable.

There is agreement that when you strengthen values and governance-related institutions, you strengthen the functioning of the whole society and nation in every respect. There has been a steady sedimentation of values over time. Transparency International, for instance, has determined that while out of 53 member countries of Africa there are only 18 from the Commonwealth, eight

in the first ten in the top ranking in Africa are from the Commonwealth. This is remarkable corroboration of a value based Commonwealth. The same is true of the very fastidious Mo Ibrahim Index of good governance. The Commonwealth believes that strengthening the institutional governance framework of member states helps nation-building and the rights and opportunities for the citizens in every respect.

SO: So on which particular institutions would you place greatest emphasis?

KS: The human rights guardian institutions to protect the individual and core institutions of legislature, judiciary, and the executive to serve the citizens.

SO: So the rule of law, independence of the judiciary, freedom of assembly, freedom of speech and the media...

KS: All of them form our core values and many of them are now the declared concern of the Ministerial Action Group. We have a Forum of Human Rights Institutions. This has existed for many years and follows the sound philosophy that sustainability and durability in human rights protection springs from what you have been able to do nationally. This Forum is a forum of national Human Rights Institutions of the Commonwealth in which they support each other as independent Human Rights Commissioners - in some cases, ombudsman - in what the collective goal and the setting of their ambition should be. They exchange among themselves good practices that have been working in various members and how the collective bar can be raised. It strengthens their work in their own country to know how things are being done effectively elsewhere and that they are all engaged in a shared enterprise.

SO: How far do you see the CHRI, the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, as being an important contributor to the debate on human rights...?

KS: I think it has an important role to play.

SO: In what way?

K Because it advertises to the Commonwealth where, if you like, the amber light has come on. The CHRI will always feel that the Secretariat should be doing more than it is. We keep on receiving communications from Maja Daruwala. In fact the CHRI was the first Commonwealth body I visited after I was appointed Secretary General. It was convenient as it is based in Delhi and working in a priority area for us, and I encouraged the public search to improve standards everywhere. Once it becomes known where the remedial effort is particularly needed, those concerned can work in the way best suited to them in order to try and address these concerns and redress them. The Forum of Commonwealth Human Rights Institutions is crucial in the same way as the Commonwealth Electoral Network is in its own field. Both were created on the same principle of self-help. These are two pivotal independent bodies that have to deliver for the citizens of all Commonwealth member states.

SO: Yes, you've said earlier you see them as crucial pillars for the promotion of democracy and parallel development.

KS: I think yes, absolutely, they're vital. This is being progressively recognised because the member states, when they created the eight goals for themselves - and you mentioned some of them; I think I mentioned them last time - signalled that they were prepared to have themselves scrutinised and judged against those eight goals. This shows a degree of commitment and performance buy-in into the values of the Commonwealth, which are significantly higher than simply having a theoretical acceptance that these values are important. These goals cannot be safeguarded without strong institutions.

SO: More specifically in the realm of economics: you said that the Commonwealth has successfully stepped outside the realm of polemics in terms of economics. How do you feel it has achieved this?

KS: I think we've been able to do that because we effectively fill a space in the multilateral negotiations and global relationships in general, which is not very attended, and these are the interests of the small states of the world in global outcomes and arrangements. These get marginalised if not defended and fought for.

SO: So how do you see the Commonwealth's work in practical terms, in filling the space? You made reference in the first interview to the fact that you don't see the Commonwealth as a boutique organisation, that you don't see it as having a particular niche in international relations. And yet here you seem to imply that it does have a particular USP, a particular role?

KS: A principal global strength we have is to strongly support the place and role of small states in global affairs. This is not limited to the field of development - in trade, debt, technical support or climate change. Let me just go back to the human rights which we were discussing. One of the roles that we play, crucially, is in advising small states particularly, though not only small states, when their term comes around in the universal periodic review, or the UPR process, in the Human Rights Council in Geneva. We have human rights advisers in our Small States Office in Geneva to support them. We start working with them as to what new commitments they can make, which additional conventions and treaties internationally they could subscribe to, how they could lift their adherence to many of the goals which are otherwise accepted in principle. We help them in preparing the UPR, and we also help them then in fulfilling the undertakings nationally. In this very practical way, we advance the work on the ground in the field of human rights in small states and their capacity constraints.

SO: How do you see it helping in that practical way? It could be said that there seems to be a greater emphasis on process, on declaratory participation in international treaties, international fora, for these small states, rather than the Commonwealth, achieving practical implementation and progress?

KS: Giving them national advice on how it is that they could create, strengthen and organise the work of their government institutionally and human rights institutions, their legislative drafting and the laws, that may require to be either introduced or changed in order to reflect Commonwealth values, is all practical support. This is buttressed by the Commonwealth Forum of Human Rights Institutions. In other words, build their capability for doing these things, and strengthen their commitment. It leads to work in diverse areas. There are

several elements in it, and I would encourage you, for the purpose of the oral history project, also to speak to concerned heads of units and divisions in the Secretariat because it would be very useful to know in detail, at least as far as the broad headings are concerned, what these areas are.

Now, coming back to the broader approach to small states, we help them in the following significant ways: we have small states offices, we've had one in New York for some time. I helped to create one after I took over as SG in Geneva. I was Permanent Representative of India in Geneva about 30 years ago and at that time I was also the spokesperson for developing countries in the Uruguay round of trade negotiations. Something which struck me at that time and something which I have carried, and tried to do something about, from India and from New York when I was posted there, is the way in which we can express practical support for small states, which have a great deal of difficulty in having their voice heard and fighting their own corner. So we created an office in addition to the one in New York, in Geneva, which partly does the human rights work which I mentioned, but also has a much valued trade advisor who assists the small states in their negotiations in WTO and UNCTAD.

SO: How closely, then, does the office for the small states in New York collaborate with the office in Geneva? Or do they work very much in parallel? I'm aware that the institutional worlds of New York are very different to that of Geneva.

KS: The Small States Office in Geneva works with the Secretariat as all the human rights and economic and trade work is really done from here. The Geneva Small States Office would not be in touch with the Small States Office in New York, which, as you say, is a very different world of the United Nations headquarters. The Geneva office also helps the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), an organisation which itself has an office in the Small States Office. This is important to register because that office serves several individual small states, not themselves represented in Geneva. The Geneva Small States Office actually has two organisations which serve other small members that are not present in Geneva; one of them is the PIF and the other one is the Association of Eastern Caribbean States. I was delighted when they opened their offices in Geneva because that meant that the catchment area of support

and service that we are able to provide to small states enlarged significantly. This was completely new capability creation.

The other facility which the office offers is not only to serve those small states that are deployed on the premises individually or through organisations, but when you have small states visiting Geneva for particular conferences or purposes, they also have a venue where they can take the advantage of expert advice and of others present, who have deeper experience of Geneva. They have a home away from home: the Commonwealth Small States Office has already become a recognised magnet and forum for advancing interests of small states. This is transformative in the multilateral world of Geneva.

SO: Sir, in institutional terms, how does the Geneva office interact and collaborate with the APC countries? I'm thinking that the Commonwealth certainly has potential in terms of its trade platform, but it seems that in the past it has being somewhat sluggish in pushing that forward?

KS: The APC actually has its headquarters in Brussels, but our Small States Office is in constant contact with WTO, with UNCTAD, and the International Trade Centre. The ITC is not a huge organisation; but close to the Commonwealth goals. It helps these small states to navigate their way with these large organisations where their particular interest are concerned. We've had independent reviews done, not just in-house reviews of our trade advisory role in Geneva, to see how useful it is, and both the reviews as well as the judgement of member states have confirmed that this service has made a big difference to the ability of the small states to be able to pursue their interests. As for the APC, it is independently the Secretariat's partner in a path-breaking Hub and Spokes trade programme, largely financially supported by the European Union. Under this experts are deployed in developing regions. The EU evaluates this programme positively.

SO: Do you also provide training for these small states for their diplomats, on how to navigate the somewhat arcane world of the WTO, how to interact to best advantage in UNCTAD? I'm just wondering what other institutional support you're able to provide?

KS: These organisations hold their own interactive courses in which the countries and organisations represented in Geneva and in our Small States Office can participate. We also have third country programmes which are now offered. This brings me to another important point: it was decided at the last CHOGM in Malta that a global version of what we do in Geneva would be established in Malta - a Small States Centre of Excellence, serving small states in diverse fields. One of the purposes of it would be to set up third country programmes of training and support, whether in economic diplomacy or diplomacy in general, in order to create and strengthen the capacity to which you are referring. Now, I just want to mention some of the specific things we do for small states, if you're ready for it.

SO: I just wondered, Sir, where did that initiative originate? Was it the Maltese government?

KS: Yes, Malta and the Secretariat have been working together. We learn from Geneva. In Geneva we've created a magnet for small states' concerns. We have put the small states profile on the horizon. When people want to know perspectives of small states, want to feel about something pertaining to small states on the agenda on any of the many organisations in Geneva, as far as small states are concerned, they say: 'Let's go to the Small States Office and talk this through.' So it has succeeded extremely well in Geneva in putting small states on the map, but we wondered whether we can't do something like this globally, so that you have a global information clearance point for small states, and which shows an intellectual leadership and an ability to conceptualise how the small states would fit in and safeguard their interests, in various aspects of international relationships. It would also initiate many practical ventures serving the needs of small states, in cooperation with partners.

This work can be over debt, climate change, trade, natural disaster and institution building governance: third country programmes in a variety of fields. The idea behind the Small States Centre of Excellence is not that the centre necessarily would do everything directly, but would have oversight of the overall situation and needs and how opportunities can be created. An audit could be done of how well it is doing from time to time.

SO: Sir, how does that interact then, in structural terms, with the Economic Affairs Division here at the Secretariat?

KS: The Secretariat will be the principal collaborator in every way. Let me give you some examples. We have initiated a Trade Finance Facility - the TFF. I went to Washington; we spoke to the World Bank and the IFC, and what we argued was that small volume trading is usually of not great interest to big banks, and the regulatory system now had become stringent because of stepped up need to monitor money laundering and other banned financial transactions, so that the small traders suffer and their trade is not covered for risk. So we urged that we needed to develop a facility in the Commonwealth which would enable this risk to be covered to boost trading activity. We put in the working group the IFC [the International Finance Corporation of the World Bank], Standard Chartered Bank, which is the biggest trading bank in the UK, Export Import Bank of India, which pioneered the concept, and the Bank of Malta, a small state and next host of CHOGM. The purpose was that everybody should see, even from the composition of the working group, that these were very serious entities, so their product would be of interest just because of the membership.

We created an endowment fund. The ultimate goal is \$20 million. The first goal is \$5 million to get it started, and India, Sri Lanka, Mauritius and Malta have already come up with contributions which have taken us to about \$5 million. We are now negotiating in the market as to which bank can make the best offer to handle the TFF. The TFF will function independently in the way it needs to in the financial market, but the Small States Centre of Excellence can make its progress part of its audit: the rate of use, the lessons we are learning, how it can be improved and strengthened, the need if any to make further appeal for funds. It need not be limited only to small states; it need not even be limited to Commonwealth member states alone and become a global service. So this is a specific way in which the Commonwealth has come to the assistance of small states, and we've created something which did not exist before. There are similarly ambitious projects in areas of climate change, disaster protection and technical cooperation.

SO: Sir, on the Economic Affairs Division and its particular contribution to development during your time here as Secretary General: how far have

you deliberately sought to boost and to support this division as a think-tank of development, in providing thinking on small states, on developmental economies, for the G-20 or other fora?

KS: I was very ambitious in this regard on behalf of the Commonwealth. Part of the reason is what I told you about my experience in Geneva, but then I also chaired an initiative called 'Financing for Development' in New York, which was in the end extremely successful as the well-known Monterrey consensus. We got common agreement that money must be used in ways which both the user and the provider agree is the most responsible way. The consensus called for enormous values-based development effort. So predictability of resource transfer would depend upon confidence of its use. That was a turning point in global economic relationships and my thinking grew from doing that work. I realised from that process that the question of 'capability' for small states is the most crucial one.

I was also influenced a lot by Amartya Sen's thinking on this because his thoughts pertain to the marginalised, the disadvantaged and the minorities, people who are out of the mainstream in national societies - you provide laws to protect them, but have to enable them to gain equality and opportunity. Amartya has this gift for using very simple concepts - as he used 'multiple identity' in another context. He stresses the real test is not enacting of laws, but creation of 'capability.' As Secretary General, I've tried to look out for capability which can be created in our large constituency of small states.

In the field of climate change, for instance, the way I used to put it was that everyone says there are millions of dollars available for climate finance, but nobody gave the telephone number to dial to these small states, or the form to fill, or tell them whom to talk to. The fact that you've created ability is not the same as creating the capability. So we sought to create, in our Economic Affairs Division when Cyrus Rustomjee was the Director, wide spectrum capacity in debt, trade and climate change - and I had, as I said, some background too - and we recruited very, very good people. Deputy Secretary General Deodat Maharaj carried forward the work effectively and with great determination. Quality recruitment is the secret. We came up with a new idea on a climate change swap: a swap based on domestic action on climate action. The way it works is that a member state creates a plan for adaptation

or mitigation, depending upon the challenges that they have, and cost this plan through technical support. We have created a hub, which is going to be based in Mauritius, called the Climate Change Finance Access Hub, to make this possible for them. We have already deployed one expert in the Pacific regional organisation, one in the Caribbean, and one is going to Africa, to assist them in developing these plans and the institutional capability of doing it. Once these national plans are developed, the investment on it can be made available from international development banks, and these banks can replenish themselves from the money that's available for climate finance mechanisms. This would also help the credit rating of small states by drawing down their debt. The UN supported this approach and uniquely the SG of the UN, Ban Ki-Moon and the SG of the Commonwealth, in the first instance of this kind, wrote a joint op-ed on climate change which introduced this idea, announced at the Malta CHOGM.

SO: I know that the Port of Spain heads of government meeting addressed the issue of climate change and an important Commonwealth initiative on climate change came out of that, to go to what proved to be the chaotic Copenhagen summit. How much was that the product of your personal guidance and input on states reacting and interacting with key members? How did you try to carry that initiative forward?

KS: I was in close touch with CHOGM Chair Prime Minister Patrick Manning, and I emphasised that we simply had to address the climate change issue because of the Copenhagen conference just a week later. We could get the eyes of the world on us because of our representative nature if we could take a lead in some way. India as the largest democracy, great industrial and emerging economies, majority of small states and island states were all in it. There's no organisation which is such a microcosm of the whole world as the Commonwealth is.

The two ways in which we internationalised the CHOGM as never before was, firstly, by inviting Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, who agreed to come. I knew him a little from my time in New York. We invited Prime Minister Rasmussen of Denmark as the host of the conference because he had a vested interest in addressing and meeting so many heads. He agreed. With the assistance then of Prime Minister Gordon Brown, we also invited

President Sarkozy of France, who flew all the way down to be able to speak on this issue in the Commonwealth, which was a historic first for the host of the Francophonie organisation.

So that got the eyes of the world on us and leading news and television channels. The Heads discussed their different perspectives on climate change. We requested Prime Minister Kevin Rudd of Australia to kindly lead informal consultations, and so a kind of a ginger group was formed of interested countries seeking an outcome. Over two days, a global funding proposal from the Commonwealth was approved, a pioneering development in global climate finance. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon told me later that the Commonwealth proposal was the only idea that was accepted in Copenhagen and emerged from it. He said one of the reasons he would adjust his diary and come to Malta for the CHOGM on the eve of the COP21 Paris conference [in 2015], was his positive experience in Port of Spain of the difference the Commonwealth can make. He told me that he had seen what had happened in Port of Spain and wanted to come to Malta because he thought the Commonwealth could give the political push the Paris conference needed. I confirmed that we had invited French President Hollande through Prime Minister Muscat and were working on a strong political declaration of political will. In the event we got one. The declaration also addressed certain definitional issues, like how to define 'damage' and 'recovery,' which was a global advance, but Secretary General Ban Ki Moon felt that literally on the eve of Paris, all of these diverse countries agreeing on a bold forward looking declaration, made a big difference to the collective global ambition at the onset of the conference.

SO: Ah, so you see it actually as a Commonwealth success at Copenhagen...

KS: The Commonwealth initiative from Port of Spain was adopted at Copenhagen. It succeeded. The only decision taken in Copenhagen was the one brought by the Commonwealth, of a climate fund of \$10 billion a year over ten years. This was acknowledged in contemporary reports. Secretary General Ban Ki Moon registered that the only decision that came out of Copenhagen was the Commonwealth proposal.

SO: Thank you for that. How much has the Commonwealth and the Secretariat also had a deliberate and focused input into the Sustainable Development Goals, building upon your own experience in New York with the MDGs?

KS: That exercise was done in New York, where we activated Commonwealth consultations. We made an independent input on sustainable development goals, as a statement by the Heads. It was also available, obviously, to all our member states in New York. We also indicated that we will contribute to the substance of various goals: many of them, it so happens, already form part of our newly adopted strategic plan. We would be able to give regular reports on what our contribution is to the global sustainable goals in a more methodical way from now on.

You had mentioned the G-20. When the G-20 was created, and the first meeting was held in Washington, I wrote to all the G-20 heads, including the President of the US as the host. I argued that there was a common challenge before the new body, which was how to prevent the G-20 from being seen by the outside world as just a glorified G-7 or G-8, now including the major emerging economies. The G-20 needed to avoid the perception that its members sat around the table and worried only about their own issues. I got many encouraging replies even from non-Commonwealth countries. We kept up our approach to all subsequent chairs. I would say it was one of the more remarkable achievements for a modestly funded, modestly staffed organisation like the Commonwealth to establish itself as a preferred interlocutor of the G-20. It was also a lesson that if your intellectual contribution is up to the mark, others will respect it and wish to engage.

SO: So what was the response of those heads of the G-20 to your letter?

KS: We worked at two levels: one was at the political level and the other at the technical level. At the political level we met either the Head, or anybody else they would indicate, and talked to them about what their priority was as the Chair, and how we could help them there and also in getting the priorities of the larger world within the G-20 agenda. In this we partnered with the Francophonie: the Commonwealth plus the Francophonie was half the developing world and the most representative partnership. So if we worked

together, although all the heavy lifting is done by the Commonwealth, we would jointly continue to be seen as a constructive collaborator, provided we maintained the quality and relevance of our contribution politically as well as to the G-20 Working Group on Development at the technical level. The quality of the contribution was the key.

SO: When you say ‘the heavy lifting,’ what do you mean?

KS: The quality of papers that have to be prepared and the insightful intellectual work that has to be done, as well as the level of knowledgeable and positive personal exchanges and advice we offered.

SO: Thank you.

KS: At the political level, I personally met Prime Minister Harper of Canada, Prime Minister Abbott of Australia, President Sarkozy of France and the President of Mexico, Felipe Calderón, when they chaired the G-20; or senior representatives indicated by other chairs were met by the Deputy Secretary General or the Director of the Economic Division. We had constant and fruitful engagement at the technical level. On the technical level, we had argued that a working group on development needed to be created for continuity. This is now in existence and we are the continuing primary interlocutors on the G-20 Working Group on Development. All the sherpas of the G-20 meet there. They prepare the briefs and approaches for their principals, and the Commonwealth in partnership with the Francophonie are their talking partners.

SO: How much do you think that the Commonwealth’s success in promoting the HIPC, and then the Multilateral Debt Relief, was an important backdrop of previous success?

KS: It gave us confidence. The Highly Indebted Poor Country or HIPC initiative came from a meeting actually of the Ministers of Finance of the Commonwealth, endorsed by Heads. I was aware of that. In my mind, that gave me enormous confidence that if you create common ground on which the diversity of our 53 nations can all stand, then surely one should be able to expand it into common ground on which everyone can stand globally because

there's no constituency missing from the Commonwealth, which is a microcosm of the whole world.

It has happened before, too. For instance, when we worked on the health workers protocol governing the migration of health workers from developing countries, it was accepted by the World Health Organisation. When we worked on the teachers' recruitment protocol, governing such recruitment from developing countries, it was accepted by UNESCO. I was at the summit of the CARICOM sitting in Barbados when Alicia Barcena Ibarra, the Director-General of the ECLA, the Economic Commission for Latin America, twice turned to me sitting there in the front row, and said, 'By the way, all that I'm describing as what we are doing, is based on the analysis of the Commonwealth.' The Commonwealth has the ability to conceptualise in contemporary and meaningful terms, the need of the developing states and where collective engagement can be fruitful, provided we ensure quality work.

One of our big contributions has been acceptance that one has to see the world in terms of Resilience and Vulnerability, not just categories of Least Developed, Developing and Developed, with the LDCs being supported in graduating into medium income countries, because the level of mutual interdependence now is so enormous, whether it's fuel prices or finance or food prices or any other of what are called exogenous shocks - natural disaster is of course one of them - which could throw any economy into disarray, requiring domestic and external support systems. So we had this new concept, which was, when we started, an academic paper but now is accepted as a working concept in the UN, which now creates Resilience and Vulnerability profiles of member states. When the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) meeting was held in Samoa, the Under-Secretary General of the UN was talking about it and he turned to me and said, 'By the way, the intellectual property for this idea is with the Commonwealth.'

When we met with the World Bank, President Kim made a statement to the effect he met a lot of organisations that told him the problems that he already knew, but in the Commonwealth he found an organisation which came with solutions to these problems. We posed the question as to what constituted Vulnerability and Resilience in the contemporary environment and provided responses such as counter-cyclical loans which swiftly adjusts the debt

burden when there is a serious external shock, and debt for nature swaps, which is an inducement particularly for small states to invest domestically in the green economy. We will soon create a hub in Mauritius to facilitate climate change finance and regional experts have already been deployed in the Caribbean and the Pacific.

Our concept is that the level of national income reflected in LDCs and medium level and high-level economies is an important element but not sufficient measure of resilience and vulnerability. What is needed is to prevent any country from being in a state of free-fall, no matter what is its income level. There should be commitment to stability and growth at all three levels through domestic policies, mutual regional support, and robust global oversight so that a such free-fall is prevented because the consequences - political, social and economic - of that collapse, as you know, are very, very severe in all three dimensions for the developing world . The Commonwealth has been driven always by an ethical concern that global outcomes must serve all human communities, but also a practical one. We know from experience that small failed human communities threaten the wellbeing of the entire global human community.

These are examples of how we can make a difference to the terms of debate by insisting on a coherent perspective, because of the strength which we have in our diversity. We can play a global role beyond that of a 'boutique organisation.' We can be relevant at many levels to the entire world community. We stand tall, we see far, we probably see further than many others, but we always hold tool kits in our hands. We can be both visionary and necessary.

Sorry for this lengthy response. This is one strong point which resonates a lot when touched.

SO: Sir, what do you think of the future of the Commonwealth?

KS: I think the Commonwealth is demonstrating itself ever more convincingly as a relevant, effective and contemporary organisation. Its history is such that it reaches back into the 19th Century. But it has been an evolving organisation. There is a frequent assumption that it carries forward baggage from the past.

But it is constantly inventing itself afresh. I have said that the modern Commonwealth may have been created in the last century but it is designed for the present one in the freedom with which it works. The challenge before it always has been to be abreast or ahead of the times. The Commonwealth can do this because of what it is - reflecting the world's variety but with strong solidarity in pursuing shared goals.

I always sought to urge strong ambition levels in the Secretariat. We talk about the celebrated convening power of the Commonwealth, but how do we express it? Heads meet physically every two years, there are ministerial and Board meetings but we were not connected in contemporary ways. So the digitalisation of the Commonwealth was one of the big goals that I set before myself and we achieved it. We have a cloud-based web platform called Commonwealth Connects, and I think I spoke about it last time; it already enables a hundred Commonwealth communities of practice to connect. We have created hubs in priority areas of health, education and election management and the one on climate change is imminent. The point is that in the Commonwealth everyone must feel they are connected in real time, all the time. This is pivotal not only for a world-wide Commonwealth, but for a young Commonwealth. I have been very strong in many ways on our work with youth and women. It is only when we do all these things that we can be the great global good, which the Commonwealth is.

SO: So in terms of the future of the Commonwealth: how important would you say it is for a Secretary General to get together a core group of Heads and to interact with them to facilitate, to drive forward, a particular Commonwealth agenda, or on particular issues?

KS: The role of the Heads is pivotal. Talking to some of my predecessors I learnt the lesson that you can lose a lot of time as Secretary General if you develop ideas and try and shape and advance them yourself. Instead, what the SG should do is to convey the concept of what the SG believes needs to be done to the Heads and member states and ask them, 'Do you wish me to do this? If you do, then I will do it.' This is the approach I adopted in respect of all my major initiatives and it worked very smoothly, if progressively. The Commonwealth is a unique organisation for the latitude and personal

encouragement given by Heads to the SG, but this respect and trust has to be reciprocated.

The significance of this approach is that political ownership is what you start with, once an idea is conceived, and you are not developing the idea in the hope of political ownership. This is how I worked in securing a set of priority goals for the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) to safeguard and advance our political values. It took four years and two CHOGMs, but it was much more secure way of proceeding.

The role of Heads and member states is pivotal in driving an ambitious and innovative agenda. We are also creating something called ComPartner, which is an easy-to-use software, of what assistance can be available directly to member states from other member states. My budget may be £20 million for technical cooperation, but we can look at what capacities we have in Malaysia, in Singapore, in India, in South Africa, and many other countries in their totality. If they can be released in a user-friendly way, then obviously the potential can be a multiple of what the budget of the Secretariat is. Then there were initiatives such as the Trade Finance Facility for small states and the Climate Change Finance Network, conceived particularly to help small states. They are in the last stages and on the point of being launched.

SO: Sir, please if I could ask you as my final question: how far would you say, as Secretary General, a ‘secret weapon’ of the Commonwealth, indeed its invisible glue, has been Her Majesty the Queen?

KS: The Queen will always be inseparable from the creation of the modern Commonwealth. She has been the keystone around which the grand arch of the Commonwealth has grown. It has been a historic role, and a hugely cohesive one not just because of the duration – which is unmatched. The Queen has been Head of the Commonwealth since the time of its formation and throughout its evolution into what it is now. When the Queen became the head in 1952, I think we had eight members; now we have 53. When the Gambia and Zimbabwe come back, which I consider inevitable in due course, it will be 55. The Queen has shown unwavering loyalty and dedication towards the Commonwealth. The conviction of her faith and belief in what she said and did for it set the tone for the organisation. It is a staggering thought

that for the last 60 years there would not have been a single head of a Commonwealth country, or even a High Commissioner, who would not have met Her Majesty the Queen. The Queen makes it a particular point, at every CHOGM, to host a lunch for those Heads who have joined in the intervening period. This makes them feel that a special gesture has been made towards them and enables a personal exchange.

SO: So her hosting a lunch for new Heads is a separate occasion to hosting a reception for Heads?

KS: That is right, just for the new Heads. The depth of her personal knowledge about personalities and the sense of history of the organisation is so apparent when speaking with the Queen.

SO: So is the Commonwealth then going to face challenging times after the undesired demise of Her Majesty?

KS: The Commonwealth is out of its formative stage and it is now a large and stable organisation. Formerly, it was countries with a colonial association with Britain who joined. The many countries that now want to join the Commonwealth are those that do not have this association. Obviously, from whatever their vantage point is, these aspiring countries see the Commonwealth as an organisation - if you like, a distinguished and quality international club - which they would like to join for what it stands for and what it has contributed. They are convinced about the wisdom and the sanity that is consistently brought to the world by the Commonwealth. This is why they want to join what they regard as this exceptionally respected and attractive global organisation. This is where we have reached over nearly seven decades of serving our peoples and the world. The contribution the Commonwealth is making in the direction of political, economic and social values and wise globalisation is now so entrenched that the issue of the next Head will now be considered in a very different environment. But I have no doubt that when the time comes – and may it be very distant – the services rendered by the Queen will greatly influence the sentiment of the Heads.

SO: Sir, I'm conscious that I only have a limited amount of your time. Thank you very much, indeed.

KS: You're welcome. It's wonderful to talk to you and I warmly welcome your interest.

[End of recording]