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Britain in the Commonwealth: the 1997 Edinburgh summit Witness Seminar

Edited by

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and

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President Nelson Mandela of South Africa with UK Prime Minister Tony Blair
Source: commonwealth.assetbank-server.com

Britain in the Commonwealth: The 1997 Edinburgh Commonwealth heads of Government meeting

Monday, 19th March 2018
The Court Room
First Floor
Senate House
Malet Street
London WC1E 7HU

Programme:

Chair: Dr Sue Onslow, Deputy Director, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, School of Advanced Study, University of London

Witnesses:

Participants:

Amitav Banerji, then Deputy Conference Secretary, Commonwealth Secretariat

Sir Richard Dales, KCVO, CMG, then Director, Africa and the Commonwealth, FCO, [Written contribution]

Martin Hatfull, then Head, Commonwealth Coordination Department, Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO)

Sir John Holmes GCVO, KBE, CMG, then Principal Private Secretary (PPS) to the Prime Minister

Anji Hunter, then Personal Assistant to the Prime Minister, the Rt Hon Tony Blair

Stuart Mole OBE, then Director and Head of the Office of the Commonwealth Secretary General, Chief Emeka Anyaoku

Prunella Scarlett LVO, then Director, Commonwealth Affairs at the Royal Commonwealth Society (RCS)

Introduction

The meeting in Edinburgh in 1997 was the last occasion on which Britain hosted the Commonwealth heads' meeting, and the discussions covered a range of important issues for the future direction of the association which remain relevant and highly topical: the great step forward on trade, business and investment; the denouement of the Nigerian crisis and the willingness to impose sanctions; the return of Fiji and the presence of President Nelson Mandela; the elevation of HM the Queen into the summit itself; the start of a visible Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) presence; and discussion on possible new members.

This is the third in a series of witness seminars organized by the Institute of

Commonwealth Studies. The first focused on the formation and work of the Eminent Persons Group of 1986 and the outcome and impact of the EPG's visit to apartheid South Africa. The second addressed the role and functions of the Commonwealth Secretariat since 1965 and was held on June 2013.

This seminar is being organized in collaboration with King's College, London. Since 1986, the ICBH Witness Seminar Programme has conducted nearly 100 witness seminars on a variety of subjects: most recently, the ICBH's witness seminar series has examined the work of UK Embassies/High Commissions in Washington, Moscow, New Delhi, Pretoria and the Caribbean. These witness seminars have been well received by both practitioners, and the academic community who have increasingly come to see that it is important to examine and analyse the function of British overseas missions, as well as to capture the perspective of contemporary actors of recent events.

The significance of history and the importance of gathering and utilizing oral history interviews have also been identified in the report of the Foreign Affairs Committee, *The Role of the FCO in UK Government* (published 29 April 2011). In oral evidence, Foreign Secretary William Hague stated: 'history is vitally important in knowledge and practice of foreign policy'. He further stated, 'One of the things that I have asked to be worked up is a better approach to how we use the alumni of the Foreign Office, [and]… continue to connect them more systematically to the Foreign Office.' He went on to say: 'these people who are really at the peak of their knowledge of the world, with immense diplomatic experience, then walk out of the door, never to be seen again in the Foreign Office.'

In terms of the Commonwealth, the Institute of Commonwealth Studies' extensive collection of interviews with leading Commonwealth figures in the modern Commonwealth, contains a number of important interviews of those who were involved in the 1997 Edinburgh summit. However, the role and insights of leading British figures and diplomats is absent and needs to be collected, particularly as British officials prepare again to host a Commonwealth summit, and the UK government moves into the Chair-in-Office role until the 2020 Malaysian summit.

For these reasons it is important to gather the memories of those FCO alumni who worked on the preparatory arrangements for the 1997 Edinburgh meeting, together with the recollections of senior Commonwealth diplomats, over a period in which the UK's relationship within the Commonwealth continued to evolve.

Dr Sue Onslow,
Deputy Director, Institute of Commonwealth Studies,
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And
Dr Michael Kandiah, Director, Witness Seminar Programme,
Department of Political Economy, King's College, London

Format

The seminar has been divided into two parts. The first witness seminar panel will focus on the preparations around the 1997 Edinburgh summit, the summit itself and 'retreat' of Commonwealth leaders at Gleneagles; and the second session will consider the outcome, and implications for British policy and engagement with the modern Commonwealth; and the role and functions of Commonwealth diplomats and civil society organizations.

- The witness seminar is like a group interview or conversation, led and moderated by the chair.

- There is an audience consisting of Commonwealth Secretariat alumni and current staff, academics and students of foreign policy. If there is time, the chair will ask for contributions and questions from the floor.

- The witness seminar is a public event and it will be recorded and transcribed.

- No one other than the official sound recorder should attempt to record the event.

- All participants will be identified in the recording and transcripts. It is essential that each speaker, whether a witness or from the floor, identify himself or herself before speaking for the first time.

- The agreed transcript of the proceedings, with speakers and their contributions identified, will be published electronically, on the Institute of Commonwealth Studies' Resources platform and on the Round Table (The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs) website.

Brief Chronology[1]

NOTE: the following is not meant to provide an exhaustive chronology of Britain's relations within the modern Commonwealth. It is intended to help refresh people's memories by covering significant events and milestones in the history of the Commonwealth, with reference, where relevant to the UK, and to significant world events**:**

1926	Imperial Conference: The UK and its Dominions agree they are 'equal in status, in no way subordinate one to another in any aspect of their domestic or external affairs, though united by common allegiance to the Crown, and freely associated as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations'.
16 August 1930	The first British Empire Games (the forerunners of the Commonwealth Games), Hamilton, Canada.
11 December 1931	The Statute of Westminster formalizes the Balfour Declaration (1926). Parliament renounces legislative power over the Dominions. It is adopted by Canada, the Irish Free State, Newfoundland and the Union of South Africa. Australia and New Zealand decline.
16 February 1934	Self-government of the Dominion of Newfoundland is suspended, and replaced by the Commission of Government. Newfoundland ceases to be in the Commonwealth.
4 August 1934	The second British Empire Games open in London.
5 February 1938	The third British Empire Games open in Sydney, Australia.
1 May 1944	The first Commonwealth Prime Ministers Conference convenes in London.
23 April 1946	The second Commonwealth Prime Ministers Conference convenes in London.
14 August 1947	Pakistan (including modern Bangladesh) joins the Commonwealth upon being granted independence by the UK
15 August 1947	India joins the Commonwealth on being granted independence by the UK
21 October 1947	India and Pakistan begin the first Indo-Pakistani War, over Kashmir and Jammu. (The first armed conflict between two members of the Commonwealth).
25 November 1947	New Zealand passes the Statute of Westminster Adoption Act (1947) and becomes a member of the Commonwealth.
4 February 1948	Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) joins the Commonwealth on being granted independence by the UK.
16 June 1948	Three European plantation managers are killed in Perak, sparking the Malayan Emergency, leading to the deployment of Commonwealth troops in Malaya.
11 October 1948	The third Commonwealth Prime Ministers Conference convenes in London.
31 December 1948	India and Pakistan sign a ceasefire, ending the first Indo-Pakistan War
31 March 1949	Newfoundland (a Dominion since 1934) joins Canada as a province.
18 April 1949	Eire leaves the Commonwealth upon becoming a republic (when the Republic of Ireland Act 1948 comes into effect.)

[1] Compiled by Dr Sue Onslow using a variety of open access online sources, which have been acknowledged where appropriate

22 April 1949	The fourth Commonwealth Prime Minister's Conference. Agenda is dominated by India's future within the Commonwealth.
28 April 1949	The Commonwealth Heads of Government issue the London Declaration. It allows India (and henceforth all other members) to remain in the Commonwealth without having the British monarch as Head of State, creates the position of Head of the Commonwealth, and changes the name of the organisation to 'the Commonwealth of Nations'.
26 January 1950	India becomes a republic, being the first non-Commonwealth Realm member of the Commonwealth.
4 February 1950	The fourth British Empire Games open in Auckland, New Zealand.
4 January 1951	The fifth Commonwealth Prime Ministers Conference convenes in London.
28 July 1950	The First Commonwealth Division is created, amalgamating Australian, British, Canadian, Indian and New Zealand forces engaged in the Korean War.
6 February 1952	George VI dies, and is succeeded as monarch of the Commonwealth Realms and Head of the Commonwealth by Elizabeth II.
28 April 1952	The British Commonwealth Occupation Force is officially disbanded, having transferred control of Far Eastern forces to British Commonwealth Forces, Korea.
20 October 1952	Sir Evelyn Baring, Governor of Kenya, declares a state of emergency. (the Mau Mau uprising)
3 June 1953	The sixth Commonwealth Prime Ministers Conference convenes in London. The creation of the Central African Federation (amalgamating the colonies of Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland, and the self-governing colony of Southern Rhodesia.)
30 July 1954	The British Empire Games are renamed 'the British Empire and Commonwealth Games', with the opening of the 1954 Games in Vancouver, Canada.
26 July 1955	The seventh Commonwealth Prime Ministers Conference convenes in London.
27 June 1956	The eight Commonwealth Prime Ministers Conference convenes in London.
6 March 1957	Ghana (the Gold Coast) joins the Commonwealth on being granted independence by the UK, becoming the first majority-ruled African member.
26 June 1957	The ninth Commonwealth Prime Ministers Conference convenes in London.
31 August 1957	The Federation of Malaya joins the Commonwealth upon being granted independence by the UK. It is the first monarch in the Commonwealth, except for the Commonwealth Realms.
3 January 1958	The Federation of the West Indies is formed from the British West Indies as a self-governing colony.
30 July 1958	the 1958 British Empire and Commonwealth Games open in Cardiff.
3 February 1960	Harold Macmillan gives his Wind of Change speech to the Parliament of South Africa.
3 May 1960	The tenth Commonwealth Prime Ministers Conference convenes in London.

1 October 1960	Nigeria joins the Commonwealth upon being granted independence by the UK.
8 March 1961	The eleventh Commonwealth Prime Ministers Conference convenes in London. (The agenda is dominated by criticism of South Africa.)
13 March 1961	Cyprus joins the Commonwealth, having gained independence from the UK the previous year. (Heavily opposed by the UK, it is the first small country to join.)**
27 April 1961	Sierra Leone joins the Commonwealth, upon being granted independence by the UK.
31 May 1961	South Africa becomes a republic, withdrawing from the Commonwealth.
9 December 1961	Tanganyika, now part of Tanzania, joins the Commonwealth upon being granted independence by the UK.
31 May 1961	The Federation of the West Indies collapses. Its constituent states revert to being colonies of the UK, and preparations begin to grant them separate independence within the Commonwealth.
6 August 1962	Jamaica joins the Commonwealth upon being granted independence by the UK.
31 August 1962	Trinidad and Tobago joins the Commonwealth upon being granted independence by the UK.
10 September 1962	The twelfth Commonwealth Prime Ministers Conference convenes in London.
9 October 1962	Uganda joins the Commonwealth upon being granted independence by the UK.
22 November 1962	The 1962 British Empire and Commonwealth Games open in Perth, Australia.
10 December 1962	Zanzibar, now part of Tanzania, joins the Commonwealth upon being granted independence by the UK. It is (briefly) the first hereditary monarch in the Commonwealth, except for the Commonwealth Realms.
12 December 1963	Kenya joins the Commonwealth upon being granted independence by the UK.
31 December 1963	The Central African Federation formally dissolves.
26 April 1964	Two Commonwealth members, Tanganyika and Zanzibar, merge to form the United Republic of Tanzania, which joins the Commonwealth.
6 July 1964	Malawi, previously Nyasaland and part of CAF, joins the Commonwealth upon being granted independence by the UK.
8 July 1964	The thirteenth Commonwealth Prime Ministers Conference convenes in London.
21 September 1964	Malta joins the Commonwealth upon being granted independence by the UK.
24 October 1964	Zambia, previously Northern Rhodesia, joins the Commonwealth upon being granted independence by the UK.
18 February 1965	The Gambia joins the Commonwealth upon being granted independence by the UK.
17 June 1965	The fourteenth Commonwealth Prime Ministers Conference convenes in London. The Conference approves the creation of the Commonwealth Secretariat
1 July 1965	The Commonwealth Secretariat is founded. Arnold Smith is appointed first Secretary General.
15 August 1965	India and Pakistan begin the second Indo-Pakistani War, over Kashmir and Jammu.

6 August 1965	Singapore joins the Commonwealth upon being granted independence by the UK.
23 September 1965	India and Pakistan sign a ceasefire.
11 November 1965	Rhodesia issues a Unilateral Declaration of Independence, which is rejected by London. This sparks a 15 year crisis in the Commonwealth
12 November 1965	The UK imposes full economic sanctions on Rhodesia.
10 January 1966	The fifteenth Commonwealth Prime Ministers Conference convenes in Lagos, Nigeria, to discuss the Rhodesia crisis. It is the first Conference held outside London.
10 March 1966	The Commonwealth Secretariat Act 1966 is passed, coming into effect retroactively (1 July 1965), granting the Secretariat legal immunity in the UK.
26 May 1966	Guyana, previously British Guiana, joins the Commonwealth upon being granted independence by the UK.
4 August 1966	The 1966 British Empire and Commonwealth Games open in Kingston, Jamaica. It is the first time the Games are held outside the so-called 'white Commonwealth and the last time the Games include the British Empire in their name.
6 September 1966	The sixteenth Commonwealth Prime Ministers Conference convenes in London. The UK announces NIBMAR policy towards Rhodesia (No Independence Before Majority African Rule).
30 September 1966	Botswana joins the Commonwealth upon being granted independence by the UK.
4 October 1966	Lesotho, formerly Basutoland, joins the Commonwealth upon being granted independence by the UK.
30 November 1966	Barbados joins the Commonwealth upon being granted independence by the UK.
31 January 1968	Nauru joins the Commonwealth as a 'Special Member' upon being granted independence from a joint Australia-New-Zealand-UK trusteeship. It is the first microstate to join.
12 March 1968	Mauritius joins the Commonwealth upon being granted independence by the UK.
6 September 1968	Swaziland joins the Commonwealth upon being granted independence by the UK.
7 January 1969	The seventeenth and last Commonwealth Prime Ministers Conference convenes in London.
2 March 1970	Rhodesia declares itself a republic and a new constitution takes effect.
4 June 1970	Tonga joins the Commonwealth upon being granted independence by the UK.
1 July 1970	Arnold Smith begins his second term as Commonwealth Secretary-General.
16 July 1970	The 1970 British Commonwealth Games open in Edinburgh.
28 August 1970	Samoa joins the Commonwealth, having gained independence from New Zealand in 1962. (Trusteeship)
10 October 1970	Fiji joins the Commonwealth upon being granted independence by the UK.
14 January 1971	The first Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) convenes in Singapore.
22 January 1971	At the conclusion of the first CHOGM, the assembled Commonwealth Heads of Government issue **the Singapore Declaration**, setting out the core political values of the Commonwealth. It includes commitments to individual liberty,

	freedom from racism; peace, economic and social development, and international cooperation. (Along with the **1991 Harare Declaration**, this one of the two most important documents in the Commonwealth's constitution.)
26 March 1971	East Pakistan declares its independence as Bangladesh.
3 December 1971	India intervenes in Bangladesh, sparking the Indo-Pakistan War of 1971.
16 December 1971	Pakistan surrenders to India, ending the war
1972	Pakistan leaves the Commonwealth, on international recognition of Bangladesh
18 April 1972	Bangladesh joins the Commonwealth, having gained independence from Pakistan in Dec. 1971.
10 July 1973	The Bahamas joins the Commonwealth upon being granted independence by the UK.
2 August 1973	The second Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting convenes in Ottawa.
24 January 1974	The 1974 British Commonwealth Games opens in Christchurch. (The last time the Games' name includes reference to Britain.)
7 February 1974	Grenada joins the Commonwealth upon being granted independence by the UK.
29 April 1975	The third Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting convenes in Kingston.
1 July 1975	Guyana's Shridath Ramphal succeeds Arnold Smith as Commonwealth Secretary General.
16 September 1975	Papua New Guinea joins the Commonwealth upon being granted independence by the UK.
29 June 1976	The Seychelles joins the Commonwealth upon being granted independence by the UK.
8 June 1977	The fourth Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting convenes in London. The Gleneagles Declaration, discouraging sporting contacts with apartheid South Africa.
7 July 1978	The Solomon Islands joins the Commonwealth upon being granted independence by the UK.
3 August 1978	The 1978 Commonwealth Games open in Edmonton.
1 October 1978	Tuvalu joins the Commonwealth upon being granted independence by the UK.
3 November 1978	Dominica joins the Commonwealth upon being granted independence by the UK.
12 July 1979	Kiribati joins the Commonwealth upon being granted independence by the UK.
1 August 1979	The fifth Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting convenes in Lusaka.
7 August 1979	The assembled Commonwealth Heads of Government issue the Lusaka Declaration, reaffirming the Commonwealth's opposition to racism and discrimination on the grounds of gender, demanding legal equality of all people of the Commonwealth.
September 1979	The Lancaster House conference convenes in London.
27 October 1979	St Vincent and the Grenadines join the Commonwealth upon being granted independence by the UK.
12 December 1979	Zimbabwe Rhodesia dissolves itself, returning power to the UK in preparation for recognised independence following multi-party elections.

17 April 1980	Zimbabwe formal independence.
1 July 1980	Shridath Ramphal begins his second term as Commonwealth Secretary General.
1 October 1980	Zimbabwe joins the Commonwealth.
30 July 1981	Vanuatu joins the Commonwealth upon being granted independence from a French-UK condominium.
21 September 1981	Belize joins the Commonwealth upon being granted independence by the UK.
30 September 1981	The sixth Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting convenes in Melbourne.
1 November 1981	Antigua and Barbuda joins the Commonwealth upon being granted independence by the UK.
30 September 1982	The 1982 Commonwealth Games open in Brisbane.
9 July 1983	The Maldives join the Commonwealth as a 'Special Member', upon being granted independence by the UK in 1965.
19 September 1983	St Kitts and Nevis joins the Commonwealth upon being granted independence by the UK.
25 October 1983	US invasion of Grenada, following Cuban trained troops' assassination of Prime Minister Maurice Bishop
23 November 1983	The seventh Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting convenes in New Delhi.
1 January 1984	Brunei joins the Commonwealth upon being granted independence by the UK.
31 October 1984	PM Indira Gandhi assassinated.
1 July 1985	Shridath Ramphal begins his third term as Commonwealth Secretary General.
20 July 1985	The Maldives becomes a full member of the Commonwealth
16 October 1985	The eighth Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting convenes in Nassau. Eminent Persons Group (February – May 1986) Malcolm Fraser (Australia) Olusegun Obasanjo (Nigeria) Dame Nita Barrow (Barbedos) Archbishop Edward Stott (Canada) Anthony Barber (Great Britain) John Malecela (Tanzania) Swaran Singh (India)
24 July 1986	The 1986 Commonwealth Games open in Edinburgh. The Games are boycotted by 32 countries, including almost all African, Caribbean and Asian nations, in protest against the British government's attitude to sport in apartheid South Africa.
3 August 1986**	The ninth Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting convenes in London. Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group Report formally presented.
13 October 1987	The tenth Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting convenes in Vancouver (the first outside the host nation's capital city.)
15 October 1987	Fiji is suspended from the Commonwealth, after two coups d'etat
29 September 1989	Cameroon applies for observer status in the Commonwealth, paving the way for its membership in 1995.
1 October 1989	Pakistan rejoins the Commonwealth
18 October 1989	The eleventh Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting convenes in Kuala Lumpur.

21 October 1989	The assembled Commonwealth Heads of Government issue the Langkawi Declaration, committing Commonwealth members to environmental sustainability.
24 January 1990	The 1990 Commonwealth Games open in Auckland.
21 March 1990	Namibia joins the Commonwealth upon being granted independence by South Africa.
1990	Commonwealth Finance Ministers Meeting, Trinidad Launch of Commonwealth debt relief initiative
1 July 1990	Nigeria's Chief Emeka Anyaoku succeeds Shridath Ramphal as Commonwealth Secretary General.
13 October 1991	The twelfth Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting convenes in Harare. At the conclusion, the assembled Commonwealth Heads of Government issue the **Harare Declaration**, adding the core principles and values of the core principles and values of the Commonwealth, detailing membership criteria, and redefining and reinforcing its purpose. (Along with the 1971 Singapore Declaration, it is considered one of the most important documents of the Commonwealth's constitution.)
21 October 1993	The thirteenth Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting convenes in Limassol.
April 1994.	Black majority rule in South Africa. South Africa rejoins the Commonwealth. Commonwealth Finance Ministers meeting, Malta Commonwealth debt relief initiative
18 August 1994	The 1994 Commonwealth Games open in Victoria, Canada. The event marked South Africa's return to the Games after a 36 year absence.
1 July 1995	Chief Emeka Anyaoku begins his second term as Commonwealth Secretary General.
10 November 1995	The fourteenth Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting convenes in Auckland.
12 November 1995	The assembled Commonwealth Heads of Government agree to the **Millbrook Commonwealth Action Programme** on the Harare Declaration, designed to implement the Harare Declaration's affirmation of the Commonwealth's principles and membership criteria. Creation of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG), set up to deal with persistent and serious violators of the Commonwealth's shared principles. Nigeria suspended from the Commonwealth following the sentencing to death of writer and activist, Ken Saro-Wiwa and a group of fellow activists. (during 1990s CMAG meets twice a year, and deals with Nigeria, Sierra Leone, The Gambia, Pakistan, Fiji ,Solomon Islands, & Zimbabwe; Lesotho; Tanzania-Zanzibar; Swaziland; Guyana; Antigua/Barbuda.
13 November 1995	Cameroon joins the Commonwealth (having been granted independence by France in 1960, and joined by the former British colony of South Cameroons in 1961.) Mozambique joins the Commonwealth, the first country without having had constitutional ties to an existing member.
January 1996	CMAG failed attempts to visit Nigeria.
March 1996	House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee Report on the Future of the Commonwealth (Conclusions and

	Recommendations published in the Round Table, 339, July 1996)
	Announcement that next CHOGM venue will be Edinburgh.
	GB announcement of 600,000 pledge to Commonwealth of Learning
April 1996	Indian election. Prime Minister Narasimha Rao defeated.
May 1996	BJP leader Atal Bihari Vajpayee sworn in as President, then resigned 13 days later. Devi Gowda formed government
April-May 1996	Talks between coalition of Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP), PDP and DCP, and rebel Revolutionary United Front
May 1996	Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad of Malaysia visit to Britain
June 1996	Nigerian delegation, led by FM Tomi Ikimi, visit to London.
	CMAG meeting in London (Gambia and Nigeria on formal agenda)
	Referendum in Gambia
July 1996	President Nelson Mandela visit to London.
	Launch of Commonwealth African Investment Fund
September 1996	CMAG meeting in New York
	Commonwealth Finance Ministers' meeting, Bermuda
	Proposals for HIPC
	IDA and other Bank/Fund issues
	Private capital flows
	Commonwealth Private Investment Initiative (CPII)
	Combatting Money Laundering
November 1996	CMAG visit to Nigeria
February 1997	African Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting, Botswana
	CMAG meeting in London (Nigeria, the Gambia, Sierra Leone)
March 1997	Commonwealth Day Debate, House of Commons
May 1997	British General Election.
	Labour Government under Prime Minister Tony Blair
June 1997	Hong Kong returned to Chinese rule
July 1997	CMAG meeting
31 August 1997	Death of Diana, Princess of Wales
September 1997	Commonwealth Finance Ministers Meeting, Mauritius (Globalization, HIPC, [the Mauritus Mandate], Promoting Private Capital Flows, Trade and Investment, CPII, Combatting Money Laundering.
	Gordon Brown (in one of first speeches as Chancellor) calls for wide spread relief of debt.
1 October 1997	Fiji rejoins the Commonwealth, following adoption of a new constitution more in line with Commonwealth principles.
22-23 October 1997	Commonwealth Business Forum, London (attended by businesspeople, government officials and several heads of government)
24 October 1997	The fifteenth Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting convenes in Edinburgh.
26 October 1997	Retreat at St Andrews
27 October 1997	At the conclusion, the assembled Heads of Government issue **the Edinburgh Declaration**, codifying the Commonwealth's membership criteria.
10 April 1998	Good Friday Agreement (GFA)
11 September 1998	The 1998 Commonwealth Games open in Kuala Lumpur. The first games to be held in Asia.

29 May 1999	The Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group lifts Nigeria's suspension from the Commonwealth.
18 October 1999	The Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group suspends Pakistan from the Commonwealth with immediate effect.
12 November 1999	The sixteenth Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting convenes in Durban. Thabo Mbeki becomes the first Commonwealth Chairperson-in-office.
1999	Hong Kong reverts to PRC sovereignty. (continued participation in the Commonwealth Lawyers Association, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, the Association of Commonwealth Universities, the Commonwealth Association of Legislative Counsels)
1 April 2000	New Zealand's Don McKinnon succeeds Chief Emeka Anyaoku as Commonwealth Secretary General
6 June 2000	The Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group partially suspends Fiji from the Commonwealth with immediate effect.
28 September 2000	The Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting (due to convene in Brisbane on 6 October) is cancelled in the aftermath of the 11 September attacks in the US.
20 December 2000	The Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group lifts Fiji's suspension from the Commonwealth, but keeps it on the agenda until the Supreme Court rules on the government's constitutionality.
2 March 2001	The seventeenth Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting convenes in Coolum, Australia. John Howard becomes Commonwealth Chairperson-in-office.
October 2001	Visit by Commonwealth ministers to Zimbabwe. Announcement that Zimbabwe has done little to honour commitments to end the crisis over seizures of land.
30 January 2002	The Ministerial Action Group approves General Musharaff's roadmap for the October general election
19 March 2002	After Commonwealth election observers report that Zimbabwe's presidential election was rife with fraud and intimidation, the troika, led by John Howard, announces Zimbabwe's immediate suspension from the Commonwealth.
25 July 2002	The 2002 Commonwealth Games open in Manchester.
5 December 2003	The eighteenth Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting convenes in Abuja, Nigeria. Olusegun Osabanjo becomes Commonwealth Chairperson-in-Office. Zimbabwe's suspension extended indefinitely. Don McKinnon is re-elected as Commonwealth Secretary General in a competitive election by 40 votes to 11 votes, against Sri Lanka's Lakshman Kadirgamar.
7 December 2003	Robert Mugabe personally announces Zimbabwe's immediate withdrawal from the Commonwealth, following his failure to have suspension lifted.
8 December 2003	At the conclusion of the eighteenth CHOGM, the assembled Commonwealth Heads of Government issue the Aso Rock Declaration, reaffirming the Commonwealth's commitment to the Harare Declaration.
22 May 2004	The Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group lifts Pakistan's suspension from the Commonwealth with immediate effect.
7 April 2005	the International Organisations Act 2005 is passed in the UK, amending the Commonwealth Secretariat Act 1966.

25 November 2005	The nineteenth Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting convenes in Valletta, Malta. Lawrence Gonzi becomes Commonwealth Chairperson-in-Office.
15 March 2006	The 2006 Commonwealth Games open in Melbourne.
8 December 2006	The Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group suspends Fiji from the Commonwealth with immediate effect.
24 October 2007	The committee on Commonwealth Membership makes recommendations on changes to the membership criteria of the Commonwealth.
22 November 2007	The Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group suspends Pakistan from the Commonwealth with immediate effect, following President Musharraf's declaration of a state of emergency and sacking of top judges.
23 November 2007	The twentieth Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting convenes in Kampala. Yoweri Museveni becomes Commonwealth Chairperson-in-office.
1 April 2008	Kamalesh Sharma succeeds Don McKinnon as Commonwealth Secretary General.
22 May 2008	The Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group lifts Pakistan's suspension from the Commonwealth with immediate effect.
1 September 2009	Fiji's suspension is increased to full suspension, following a failure to commit to the restoration of electoral government by 2010.
27 November 2009	The twenty-first commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting convenes in Port of Spain. Patrick Manning becomes Commonwealth Chairperson-in-Office. Rwanda joins the Commonwealth after applying for membership in 2008. (in recognition of its 'tremendous progress' since the 1994 genocide.) Eminent Persons Group (EPG) membership: Dr Emmanuel O Akewety (Ghana) Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi (Malaysia, Chairperson) Mrs Patricia Francis (Jamaica) Dr Asma Jahangir (Pakistan) Mr Samuel Kavuma (Uganda) The Hon Michael Kirby (Australia) Dr Graca Machel (Mozambique) Rt Hon Sir Malcolm Rifkind (UK) Sir Ron Sanders (Guyana) Senator Hugh Segal (Canada) Sir Ieremia Tabai (Kiribati)
26 May 2010	Kamla Persad-Bissessar becomes Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, and thus succeeds Patrick Manning as Commonwealth Chairperson-in-Office.
3 October 2010	The 2010 Commonwealth Games open in Delhi.
28 October 2011	The twenty-second Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting convenes in Perth. Julia Gillard becomes Commonwealth Chairperson in Office.
November 2011	The British Parliament's Foreign Affairs select committee recommends better representation for Crown Dependencies such as the Channel Islands in the Commonwealth.
January 2012	The Commonwealth calls for credible elections in Fiji, after General Voreqe Bainimarama announces plan to end martial rule and to hold elections in 2014. Fiji remains suspended from

	the Commonwealth and is the subject of international sanctions.
2012	Australian Prime Minister makes statement in Parliament:
2013	The controversial twenty-third Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting convenes in Columbo, Sri Lanka
2015	Commonwealth Games open in Glasgow
November 2015	The twenty-fourth Commonwealth heads meeting opens in Valetta, Malta. Patricia Scotland is elected Secretary General, against Commonwealth Deputy Secretary General Msasekgoa Masire-Mwamba, and Sir Ronald Sanders
April 2018	Commonwealth Games open at the Gold Coast, Australia
April 2018	Commonwealth summit, London

Issues for Discussion

The following list is indicative of the broad areas we are hoping will be commented upon by participants during the witness seminar:

1. The role and input and engagement of the British Government under Prime Minister Rt Hon John Major to the Commonwealth.

2. The decision for Britain to host the 1997 summit in Edinburgh.

3. The attitude of the British Labour party to the Commonwealth before coming to office.

4. The 1997 Election, and Labour in office:
    - The place of the Commonwealth in Labour's 'ethicial' foreign policy
    - Labour and the Commonwealth:
    - Personalities and Policies (the attitude and approach of Prime Minister Rt Hon Tony Blair, Foreign Secretary Robin Cook)
    - A Revitalized Commonwealth?
    - The Queen's tour of Pakistan and India

5. The importance of Commonwealth developments:
    The work of CMAG (Sierra Leone, Nigeria, The Gambia)
    Soundings from potential new members

6. Preparations for the summit:
    Official motif: Trade, Investment and Development

7. The Commonwealth summit

- policy issues
- trade and investment
- commodity-dependent countries
- impact of globalization on low-income countries
- sustainable pathways out of debt

- Membership criteria
    Applications from Yemen, Rwanda and Palestinian National Authority

- Proposed aid programmes
- Trade and Investment Access Facility
- Commonwealth Training Centre
- Simplification of customs procedures
- Commonwealth Export Training centres

- Launch of South Asia Regional Fund (part of Commonwealth Private Investment Initiative, [CDC/Commonwealth Secretariat)

- CMAG reports (Nigeria, Sierra Leone)

- the distraction of other issues in British foreign policy and party politics: EMU

8. The Retreat (St Andrews)

9. The Edinburgh Economic Declaration.

10. The Edinburgh summit and the Queen.

11. Role of Commonwealth NGOs in Edinburgh

11. The Commonwealth summit and the Press.

12. Aftermath

Discussion

Dr Sue Onslow

Ladies and gentlemen, honoured speakers and honoured guests, it gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the Institute of Commonwealth Studies at Senate House. I am Sue Onslow, acting Director of the Institute, and it is my pleasure to chair this event on 'Britain in the Commonwealth: the 1997 Edinburgh Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM).'

It gives me great pleasure to welcome those who were closely involved in the planning – both political and logistical – within the British Government, within the Commonwealth Secretariat and, critically, within the non-governmental organisation (NGO) sector in the run-up to CHOGM. As we face the Commonwealth summit which will be held in London next month, it is worth remembering that the Edinburgh heads' meeting was the last time Britain hosted such an event. I think that we will all identify many echoes from the context of the Edinburgh meeting, which are still relevant to this day – the background of Europe, the background of problems within the Commonwealth, debates about its revitalisation, debates about membership, and debates about the headship – which were all there in the 1997 summit.
This was, of course, the first summit which had a prearranged motif of economics, which had been agreed before the incoming Labour government under Tony Blair, elected in May 1997. We will be covering the transitional arrangements from the John Major government into the new Blair administration, and then the summit itself. It gives me great pleasure to welcome here around this table Sir John Holmes, who then was PPS to the Prime Minister. He first joined Prime Minister John Major's office in Downing Secretary as his Private Secretary, Overseas Affairs, and Diplomatic Adviser at the beginning of 1996. He continued in this role under Prime Minister Tony Blair from 1997 to 1999, becoming his PPS, and was a key figure in the negotiation of the Good Friday Agreement; consequently he had a particularly close view of the important backdrop of British domestic political debates in the run up to, and at the time of the Edinburgh summit.

I also welcome Mr Martin Hatfull, who was then Head of the Commonwealth Coordination Department at the FCO. Mr Hatfull is a former British diplomat, and recently stepped down as Director of International Public Affairs at Diageo. Formerly on the UK-India Business Council, he is currently Vice Chair of the UK-ASEAN

Business Council. Mr Hatfull joined the FCO in 1980 and rose to become Minister at the British Embassy in Tokyo between 2003-2008 and also served as Ambassador to Indonesia.

In 1997 Mr Stuart Mole, on my left, was Director and Head of the Office of the Commonwealth Secretary General, Chief Emeka Anyaoku. Stuart Mole had joined the Secretariat in the early 1980s and, by this point, along with my other colleague, Mr Amitav Banerji, was – I hesitate to use the word – a veteran of CHOGMs, which was very important in terms of their detailed knowledge and experience in the framing, assistance and planning of these summits. After serving at the Secretariat, Mr Mole later became Director of the RCS between 2000 and 2008.

Mr Amitav Banerji, in 1997, was Deputy Conference Secretary at the Commonwealth Secretariat. He later became Chief of Staff to Secretary General Don McKinnon. He also served as Director of the Political Affairs Department and is now Project Director at the Global Leadership Foundation.

Ms Prunella Scarlett, then Director of Commonwealth Affairs at the RCS, will be speaking about the very important role of NGOs at the Edinburgh summit, giving the background context, the organisation and the multidimensional aspects of the Commonwealth and the innovation of including civil society.

I am delighted also to welcome to this table, not as a 'late entry' but as a very welcome addition to the discussion, Ms Anji Hunter, then Personal Assistant to Prime Minister Tony Blair.

Thank you very much indeed, honoured guests.

If I may provide a brief framework to our discussion: witness seminars are organised as an interactive discussion. These are not intended as the occasion for delivering long speeches, but rather for each participant to talk to the others, to interrogate recollections and to stimulate our memories. I am sorry that Dr Moses Anafu, formerly in the Political Affairs Department and Deputy Conference Secretary in 1997, cannot be with us today. I am also very sorry that Sir Richard Dales, then Director, Africa and the Commonwealth, FCO, is similarly unable to attend. However, he has kindly sent a memorandum of his recollections, which are as follows:

Sir Richard Dales

I took up my post (at the time designated Assistant Under Secretary of State for Africa and the Commonwealth) in late 1995, and thus inherited the decision to hold the 1997 CHOGM in Edinburgh. My recollections of both the preparations for the Conference and the event itself are very sketchy. This is partly a consequence of the lapse of time and my age, but also of the fact that the bulk of the work in the FCO was done by the excellent teams of the Commonwealth Coordination Department, who coordinated the contribution from the departments dealing with economic policy, trade and development etc and of the Conference Section of Protocol Department who took care of the logistical arrangements. In addition, events in Africa were a constant preoccupation for me. That's my excuse anyway.

Policy and Agenda Preparations

John Major's Conservative Government was in office. Malcolm Rifkind was Secretary of State and Lynda Chalker, Minister of State covering Africa and the Commonwealth. The Conservative Party had a reputation for regarding the Commonwealth as a bit of a nuisance, a forum in which the former colonies could pillory the ex-colonial power and beg for more aid. This attitude was not reflected in the government. The Commonwealth was still named separately in the title of the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, a separate Department in the FCO covered Commonwealth affairs (like the departments covering the EU and the UN etc). Ministers probably saw the main benefit of the Commonwealth as lying in the way its multiplicity of NGO and groupings (such as judges) provided a means of upholding its values. But it also provided a forum bringing together a third of the countries in the world and thus a means for Britain to project its policies. At the same time, ministers were well aware of the importance of avoiding appearing to treat the Commonwealth as a useful poodle internationally.

The CHOGM was therefore a major opportunity for the UK. It was going to take place soon before the UK assumed the Presidency of the EU (first half of 1998) and the Chairmanship of the G10. A complication in preparing the agenda and intended outcome of the CHOGM was that a British General Election was expected before the end of 1997. Opinion polls made it seem likely that Labour would come into office. We therefore had to ensure that British objectives were supported by both major parties. Ensuring that all the preparations for the CHOGM would survive a change of government was a major preoccupation for me. It was decided early on that the

principal British objectives should be to get the Commonwealth to sign up to policies to remove barriers to trade and investment, a major foreign policy objective at the time but also one which was likely to be shared by Labour and LibDems. Discreet contacts tended to confirm this. Another strategic objective was action on environmental protection.

These policy issues were not the sole preserve of the Commonwealth Coordination Department, or even the FCO, so the coordination across Whitehall and with the Commonwealth Secretariat was a major undertaking. However, I recall the Secretariat as being supportive, while emphasising the importance of making sure that the benefits of liberalisation would extend to the poorer and smaller countries. The all-important preparatory meeting of Senior Officials was constructive as we were able to be sympathetic to suggestions that the trade and investment policy we hoped would emerge from the CHOGM should include measures to protect the interests of small states. (The more difficult issue was how to achieve this, but I do not remember how it was resolved.) Britain also shared the serious concerns that several Commonwealth countries, especially in the Pacific, were threatened by rising sea levels and needed special attention in international negotiations on environmental protection. It was a useful supporting argument in international negotiations.

Internal Politics

Labour distinguished itself from the Conservatives in expressing a certain enthusiasm for the Commonwealth as an institution with the implication that a Labour Government in office would pay more attention to it. Discreet enquiries suggested that Labour would support the British proposals for the CHOGM. (In my view the differences between the two parties were purely presentational and not substantial- as indeed with Robin Cook's so-called "ethical foreign policy". There were no significant changes in the execution of policy with the change of government, as regards either the Commonwealth or ethics.)

I was naturally concerned to ensure that the new Labour Government was in full agreement with both the policy issues and the arrangements for the CHOGM. I was advised by one of my political contacts that to ensure the Prime Minister's support I had to get myself accepted by two lady "gate-keepers" at No 10, both of whom I arranged to consult. When I was summoned to brief Tony Blair (the first time was fairly early on) I found him well up on what we were proposing and receptive to

suggestions. I remember nothing of substance, but I do remember coming away from the meeting feeling with great relief that the PM was on board. He was also very much aware of the special opportunity to promote British interests offered by the co-incidence of the CHOGM, EU Presidency and G10 chairmanship within a six month period.

I should mention that Robin Cook took remarkably little interest in the preparations for the CHOGM (or indeed in the Commonwealth). Baroness Symons, a junior FCO Minister, had responsibility for the Commonwealth. She took a particular interest in the logistical arrangements.

CMAG

We regarded CMAG as a useful committee. I do not remember the issue of Asian membership as a major preoccupation for the Committee (or Britain) as it hit straight at the rivalry between India and Pakistan and no-one wanted both!

Lynda Chalker had been a very active participant in CMAG meetings and although there were mutterings from some other members that the Secretary of State should attend in person, I do not re-member whether either Malcolm Rifkind or Robin Cook ever attended.

Commonwealth Membership

A subsidiary British objective for the CHOGM was to get the Commonwealth to take a stance on Nigeria (then under Sonny Abacha), the Gambia, Sierra Leone and to adopt the recommendations of CMAG on criteria for Commonwealth Membership. Mandela had railroaded the previous CHOGM into accepting Mozambique as a member, which had no British connections whatsoever. Rwanda and the PLO were now seeking to join. The PLO was not eligible as it was not a state, but Rwanda was in the hands of an English- speaking regime which had grown up in exile in Uganda and come to power with a huge tide of sympathy after a bloody ethnic conflict only three years be-fore the CHOGM. The UK was determined to stop the expansion to countries which had no experience of “Commonwealth values”. It was hard enough making sure that all existing members put into practice the concepts of the Harare Declaration. Even the proposed criteria would in theory al-low Iraq, Libya and Palestine to apply, but the last thing anybody wanted was the exposure of the Commonwealth to the intractable problems of the Middle East. My recollection is that

the UK and its allies fended off the new applications, but I recall the look of extreme annoyance on Mandela's face when his attempt to admit the PLO (I am not sure about Rwanda) was thwarted. I think it may have been the first time that he had been overruled. He was evidently not used to failing to get his way.

Logistics

The first CHOGM I attended was in Kingston, Jamaica, in 1975. (I was an Assistant Private Secretary to the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, James Callaghan.) It lasted over a week. The CHOGM of 1977 (which I also attended part of) was only slightly shorter. Both included an away-weekend, when Heads of Government and Foreign Ministers gathered separately in informal surroundings without officials. By the 1990's no British Prime Minister could afford to devote so long to one meeting (and nor could many other Heads of Government) given the multiplicity of international meetings of that period. Moreover, the whole weekend Retreat away from the conference centre had become more difficult, both because of the need for suitably prestigious hotel accommodation for over fifty Heads of Government and because the increase in the number of Commonwealth members had made the informality of the weekend very difficult to achieve. The 1997 meeting was therefore not only cut down to 4 days, Friday to Monday, but the Retreat was turned into a day trip. I remember that this caused resentment among some countries but that Britain would make no concession. I cannot remember whether the 4 day meeting was decided upon by Mr Major or by Mr Blair, but I believe that the decision not to stay a night away on Retreat was taken by Mr Blair, because of the difficulties of finding suitable hotel accommodation for such large numbers outside Edinburgh. At one time we were considering having the Retreat in Edinburgh, so that no-one would have to move. In the end we decided upon St Andrews to which a special train took all participants. The journey would be easier to organise than having masses of cars trying to get out of Edinburgh and the travelling time could form part of the Retreat. It did not work. There were quite a few critical mutterings on that train!

The logistical arrangements for the CHOGM were in the hands of the FCO's Conference Section. I went early on the Edinburgh to look at the facilities and to establish links with the Scottish civil servants in Edinburgh who would have to help with much of the preparatory work. (Police and security, car hire firms, hotels, press arrangements and ultimately provision of separate facilities for the Business and NGO forums which (I think) ran in parallel. Soon after Labour came into Government,

I went again, with Baroness Symons, to check that all the arrangements made by that time were right. Conference Section were very effective in coordinating all the different aspects of logistics. They recruited a businessman to help with contract negotiations covering everything from hotels to freebies (the memento packs (of varying value) given to all delegates. (I still have my CHOGM 1997 ballpoint!!) I chaired coordination meetings attended by different departments to ensure that all the boxes were ticked on both the substance of the meeting and the arrangements. I am fairly sure that we came in on budget.

The logistical arrangements were extremely difficult because none of the facilities were really big enough for such a large meeting of VIPs. Even the (new) Conference Centre was a tight fit. But there was no question of moving the venue from Edinburgh. I remember negative comments from some Commonwealth officials who I think thought that we had done the CHOGM on the cheap. There was of course never any question of building a special Commonwealth village on a par with Mobutu's OAU village in Kinshasa, where each OAU head of Government had their own villa to stay in at an OAU Summit!

Dr Sue Onslow

I would now like to invite Sir John Holmes to begin. Sir John, what are your recollections around the decision to hold the summit in the UK, the attitude of Prime Minister John Major, and your memory of events as the summit itself approached?

Sir John Holmes

Thank you very much, Sue, and thank you very much for the invitation. As I said to you right at the beginning, this is coloured by the fact that my memory of the detail of this event is limited, although refreshed by the documents you have sent round; so a certain amount of secondary reconstruction may have gone on from my memory, but let us hope not too much.

I thought that what I would do is not really talk, certainly in this introductory bit, about much detail but just talk about the general context in which the event was happening from, first of all, John Major's point of view and then Tony Blair's point of view. Forgive me if I am slightly brutal at times about it.

The first point to make is to put a Commonwealth summit into the general context of a prime minister's diary. Any prime minister these days – and certainly in those days as well – is incredibly busy, trying to do several jobs at once – being prime minister, keeping their party going, keeping the House of Commons going and so on – with a large number of international obligations which, to some extent, in a prime minister's view, get in the way of the real business of governing their own country.

There are a large number of summits on the agenda in any one year, and I would say that CHOGM is the most pleasant but possibly the least substantive of those; therefore, that is the way in which a prime minister would approach it and, not of their own volition, necessarily, take a huge interest in it until it happens and they have to be there and deal with it. Of course, it has a lot of ancillary advantages: it is a great place to meet a lot of leaders in one place and in a way in which you cannot do at other summits such as European or NATO summits. This is a much broader gathering, a bit like the United Nations, in a way, so that is an attraction of any CHOGM.

The job of someone like me was always to try to make sure that there was enough focus from the prime minister – whether it was John Major or Tony Blair – on what was going to be an important public event and to make sure that they had enough input into it and that they were happy with the way the preparations were going. That is the general approach to it.

As far as John Major was concerned, by the time I got there, the decision to hold a meeting in the UK had been taken significantly before that, but the serious preparations were just beginning. Just to put it into the context of John Major's thinking about it: although he would not have said it in quite this way, he would have had a pretty good idea that he was not going to be at the heads' meeting. Although he was hoping to win the election, the chances of that, even at 18 months out, did not look particularly bright, so that, no doubt, would have coloured his attitude. So one just needs to have that in mind too.

At the same time, of course, he wanted it to be done properly – to be a well-run summit with some good themes and some good substance in it. That is the point which I recall most strongly: this desire from John Major downwards that this should be a substantive summit, with some meat to the agenda which was not just the usual declarations of values. Commonwealth summits in the past had been completely

dominated by subjects like South Africa, which was no longer on the agenda in the same way, although there were other issues of a similar nature, perhaps. There was, then, a desire to say, 'Can we use the Commonwealth for something else and focus it on something else?' - hence the idea of a summit very much focused on economic issues. Trade and investment was an initial wish and it was necessary to add development to that later, because that was a preoccupation of most of the Commonwealth members, which was not a problem.

That was the wish: to focus it on that. I am not going to talk about the logistics of it because that goes for itself, but there was a number of meetings that I was involved in with the Commonwealth people in the FCO about how we should organise this, about how we should make sure that this focus trade and investment and development was there, what we could get out of it, and what the traps, problems and opportunities were. That was what was happening in John Major's time; of course, he disappeared five months before it happened. As the time approached, it became more and more obvious that he was not going to win the election, and it became more and more problematic to run the government as a whole. It was a very difficult end-of-government period after 18 years of Conservatives in power and the lack of a majority etc, so his own personal attention to the summit, I think, was pretty limited. That, then, was the Major approach to it in general, without trying to get into too much detail.

When Tony Blair arrived on 1 May, again you need to remember the context, which is sometimes a bit hard to believe now. This was a time when Tony Blair could walk on water, as far as the electorate was concerned; and he was a prime minister with huge self-confidence in his own ability to reach agreement on almost anything. There was, as your papers bring out, a Labour commitment to the Commonwealth. If I am honest, however, I do not think I could say that Tony Blair's commitment to the Commonwealth was particularly obvious – not that he was against it at all but it was not something that was foremost in his thoughts. If the Commonwealth bits were there – and Anji can correct me if I am wrong – it was probably more because of Robin Cook than it was because of Tony Blair. If you look at his record, he did his stuff at the Commonwealth when he had to but, I was looking at his autobiography a couple of days ago and, if you look in the back index for 'Commonwealth', you will not find it, and that is perhaps not an accident.

At the same time, he wanted to make a success of this meeting – it was an important that the UK was hosting, and there was the commitment to the Commonwealth – and to be a more positive supporter of the Commonwealth than the Conservatives had been; so there was an obvious incentive from that point of view to make a success of it. He wanted to make a success of everything. Since everything was new, there was an opportunity to do different and new things and to get some positive press interest in it. Getting the British press interested in the Commonwealth is always an uphill struggle but he was certainly very keen to do that, if he possibly could, and I think that coloured his attitude to the approach to the summit. I think he was happy that there was this economic focus that fitted with the agenda and with the idea of putting some substance into it, if at all possible, and not just having the usual political arguments. He was particularly interested in the global-trade side, which was a bit controversial, as we will, no doubt, come to later, but also in Nigeria and the issues that that was causing at the time.

It was a job to get him to focus on Commonwealth summit before it happened, and that is particularly also because there were some very big issues preoccupying him at the time in the run-up to that, including learning how to be a prime minister, apart from anything else. Northern Ireland was a constant preoccupation throughout this time and went on for many years after that, and was much in mind. The particular preoccupation in the run-up to the summit and during the summit itself was the argument about the European currency: whether we should join and what we should say about that. It is not a secret that there was a lot of disagreement between him and Gordon Brown about this. There was a huge amount of negotiation that had been going on for weeks – indeed, months – about what sort of statement should be made about that, culminating in the statement which Gordon Brown made on the Monday immediately after the summit.

His mind was very much on that all that time, because this was a huge existential issue for the UK. It is something to which he was committed but knew that there were huge problems with. As I say, there was a disagreement with Gordon Brown about it, which was also concerning. Again, you just need to have that context firmly in mind when you are thinking about the Edinburgh meeting.

Perhaps the last bit of context is the relationship with Robin Cook, which was not always the easiest relationship. Robin Cook had announced a new foreign policy approach – I am not sure how new it was, to be honest, but it was called a new

foreign policy approach, and it was labelled by Robin Cook an 'ethical' foreign policy. Tony Blair did not want foreign policy to be unethical but his approach was more pragmatic, so he was not particularly bought-in to the new, ethical nature of foreign policy. He wanted to make sure that we were defending British interests in perhaps a more pragmatic way than that label would have implied, so, again, that was somewhere in the background of the relationships going on at the time of the summit. That, then, is by way of introduction, if I may.

Dr Sue Onslow

Thank you very much indeed, Sir John. Mr Hatfull, how does this correspond to your own recollections in terms of the focus and attention of the Prime Minister and engagement with your own Department?

Martin Hatfull

It corresponds very well. My perspective on it was different from John's because of the different role that I was doing. Perhaps just to set a bit of personal context: I was appointed to the role as Head of Commonwealth Coordination Department in late 1996, so about a year out from the summit itself. I was appointed on promotion, and the relevance of that is that, normally, to be honest, the job of Head of Commonwealth Coordination Department would not have been one which would have been terribly attractive to a reasonably ambitious, youngish diplomat in the FCO, because normally it was seen as very much of a backwater. However, it was because it was CHOGM that it was set up as something which was an opportunity to be involved in something which was of real significance and importance to the Government, who wanted, as John was saying, to have a substantive summit. There was also already at that stage a recognition of the need to try to reinvigorate not necessarily the Commonwealth but the UK's relationship with the Commonwealth. That reflected partly a difficult relationship between the UK and the Commonwealth – or a relationship which was difficult at times – which I think was a reflection of the concerns which many members of the Commonwealth had about Prime Minister Thatcher's views on apartheid South Africa, and that that coloured a lot of Commonwealth member states' attitudes to the UK. The FCO had difficulty knowing how to cope with that, to some extent.

John touched on the difficulties of the Major administration at the time, and certainly, working in the FCO at that time, one was very aware of that. I came to my role from a job in one of the EU departments, and we had had, during the course of 1996, the

bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE)-related beef ban, the policy of non-cooperation with the EU, and John Major being in hock to a few extreme right-wing Conservatives like Teddy Taylor and others. The whole atmosphere was very difficult, so there was no sense of a dynamic foreign policy being executed at that time.

In addition, in March 1996, the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Commons published a very important report on the future of the Commonwealth, which was very critical of the Government's approach to the Commonwealth, essentially arguing that it was neglecting an important asset. Already, by the time that I came into my job, there was a determination on the part of the FCO to try to respond to that by demonstrating not only a commitment to make a successful CHOGM but to try to use the Commonwealth more effectively as part of the UK's foreign policy.

To some extent, the motivation for that was more to do with trying to deflect further criticism from Parliament, rather than any substantive foreign-policy objective. Certainly, in the tail end of the Major administration, I do not really recollect any close attention on CHOGM preparations from Malcolm Rifkind or other FCO ministers, with the exception of Lynda Chalker, who was interested. The then Permanent Secretary, John Coles, was also quite focused on CHOGM preparations.

John touched on the fact that the major decisions in terms of location, format and theme etc had already been taken, and I think, insofar as the business forum was concerned and also the separate dedicated centre for the NGOs at CHOGM, my recollection is that those decisions had been taken in principle but were still to be sorted in terms of the detail of the practicalities. During the last few months of the Major administration, my main focus was, first of all, on learning about the Commonwealth, because I knew absolutely nothing about the Commonwealth when I took the job. That is also indicative because I had done a range of different jobs in the FCO by that stage, but I think there were very few people working in the FCO who understood the Commonwealth or had more than a passing knowledge of it. It is an extremely complex organism rather than an organisation, and so trying to get my head around that was the main preoccupation.
In terms of trying to get staff and resources, the Commonwealth Coordination Department, when I joined it, was about four people. Trying to build that up into a team which could be the core of a team which would manage the summit, with other departments like the Conference Department at the FCO and other bits of the

Government machinery that we were also able to draw on, was a big preoccupation, just in terms of getting the staff in place. Clearly, making a start on the practical arrangements, we knew that there was an election coming and that, therefore, there was no point in trying to start to fine-tune things such as hotels and transport arrangements. At that stage, it was not possible anyway that far out from the summit.

There was also quite a lot of non-CHOGM-related stuff that still had to be dealt with. There was an issue over the future of the Commonwealth Institute, for example. There were all the routine issues to do with the Commonwealth Finance Committee and the relationships with the Commonwealth Secretariat and so on.

When the Labour Government came in, my recollection is that it was, within the FCO, widely welcomed because it offered an opportunity for a fresh start. There were difficulties in the FCO, as elsewhere, initially over Labour ministers' suspicions about bureaucrats who they expected to be tainted by years of Thatcherism, but one got over that. From the Commonwealth's point of view, my sense was that there was a great sense of goodwill towards to the Labour Government, precisely because it was the flipside of the concerns about Thatcher's views on apartheid and the fact that the Labour Party had been such a strong supporter of the anti-apartheid movement. That alone stood it in quite a lot of credit.

John touched on the fact that the new Government was happy with the economic focus and the broad arrangements for CHOGM, and also repeated that desire to be clearer about what the Commonwealth was for and what its economic role was. There was also a relationship there to the ethical foreign policy; for example, trying to get a stronger role for the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) so that it was effective in implementing the principles in the Harare Declaration in relation to Nigeria, Sierra Leone and elsewhere was a concern. Subsequently, that was a matter of some discussion with Commonwealth members.

As we approached the summit itself, I was juggling administration and logistics – things like liaising with the two different police forces in Scotland who were involved, as well as with colleagues in the Commonwealth Secretariat and other bits of Government – as well as, from a policy point of view, trying to keep an oversight of what was happening with the developing economic declaration and the developing communiqué etc. There is an extraordinary Christmas tree, especially in the report

of the Committee of the Whole, which gets endorsed by ministers with an incredible number of different Commonwealth organisations and bodies of one sort or another that need to be recognised in some form in the CHOGM communiqué.

That was the antithesis of the sense that we got from Anji and colleagues in Number 10, which was a desire to make CHOGM something which was identifiably an achievement for the Prime Minister in particular. That was increasingly evident as we got closer to the date, and I remember a number of meetings with Anji, Magi Cleaver and, on occasion, Alastair Campbell and others on a range of things like the logo, the branding, the video, the new orchestration of the national anthem and all of that sort of stuff around the production, if you like, of the event, which Number 10, understandably, placed a lot of importance on. It was not only that, however; it was also, as I said earlier, a renewed focus on trying to establish an identity for the Commonwealth: 'Why are we doing all this?' It is because it is important for the world economy and for development, and also for education. One of the things that is sometimes overlooked is the stuff on the Commonwealth of Learning, and that was an important focus as we prepared.

Those, then, are my impressionistic recollections, at this distance, of the preparations for the summit.

Dr Sue Onslow

Thank you very much, Mr Hatfull. Ms Hunter, if I could ask you at this particular point in the flow of the conversation, for your particular recollections of how quickly – if at all – Prime Minister Tony Blair came to understand the Commonwealth as a complex organism rather than as an organisation? And if you could comment on his relationship with Robin Cook? It is often said that personalities in politics are very important. Robin Cook had recently been involved in a very controversial tour of the Queen to Pakistan and to India, which had created a lot of attention in the press – it had been a point of real friction with the Indian Government around the issue of Kashmir. Could you add any light on those two different aspects?

Anji Hunter

If I could just recollect something that both of these gentlemen have touched on: the election that year, was held on 1 May 1997. So we went in [to No 10] on 2 May and there had been, as John said, 18 years of Conservative rule. There was this sense, you will recall, in 1997 of youth, vigour and excitement about our administration

coming in. You say that you had been planning for a change of government. I can absolutely promise you that we never expected to win in the way that we did and with that huge majority. We did not. We entered on 2 May, and I remember walking into Downing Street. We were somewhat in a state of shock at entering No. 10 in any event. At the risk of sounding sycophantic in this company, the one thing you know when you get into Downing Street is you just say, 'Thank you, God, for our civil servants'. You do have a Rolls Royce machine and operation in Downing Street – these guys and the Cabinet Secretary – and you know you are in the hands of people who really know how to do things properly, which is what we wanted to do. We were not like this current Labour Party – we were New Labour and we were pro-business, pro-monarchy and pro-the establishment.

I remember, in my first or second week, being called in to the Cabinet Room. The Prime Minister was sitting there, and I think Sir Robin Butler, the Cabinet Secretary, was sitting opposite him. John was also in there, as was the Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook. If it is okay with you, I will refer to Tony Blair as 'Tony'. Tony said, 'I have just been informed that we have four massive events coming up over the next year. We have CHOGM'. I did not even know what 'CHOGM' meant. He said, 'We have to host the Commonwealth in October. In April, we have the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). In May, we have the G8 in Birmingham. Then we have the European summit in Cardiff in June'. He said to me, 'You are going to the point person on all of this with the FCO'. You can imagine that I was in a state of shock at that.

Robin and the Prime Minister had an odd relationship. We had always thought that Robin was more from the left wing of the party and we always thought he was what we called 'tricksy': you were never quite sure with him. However, they had mutual respect for each other. There was no question about that. I have to say Tony was not mad keen on the ethical foreign policy – not, as John says, that he was for an unethical foreign policy, but just to raise it up in this sort of 'Of course we are going to have an ethical foreign policy, and of course our people in the FCO are going to behave in an ethical way'. He was slightly suspicious of the Foreign Secretary on that but they worked together – there was no question about that – and they worked together perfectly well, often with the help of the officials that would smooth the waters between them.

We were sitting in this room and the Foreign Secretary said, 'If you are having your person involved in this, I want my person involved in it too'. We were just waiting to

see whom he suggested, and he suggested Baroness Symons, who was a very good person because she was emollient and very respectful of her colleagues and her officials in the Department. I knew she would work really well with us: she was 'one of us', as they say.

We were set to work on these four events, the first of which was CHOGM. It is true that the Prime Minister was not anti the Commonwealth. He did not know much about it but he was keen to find out about it. When he found out that this was going to be the biggest one that had ever been, with 48 countries represented, 20 of which all had new leaders, he felt he was amongst a new group of people too. It was not just us being new; they were all new.

I do not know if you recall but there was this thing called 'Cool Britannia', which we had not invented. I absolutely promise it was not a phrase of ours. Cool Britannia was on the front of *Time* magazine. Ben & Jerry's had an ice-cream called Cool Britannia. It was out there and some of our own younger officials were quite excited by it in Downing Street: the prospect of Oasis and these sorts of people coming into Downing Street. There was that thing about 'Let us not just make this a meeting of heads of state; let us make it a cultural event as well and to be as sensible culturally as possible, and not to have the Spice Girls or anything', although I believe we had them at the G8, rather regretfully. We had Evelyn Glennie, the Scottish percussionist, and John Thaw doing a reading. There was also poetry and ballet. A couple of countries put on some splendid song and dance as well, so there was that sense of trying to make it into something like a fringe, with fringe events to the main event.

It was also the first time that the Queen was presiding over the Commonwealth. Before, she had attended Commonwealths, but it was at receptions the night before. She opened it, however, and presided over it. We wanted that in the news. We were hell-bent on getting good coverage in those days. I remember her looking very bemused during the national anthem because, as John said, it was a new version of it, which nobody recognised. Nobody stood up – that was what was embarrassing. Liz Symons got everybody to stand up in the royal box. She got the Foreign Secretary to stand up.

It was exciting in that sense. There was a new, 'Let us make it youthful and vigorous', not just about people getting in a room and just, 'Chat, chat, chat'. We

arranged a photo-call with Nelson Mandela walking around the golf course – things like that that we knew the media would be interested in – as well as going to St Andrews on the Orient Express. We organised great pictures of all of that, so we did get into the newspapers but not much because, as has been referred to, our single horror that weekend was the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU). The Prime Minister and the Chancellor, Gordon Brown, were absolutely at loggerheads the entire weekend on the phone. Tony Blair was trying to do bilaterals and trying to have good meetings. I remember Mugabe giving us a great lecture on land ownership and distribution.

Tony did really definitely try to have these bilateral meetings but he was slightly obsessed with what was going on down in Whitehall, and various briefings and the Chancellor's people briefing against us. Trying to keep the whole CHOGM thing on the road was one of my responsibilities, and I think most people who attended it thought it had been successful.

Dr Sue Onslow

Thank you very much indeed. Stuart, if I may, what are your recollections?

Stuart Mole

Thank you. Can I first say that, at the last witness seminar I attended, I arrived late and, to much derision, said that I had been delayed by cows on the line at Taunton. When I fought my way through the snow this morning, I thought, 'I am not going to be late today'.

It is very interesting to hear three colleagues talking about the summit, and I just want to chip in, from our perspective, with, first of all, how we saw John Major and Tony Blair. The first thing to say about John Major is that he had some feeling for the Commonwealth originally because of the time that he spent in Nigeria, which ended prematurely with a very nasty road accident; but he also had that short stint as Foreign Secretary, where he had had a rather unfortunate experience, although he did not seem to think so particularly – at least not in his memoirs – at the Kuala Lumpur CHOGM over South Africa, where Mrs Thatcher was seen to disown him. He was also Chancellor of the Exchequer and he was among a long and honourable line of British chancellors who have advanced the cause of debt relief within the Commonwealth. John Major was instrumental in encouraging the Commonwealth to get behind the Toronto terms at that stage in terms of debt relief. Gordon Brown took

on that same tradition. By the time John Majot came to the Commonwealth as Prime Minister, he was not unknown and he knew the Commonwealth in a way that perhaps Tony Blair did not.

The other thing I want to say is that the 1991 Harare CHOGM was a very important one for the Commonwealth in terms of trying to exorcise the ghosts of Mrs Thatcher and of the whole anti-apartheid struggle in terms of the antagonisms with the British Government. I think there was a recognition on the Commonwealth side that it meant a far greater focus on governance, human rights and democracy. It was in the UK's interests to see some coming together from what some have described as a binary Commonwealth that opened up in the 1980s between the UK and the rest, as it were.

I mention Harare because, of course, although every CHOGM is different, because, while you have the Secretariat that tries to stick to its script in terms of how it plays its part at this summits, every host is different. Therefore, there is a different chemistry and a different character to each of the summits and, of course, Edinburgh was no exception. However, although the host plays a very important role, it is not the only player in this. The job of the Secretary General is to conduct extensive consultations with other heads of government – I think there were 46 heads of government in Edinburgh, which was a record, and 52 countries represented overall. Of course, all sorts of interests will come.

I absolutely agree with Martin in terms of the Foreign Affairs Committee report of 1996. David Howell, a huge advocate for the Commonwealth then, as now, was the Chairman of that committee. That was a very important report in changing perceptions of the Commonwealth's role in that respect. However, there were other perspectives on the economic side which were coming in and which were instrumental; for instance, quite a lot of countries had said that 'Harare in 1991 concentrated more on the political dimension and we believe there ought to be a Harare economic declaration, maybe even with the same instrumentality that developed with CMAG'. There was, then, a feeling that there needed to be more on the economic side and, in particular, development. Of course, it was in Edinburgh too where the small-states agenda got second wind. Since a majority of Commonwealth countries – then and now – are small states, that too was important. When the economic declaration came out, it was an amalgam of all these different views.

Anji reminded us about the whole cultural side and the beginnings of what we now recognise as different forums and so on. That was very important. The unique thing, which, no doubt, Pru will talk about, is the UK Year of the Commonwealth and the build-up, and the way we worked together on that. That was extremely important. I hope we are going to talk about the monarchy and about some of the resonances now of what happened then, not just in terms of the Queen being present at the opening and making a speech, which was new ground, but also in other respects, where the question of the succession was an issue.

On the national anthem, people said that they thought it had been played on the central-heating system – that is what it more or less sounded like, I think. There were other aspects of Cool Britannia – whether it was wise to highlight *Trainspotting* as one of the UK's major cultural outpourings, I do not know.

Stuart Mole

I am sure we will – and I hope we do – come on to discussing the retreat. The idea of an away-day as opposed to an overnight stop and the retreat, ever since Pierre Trudeau initiated the idea, was seen as a very important creative component of the Commonwealth meeting. The away-day did present challenges and came in for some criticism for being truncated in that way.

Dr Sue Onslow

Stuart, thank you very much indeed. Mr Banerji, could I ask you to contribute your recollections? How much do they echo what Stuart has said, or do you want to add more, as you were Deputy Conference Secretary?

Amitav Banerji

I am not sure I can add more but I can contribute my own mite to this initial stage of the run-up to the CHOGM. Thank you very much, Sue, for asking me to join. It is lovely to see a number of old friends after a long time. It is great that you have taken this initiative exactly one month before Britain hosts another CHOGM. Clearly, there are some things, as you said, that are not uncommon.

I should perhaps with an interesting historical comment that, although it underscores Britain's status as a vigorous democracy, most prime ministers might think twice about offering to host CHOGM. So far, the record is 100% where a prime minister

who offers to host does not stay to host. Harold Wilson, in 1977, and James Callaghan did. We have just talked about John Major and Tony Blair. It was David Cameron who offered to host this one, and it will be Theresa May who host it. Like Stuart, I will comment on the Commonwealth side of things, if you like. It is really fascinating to hear our colleagues from the then UK establishment. I would agree that the advent of Tony Blair transformed things quite a bit. For the rest of the Commonwealth, the numbers that Stuart is talking about in terms of the record attendance – and I am not sure whether it was 42 or 46 but it was the largest ever – had to do a lot with the fact that there was this new leadership in the UK, and a dynamic, young prime minister who had taken the party completely from the left to the centre. There was this fascination but, likewise, because of what the Commonwealth had done since 1991 and the focus on fundamental political values, and democracy was at work elsewhere. There were 20 new leaders, as you pointed out, which was quite a change that showed that military regimes had given way to multiparty democracies, and one-party systems have done likewise.

I also agree with Stuart and others that there was this focus right from the outset on economics rather than politics. The Harare Declaration had made a major difference. In New Zealand in 1995, at the previous CHOGM, that declaration had been given teeth in the Millbrook Commonwealth Action Programme through the creation of CMAG, which was an absolutely unprecedented mechanism. The Commonwealth could claim that others could not even conceive of having a small group of eight foreign ministers at the time who could sanction existing member states. All member states had collectively agreed to surrender their sovereignty to the extent that, if they crossed a certain line, they could expect to be rapped on the knuckles.

However, there was also a feeling that this might have gone too far: 'The democracy thing is fine. We are committed to the rule of law and to human rights and to having elections. For most of us in the Commonwealth, however, development is what matters. Globalisation is having effects that we really do not like in many aspects'. There were different views across the spectrum on trade and investment. The idea that there should be an economic version of the political declaration that Harare represented appealed to a lot of people, which also enhanced the interest in the Edinburgh CHOGM. That idea was embraced by Tony Blair and by Britain at a time that was quite critical.

There had been, of course, at Cyprus in 1993 – after Harare – something called the Limassol Statement on the Uruguay Round of Trade Negotiations, but that did not address the sense of discomfort that many people were feeling with the phenomenon of globalisation as you came into the mid-1990s.

I will stop there. There is a lot that I would like to say about the summit itself and what was discussed, and what the significance might have been for others. Maybe one more point – and Stuart, correct me if I am wrong – is that Chief Anyaoku would have been one of the people who would have felt very enthusiastic about CHOGM coming to Britain, if nothing else because of the South Africa issue alone. This was Mandela's last CHOGM. He had gone to New Zealand. He was not going to stay President beyond Edinburgh for a very long time. To bring him back as President of a democratic South Africa to a country whose erstwhile government had perhaps delayed the end of apartheid but where the torch of the anti-apartheid had, nonetheless, shone brightly – and, as was pointed out, Labour was very much in the lead on that – this was something that the Secretary General at the time would have very strongly encouraged.

Dr Sue Onslow

Thank you very much indeed. Ms Scarlett, could you please add your reflections on the Year of the Commonwealth and the character of the CHOGM at Edinburgh from your perspective as a leading CSO figure?

Prunella Scarlett

Thank you very much. I am very aware that I am the only spokesperson for the non-governmental sector, and that is not an unusual state of affairs because we are quite often ignored or forgotten, sometimes conveniently. We do represent the people of the Commonwealth, which is extremely important, and I just want to put what happened in Edinburgh into a brief historical context, so I am not sure how well-known this is.

The Commonwealth Secretariat was set up in 1965. At the same time, the Commonwealth Foundation was also set up, again with monies from the governments of the Commonwealth, and again with offices in Marlborough House, to promote professional exchanges within the Commonwealth. The RCS did the preliminary work on that and then continued to push this as a subject that we felt was very important. As you know, the Foundation moved forward and changed in many different manifestations.

The RCS had a constancy of purpose because we had our own international network and we were very aware of the importance and strength of the Commonwealth non-governmental sector, so we kept at it. We kept being a nuisance to CHOGMs to try to get the non-governmental sector more recognised, and finally a select few were allowed to be accredited to CHOGMs, although that was only a very limited list which was not really acceptable in the wider circles.

We produced a paper called *Towards a People's Commonwealth*, which, if my memory serves me correctly, went to the Vancouver summit to keep the subject alive. As I said, we kept at it and we constantly tried to increase our relationship with the CHOGMs because we knew the importance of it, but we were very much aware that we were considered by some countries to be destabilising and uncontrollable influences that they would prefer to forget and ignore.

However, when the decision was made to have the CHOGM in Britain, we saw the potential. When I say 'we', it is important to make the point that it was we, the RCS, in collaboration with a whole lot of other organisations who felt equally strongly. It was a question of how we could make the most of this particular happening, and we did it in two different ways.

We invented the Year of the Commonwealth because it was a year of anniversaries of different Commonwealth countries' independence anyway. The Secretariat helped us with a symbol. We were doing this, needless to remark, on a budget of zero, but we produced a leaflet, we had meetings and, to our delight, it spread throughout the country. There was an article in *Round Table* that gives a list of some of the events that took place. People were amazingly inventive with what they did, whether it was cultural or serious, or just putting Commonwealth flags in their shop window or having more serious conferences. It was just quite amazing, the amount of things that went on throughout the Commonwealth that year, which I think showed the value of the relationship. We also did it entirely to encourage knowledge and understanding, and it made people sit up and think. We produced the information for them to work off and it went from there.

The other thing that we were very much aware of, because of our relationships with the other NGOs, was that this was really an opportunity to have an NGO centre where we could demonstrate and share our experience as well as making it available to the wider public. This is where we turned to the FCO because we needed some

money for this. Sir David Thorne was then Director General of the RCS and a former major-general. It was quoted back to me from the FCO that 'David parked his tanks on the lawn of the FCO' until we got the grant, but thank you very much indeed. We did get the grant and we took it from there.

We hired the Assembly Rooms, which, for those of you who know Edinburgh, is one of the places that plays a key role in the Edinburgh Festival and lots of other things. We turned to the whole of the NGO sector and they were absolutely thrilled. They put on exhibitions, they demonstrated their work, they had conferences – because, of course, we were hoping that people would find time out of the CHOGM itself to come and join – and it turned into a really vital, exciting place. I do not know if any of you managed to get there but it really was most exciting and it showed the diversity of what goes on in the Commonwealth and what the people of the Commonwealth can do. It perhaps made an impact even on the CHOGM people who came and realised that you do need popular support for an organisation. You need people understanding of an organisation that your country belongs to. This is a role that we were able to play in a variety of ways.

I am extremely biased but it was extremely exciting to be part of it and to see the inventiveness of the NGOs themselves, as well as the reaction of the public who came to take part. Knowing how inventive NGOs are, you give them an idea and off they go with it. I would just like to finish with one slightly hilarious thing. I understand there were considerable problems about what the logo would be for the conference. It was not to be thistles – that was the message that we got. At that time, the RCS had a logo of coloured ribbons as a demonstration of the diversity of the Commonwealth. To our delight, that was the symbol. (We were asked if we would mind.) And from then, those ribbons and those colours were used in many different forms and shapes throughout the Commonwealth.

Finishing on just one vignette for you: the Year of the Commonwealth really did take off. If you came out of Waverley Station in the centre of Edinburgh, you would have seen the most wonderful depiction of the Forth Bridge, but done in the colours of the ribbons of the Commonwealth. It was very exciting.

Dr Sue Onslow

Thank you very much indeed for emphasising the multidimensional character of the Commonwealth. If I may, Sir John and Mr Hatfull, to go back: while acknowledging

the importance of visibility, the pressure on busy prime ministers, the importance of prior planning and the multidimensional aspects of the Edinburgh summit, speakers have referred to the trade side, which was controversial. A Commonwealth summit is not simply about economics; it was also about politics. In the run-up to the meeting, how far do you recollect that there were key aspects that you wished to address and that you wished to use the Commonwealth forum to address – specifically, issues around Nigeria and Sierra Leone. Of course, the elected head of Sierra Leone at that point was, indeed, at the summit at that time. There were, of course, other aspects which were roiling on, such as Britain's relations with Caribbean countries over banana quotas. Were you seeking, in your planning, to try to use the summit as a way to address other bilateral or multilateral aspects?

Sir John Holmes

This is where I struggle a bit with trying to remember the detail of all that. My recollection is that the new government wanted to demonstrate that they were very much a force for positive globalisation and for freer trade and investment, and this was one of the ways of showing it. If you look at it in a slightly context, in the run-up to the G8 summit that was going to take place in Birmingham in May 1998, that was why there was a wish to get those positive messages in. Of course, as various others pointed out, they are not straightforward messages and are not straightforwardly acknowledged as unadulterated goods by many other members of the Commonwealth who feel that these things are being done to them rather than done by them; hence there was quite a difficult negotiation, which I do not think the Prime Minister was engaged in at all personally, except when it came to the very end of it, when he had to balance up the last bits of drafting. That was a focus.

Another focus was debt relief, which Stuart mentioned. The thing I particularly remember about this was the emphasis we gave to heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC), and endorsing and giving that mechanism a boost through this kind of communiqué was something very much in Gordon Brown's mind as well as Tony Blair's mind. Nigeria and Sierra Leone were there as issues, and the Prime Minister was very glad to have Kabbah there (he was out of power at the time), and to use that to send a message; but I do not think he was particularly focused on it. In my recollection, it was more the economic side that he wanted to push, together with, as Anji spoke about, the demonstration of a new approach altogether.

Martin Hatfull

My recollection is very much the same as John's in that regard, and I was not personally involved in negotiating the texts on these issues. It was much more a sense that we wanted to use CHOGM as an opportunity to try to advance the agenda on trade liberalisation in particular, recognising that there would always be a need to balance it. The question was the extent to which what we would ideally have liked to go into the economic declaration might get watered down or balanced by other references on the development side, for example, which were not necessarily things that the Government were opposed to but were not the top priority. It was a negotiation which the Government went into with its eyes open and knew that a compromise would be reached at the end. The question, as so often with these sorts of declarations, is exactly where you come out.

On the political side, again it was about wanting to send robust messages and to demonstrate that the Commonwealth was able to stand up for its values, and that this was one of the ways in which Britain wanted to project its values of democracy and human rights, recognising, again, that that would also be a negotiation and that a compromise would be reached.

My sense is that I do not think that there was anything that we failed to get in to the declaration or the communiqué in absolute terms. Inevitably, however, the wording on some things was perhaps less clear or less forceful than we might ideally have liked. It was an expected negotiation and process of trade-off rather than anything which was out of the blue.

Dr Sue Onslow

Sir Humphrey Maud, who was Deputy Secretary General for Economic Affairs at the Secretariat, commented that, in fact, in contrast to the Harare Declaration, which had taken a very long time and had gone through various considerations and had multiple inputs into the crafting of the announcement by 1991, the Edinburgh economic declaration had been crafted and put together very quickly indeed. Do you remember any sense of pressure in terms of an accommodation of Indian concerns over issues around trade that did not correspond to Britain's own approach? Do you have any memory of those particular debates?

Martin Hatfull

I read that in Humphrey's article. My recollection is that there was quite a lot of work going on over quite a long period on the economic declaration, but I suspect that Stuart and Amitav might comment a bit more on the question of how that was then handled with other member states. It was a question of the point at which you start sharing the draft that was being worked on at the official level between the hosts, in our case, and the Commonwealth Secretariat, and then sharing that with the other Commonwealth members. That may have been a slightly more accelerated process than with Harare, but I do not know.

Stuart Mole

I agree and there certainly was a fairly substantial drafting period. I was interested to see in one of the articles that you pointed us to that the Secretariat avoided officials trying to cook something too soon or too definitively, so as to allow the summit and the heads time to put their own stamp on it. Amitav would probably know the detail better than I do, but I am sure that one of the key things was to make sure that least-developed countries and those perceived as being left behind by globalisation were included in the declaration.

The other aspect, of course, was that, on a practical level, the Commonwealth Secretariat, in partnership with the Commonwealth Development Corporation, launched the third of its private-equity funds for Southeast Asia, having done one for Africa and one for the Pacific.

I do want to say something about Sierra Leone as well, if I may. Tejan Kabbah had been thrown out the year before in a coup, and Johnny Koroma was the ruler, but there was also a largely Nigerian Economic Community of West African States Ceasefire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) force in Freetown. By then, the UN were also there. Chief Anyaoku suggested to Tony Blair that Tejan Kabbah be invited because Sierra Leone was already suspended under the CMAG rules but this was a new twist that the legitimate ruler should be invited to the summit. Of course, what is interesting is the postscript because, within two years, the intervention by the British military saw the restoration of Tejan Kabbah.

Amitav Banerji

I was not personally involved with the drafting of the Edinburgh economic declaration, and I will not presume to say more than I do know, because our colleagues in economic affairs were the ones who were dealing with it. I am not so sure that it was done in a more accelerated fashion than the Harare Declaration on political matters, although that was a more major step forward in terms of getting all the countries to agree to abide by those fundamental values. The Edinburgh economic declaration, to some extent, reflected differences that existed in other forums; for example, in the Geneva negotiations between the UK and India, for example, on having a new round of global-trade negotiations, or on environment and climate change.

Derek [Ingram] has written quite aptly in his summary that the final text included substantial changes secured with the help of India and several developing countries, and the major concern was that the danger that globalisation of the world economy could marginalise a significant number of poorer member countries. There was discussion on differences over whether to call for another global trade round, which the British wanted and the Indians did not, as well as the approaches to the December Kyoto Climate Change conference.

On the political side, if I may also venture to comment on that: it was indeed quite a major step to invite Tejan Kabbah, not least because, ironically, within the meeting, he argued for a slightly more lenient hand to be shown towards Nigeria, because Nigeria had been quite helpful in ECOWAS in helping Tejan Kabbah. Although it was a military regime in Nigeria as well, Nigeria had promised to help restore Tejan Kabbah to power by February 1998, so Tejan Kabbah argued for the Commonwealth not to be so tough with Nigeria. Nonetheless, the Commonwealth was tough with Nigeria at Edinburgh and said it would apply further sanctions. Expulsion was very much kept on the table, which was the Commonwealth showing its teeth. I just wanted to say that on the issue of political values. Presumably, we will talk about other things, such as new members etc.?

Dr Sue Onslow

Absolutely – that is part of my list. Sir John and Mr Hatfull, do you recall how the British Government and the FCO regarded CMAG at the time? Amitav has made reference to the Commonwealth 'showing its teeth' – was that how you regarded the

Commonwealth at that time, as having effective sanctions, and that CMAG had an important role of oversight, correcting violators of democratic values and those who had overthrown governments through military coups?

Sir John Holmes

Yes, I think we did see it like that: that it was a little surprising in the Commonwealth context that, as people were describing earlier, you handed over a certain amount of autonomy to this body to take sanctions against other Commonwealth members. That was not the way that, traditionally, the Commonwealth had operated. We were, then, quite keen on making sure that CMAG did not just dwindle into the sand and become irrelevant, and that it was still an active body. Robin Cook was quite keen on that, too, when he came to office at Foreign Secretary. We saw that as a good question which we should support strongly.

Dr Sue Onslow

You made reference to CHOGMs being the most pleasant but the least substantive. I wonder if the innovation of CMAG was, in fact, seen as a way of showing that the Commonwealth had a degree of leverage.

Sir John Holmes

Yes. As a promoter of democratic values, there was a bit of leverage there, which was something real that the Commonwealth can do in terms of exerting some influence on what was happening internally within countries. The UN, for example, was pretty much hands-off in that sense.

Martin Hatfull

That is absolutely right. It helped to answer the question, 'It is all very well the Commonwealth having these values but what does it ever do about them?' To be able to demonstrate that in relation to Nigeria in particular was important. As I indicated earlier, one of the concerns of the Government through the preparation process in the run-up to CHOGM was to make sure that it did not get watered down and that, if anything, the communiqué would reinforce the role of CMAG. It was regarded as an important tool.

[Break]

Dr Sue Onslow

May I invite you to contribute your reflections and recollections of the summit itself? It is often said that the Commonwealth is an extraordinary, informal and personal association and a remarkable summit because of the friendships that are formed, the way of engagement and the consensual approach. The use of first names is also something of which I was frequently reminded when I interviewed leaders and their officials about the Commonwealth summit. Anji, what was your perspective of the summit as an event? Do you recall how Tony Blair felt it went?

Anji Hunter

I recall it as being modern, new, forward-looking and vigorous. We went to the new Edinburgh International Conference Centre (EICC), and I think we were the first major event that had been held there. It was very newly opened. As I said earlier, the opening of it and the oom-pah-pah – you mentioned 'no thistles', and that absolutely rang a bell with me.

Stuart Mole

No kilts either and no bagpipes!

Anji Hunter

I remember the 'no bagpipes' thing, which I am sorry about now. I remember it being very well put-together. We had a production company called the Mark Wallace Production Company. It was extremely well put-together. The Queen was presiding over it. There was a very informal dinner that night. Would it have been in the art gallery or some library? It was a magnificent setting. Again, the Queen presided over it, which she had not done before.

I was not in the discussions themselves, because I was advancing the next thing or going up to St Andrews or whatever it may be. I remember the retreat was curtailed, as you said earlier. It was normally an overnight stay and we seemed to rush up there and rush back.

Sir John Holmes

It was our fault.

Anji Hunter

The fault of EMU?

Sir John Holmes

No, it was just the Prime Minister's fault. He just thought that three days were already enough, and he had to get back to London. That was at his insistence that this was enough: 'I cannot do any more'.

Anji Hunter

The political crisis going on back home.

Sir John Holmes

Even before that happened, the retreat had been cut short.

Anji Hunter

Before you go into these things, the Prime Minister asks, 'What is the point of this and what are we going to get out of it? What is the upshot of this?' You always knew, before you went into anything, what you wanted to get out of it and what was the best possible result.

Sir John Holmes

'What is the strategy?'

Anji Hunter

Yes. I am not sure that we got exactly what we had wanted to get. We had modernised it and put it on the map, but I am very sorry to say, John, that I think you and Alastair Campbell took over. In the Sunday papers, there was more about their golf match than about some of the things that I had set up, so I was rather miffed about that. I remember there had been a paper written by two people on trade and investment, and we did not get what we wanted out of that. Was that partly because of India? India was stressing globalisation and we were trying to do more of the trade negotiations. I remember that.

In the Edinburgh Declaration, there was more about membership, the etiquette of membership and the process of membership, and establishing how the different countries could become more enmeshed. We did set up the Commonwealth Business Forum, which was very important because, as was alluded to earlier, it was something we were very keen on as well. I know John Major made it a principle that this was to be about economics, trade and business, and that was very helpful.

There is one other thing that we did. I have read this subsequently and I hope it is right, but I do remember feeling at the time that the Royal Family and the Queen felt much more part of the Commonwealth. I am not saying that they had not felt part of the Commonwealth before, but there was a sense of them really reengaging as well, which stands, to this day, as we saw a couple of weeks ago at that wonderful service at Westminster Abbey.

I think 1997 was a little bit of a turning point in some ways. It had a slightly informal, first-name-term thing about it, as you say, without it becoming informal and ludicrous. It still had that importance around it: 'This is a very important set of people and they are doing something really important here'. I am not sure, however, that we got everything out of it that we had wanted to get out of it.

Aside from the comment about John and Alastair, the main story in the Sunday newspapers about it all was that Nelson Mandela had said that the Lockerbie people were not to be tried in Scotland but to be tried in Libya. I remember that that was the main story, rather than any of the other things that we had wanted to put up in lights.

Dr Sue Onslow

Sir John, in the FCO's planning, were personalities there as well because of this unique dynamic to a CHOGM? In crafting your strategy and thinking about the policy outcomes, were you also thinking about personalities? Anji made reference to 20 new heads of state at this CHOGM, but were there other aspects to personality that you felt were feeding into this summit that you needed to address?

Sir John Holmes

Mandela was the big star, for obvious reasons. As I mentioned at the beginning, a feature of any summit is the bilaterals that are going on in the margins between everybody. It is a great opportunity for everybody to meet each other. I cannot remember who Tony Blair met. He did meet Mugabe, and it was not a happy meeting, I seem to remember. He did not, however, have a lot of time to do it because he was chairing and worrying about EMU, so there probably were not as many as there might have been otherwise. A central part of a meeting like that is who else you meet while you are there, and there were quite a number of people who we would not have met at all before that. How could he? He had only been in office for five months, and part of that was a holiday period anyway. The Indian

Prime Minister was there, and I guess he must have had a bilateral with him, but I honestly do not remember whether or not he did.

The other thing that I recall is that his style of chairing was quite a shock to a lot of the people, because it was much more informal. 'Casual' is not quite the right word but it was not the sort of thing with gavels and so on. There was a reference in one of your papers to people calling it a bit 'brusque'. I do not know whether that it is true but it was certainly business-like. I think he wanted to make sure that it was a success. He was more interested in the document coming out rather than necessarily exactly what was in it, so that everybody could sign up to it. I do not think he was arguing particularly hard at the time for a British point of view in those bits of last-minute drafting. The retreat was very short but that was, as I recall, at his insistence and maybe others around him saying, 'That is enough time – you cannot spend any more time on this. There are too many other things happening'. I was not in some of the sessions either because I was busy worrying about the single currency.

Stuart Mole

I want to talk about Tony Blair's chairmanship. As Anji says, he was a great star because of his recent victory and the manner of the victory. It was not so much the fact that he was being too informal, because the Commonwealth can handle informality; I suspect he wanted to shut people up who he felt were being longwinded, and wanted to move the debate on. That is probably something that you do not really do in the Commonwealth. You must allow the consensus to evolve, no matter how long it takes, because it will be the stronger for it at the end.

I hope you will not mind me telling a bit of a story about the retreat, which was illustrative of Tony Blair's approach. I went down early with others from the political side to St Andrews, where we were preparing the room for the discussion. One of the interesting things about retreat discussions is that they have evolved from the very earlier stage, where only heads of government and the Secretary General were present, to gradually becoming ever so slightly more formalised, with an official creeping in here and there and sitting in the corner, to a slightly more formalised arrangement, with more officials and a table as opposed to no table, etc.

I suppose Edinburgh was part of that process but, when we got there, we found that, on the instruction of Tony Blair's office, apparently, it was set out in theatre style, with

a top table, with a seat for the Secretary General and a seat for Tony Blair, and for the heads to be lined up in rows. We had to say, 'This will not run – we have to change it', so there was quite a lot of argy-bargy about that. When Chief Anyaoku came, he went to Tony Blair and said, 'We need to do it in the round' and he immediately accepted that, so it was in the round. I think there was an impatience for a rather more directed approach in that respect.

Anji Hunter

He would have wanted to control it, I suspect.

Stuart Mole

Yes, of course.

Sir John Holmes

And to keep it short.

Stuart Mole

Even though the discussions are in the round, they are not uncontrolled. The Chairman plays a role but heads have a very fine sense of equality and not of there being any kind of 'first tier and second tier' about it.

The other thing I want to say is about the Queen. Chief Anyaoku is a firm monarchist and a great admirer of the Queen and the Royal Family. He had, for some while, harboured the ambition for the Queen to be brought in to the opening ceremony. Previously, everyone thought that she was at the Commonwealth summit but, in fact, when there was a yacht to sit in, she sat in the yacht, or somewhere else. She had her gruelling schedule of audiences, of course, and it is amazing to look at the list and see how many heads she managed to meet in that timeframe. She would pay a brief visit to the conference centre beforehand and so on; otherwise, there would be no formal engagement.

I think it was a great innovation that not only would she attend the opening ceremony but she would speak as well. I wonder whether an element of this was the fact that Diana had been killed in August of that year. Of course, that had precipitated a crisis in relation to the monarchy and the Queen. Tony Blair had talked about 'the People's Princess' and so on. I wonder whether, in part, the suggestion that the Queen

should play a greater role in CHOGM was, in a way, a kind of reconsolidation of position after that tremor in relation to the monarchy, but that is just a thought. The other thing I wanted to add in terms of personality is that one of the interesting features was the return of Fiji and of President Rabuka, and the whale tooth that he presented to the Queen as an act of contrition for having left.

Dr Sue Onslow

Mr Hatfull, from your perspective as an official, did the retreat cause you any concern? After all, even though, as Stuart has outlined, the retreat had expanded, with accompanying officials, was there the possibility that decisions would be moved forward without the input of officials at such a location?

Martin Hatfull

That particular issue did not cause me any particular concern. It was understood that the purpose of the retreat seemed to be the opportunity for a more informal exchange directly among the heads of government than is possible in the formality of the conference chamber. What I was more concerned about in my role was that it was all going to go horribly wrong, because the business of training people up from Edinburgh to St Andrews, getting them from there to the hotel, getting the vast number of cars you need to get from the station at St Andrews to the hotel and getting them out again all takes an incredible amount of time. We were very conscious about trying to maximise the amount of time they had in the retreat.

Dr Sue Onslow

Were people using the train as part of the retreat?

Martin Hatfull

Yes, absolutely – that was the theory. I was not on the train with the heads of government, so I do not know the extent to which that worked. There was an opportunity for small group conversations. I do think that, overall, looking back at the conference, it was the bit that worked least well – and did not work well at all, in fact. That was really down to the decision to keep it so short. If you are going to have a retreat, you do need to have the time to give people the mental space to make use of it. It was neither one thing nor the other, really. I am glad that John got a round a golf, but even the heads of government –

Sir John Holmes

I think it was six holes.

Martin Hatfull

You are going somewhere that is the iconic home of golf, and there was quite a lot of grumbling among some heads of government that they were not even able to take advantage of that, so it was not particularly well done from that point of view. As it happens, the logistics worked as well as they could have done, but the retreat did not contribute much to the overall success of the event.

Dr Sue Onslow

Sir John, is that your recollection too? I know you won your game of golf.

Sir John Holmes

I was not in the retreat because we were playing golf at the time.

Dr Sue Onslow

Surely, it is also about senior officials at such events who also network and make contacts.

Sir John Holmes

Yes. I do not know how we managed to escape. I cannot really remember. I am sure it was Alastair Campbell's idea. The retreat seemed at the time a bit of an afterthought. That is probably how Tony Blair was thinking about it and that is how it came out. For that reason, it was not as successful as it might have been.

Dr Sue Onslow

One of the issues that may or may not have been discussed was the question of new members of the Commonwealth. You had described in another place, Stuart, the interest in joining the Commonwealth that had been registered by Yemen and by the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO). Of course, Rwanda, at that point, was also indicating an interest. As you recall, how problematic an issue was this at Edinburgh?

Stuart Mole

We talked about John Major earlier. In 1991 at Harare, I remember him specifically linking membership criteria with, as it were, adherence to the Harare Declaration. He

did this in the meeting of 10 heads before the main meeting. I thought that was a very interesting innovation: that, as you go on to set the bar for existing members and you develop machinery to do that, you also set the bar for new members too. You say, 'Not only show that this has popular support in your country but that you sign up to Commonwealth values'. I think the British view – and I am sure you will correct me if I am wrong – was that they did not want the Commonwealth to expand to countries that had no, as it were, tradition of contact with the Commonwealth. Therefore, John Major was not in favour of Mozambique joining in 1995, or of Cameroon as well.

Amitav Banerji

Less so, but Cameroon as well.

Stuart Mole

There was this broadening going on, and John Major thought that he could get round this issue by introducing the idea of there being a review of membership criteria, under the chairmanship of John Collinge, the New Zealand High Commissioner. That was agreed but, almost at the moment it was agreed that this procedure would be adopted, in true Commonwealth style the meeting said, 'Yes, but we want to have Mozambique as a member anyway'. And in came Mozambique, much to John Major's frustration.

The idea of Palestine, Yemen and Rwanda coming would have caused anxiety too. In the briefing that followed, it said that this was rejected, but that is not a fair characterisation. It was, as it were, laid on the table and, of course, Rwanda has subsequently joined. Surprisingly, although Palestine was not a state and, therefore, in that respect, was not eligible, there was a strong minority opinion among heads of government that wanted to see Palestine in anyway. It was a very interesting development in that respect.

On membership, I should add that, from the Commonwealth's point of view, there was a subtext about Ireland. Certainly, successive Secretary Generals attempted to develop the thought that there might be an opportune moment for Ireland to come in. The opportunity was felt to be at the next CHOGM, in Durban, with the hope that South Africa and, even before he had demitted office, Mandela might lead the charge in helping Ireland come back. Of course, the idea was that it would link with the

Good Friday Agreement and the developments that occurred there, but that was not to be.

Amitav Banerji

The membership question is quite fascinating to recall. It is useful to recall that it was Mandela, in 1995, who was quite instrumental in getting Mozambique into the Commonwealth. He stood up and said, 'This is a frontline state that has borne the brunt of apartheid South Africa's attacks. They have been a Commonwealth cousin since 1975, when the Commonwealth set up a special fund for them. Whatever you do, please take them in'. When Mandela spoke, who would demur, and Mozambique came in. It set off some alarm bells, however, and the UK was not the only one that said, 'Hang on – here is a Lusophone country with no historical or administrative association with the Commonwealth. You have just allowed them to come in. You need to set up some rules and regulations about membership'. That is what spawned the intergovernmental committee on Commonwealth membership that Stuart referred to, chaired by New Zealand. I will come back to that in a moment.

I completely agree with what Stuart said: Palestine had a lot of support. The Oslo Process was very advanced and people thought that Palestine was about to get sovereign statehood. Then, of course, some people said, 'What about Israel?' and that immediately generated a major debate. The strong support for Palestine among some non-aligned and Islamic member states was immediately countered by people who said, 'Israel has as much of a historical right to come in and Israel is a democracy' etc. That quite quickly put paid to the chances of Palestine coming in, because you immediately saw the prospect of future Commonwealth summits bedevilled by confrontation and contention between Palestine and Israel. Very politely, the matter was simply kept under review until Palestine assumed statehood, which, of course, has still not happened. Yemen and Rwanda suffered a similar fate: they were politely put on the shelf. As Stuart said, Rwanda came back many years later.

What I want to mention about membership is something that is not often noticed. This committee led by the New Zealand High Commissioner reported to the Edinburgh CHOGM, and its recommendations were approved. One of the recommendations was that, effectively – and I am paraphrasing – the British monarch would, in the future, be symbolically the head of the Commonwealth. This was a major change from the London Declaration of 1949, which talked about the

King at that time, not the British monarch. I think people who let this committee's report go through on the nod probably did not wake up to this, and woke up to it after the meeting and said, 'Hang on – this is not something we subscribe to voluntarily'. Many years later, at the Kampala CHOGM, where the latest iteration of eligibility for Commonwealth membership was articulated, it was changed back to acceptance of Queen Elizabeth II as head of the Commonwealth. This was in 2007. I mention this only because the 2018 CHOGM is likely to see this discussion again.

One more comment about Tony Blair and his style of chairmanship: people were not used to it. An additional angle in the Commonwealth, especially in cultures like Africa and Asia, is that age matters and you respect seniority. The likes of Mugabe, Museveni, Nujoma, Gujral, and perhaps even Chrétien and Tuilaepa of Samoa, saw this very young Prime Minister, unconventional in his ways, stopping debates etc. I do not think that went down very well.

Dr Sue Onslow

Do you know who drafted the phraseology of recognising 'the British monarch as symbolic of the free association' in the intergovernmental committee?

Amitav Banerji

It was a committee of member governments. We in the Secretariat were not associated with that. I cannot honestly answer that question, but perhaps Stuart has some more intelligence than I do.

Stuart Mole

I could not say. All I would say is that the situation was made slightly more dramatic because of the way that Chief Anyaoku dealt with the question when it was put to him at the final press conference when Tony Blair was there with him. The Chief had long had a view that it ought to be the British monarch and that there should be no question but that Charles would succeed, so that was his private view. When he was pressed on this, he was ambiguous, I think, in his response and, therefore, slightly fueled the issue.

Sir John Holmes

Can I make a comment on the membership point? I am not sure that the British view was quite as monolithic as has been portrayed, because there was an interest. It was quite interesting to be part of an organisation which was attracting new members

and seemed to have that attraction. There was a view that 'This is the Commonwealth, not the British Commonwealth, so you do not need to emphasise the Empire connection anymore. If a country wants to come in, why not?' If you could see it in a geostrategic way – and Rwanda was an example – there was an interest. Kagame was very much the star at the time – and still is in some eyes, but not in everybody's. If you look at it from a rather sad Anglo-French angle, you are weaning a country away from French influence into the Anglophone sphere. There was a certain attraction to that. Yemen had a historical link, and so did Palestine. It was slightly controversial in both cases but they were there.

There was an interesting in possible expansion as well as the reservations around, 'If we do that, where does it stop?' That was also a consideration. The fact is that Mozambique was already in: the principle had already been abandoned so why not go further? That was a view that was around.

Dr Sue Onslow

Mr Hatfull, does that correspond with how you remember any debate or concerns?

Martin Hatfull

Yes, it does. It was a debate and I do not think that there was a terribly clear position in regard to membership. I suspect that that was one reason why it was preferable, from the British Government's point of view, not to have a decision or a big debate about it at this CHOGM, because there were other things that we wanted to focus on and it made sense to kick it down the road in terms of having that review process and so on. There was more concern to get the membership criteria agreed and adopted.

Dr Sue Onslow

Do you recall concerns that the Commonwealth might be getting too big? It has been said that, historically, the Commonwealth was more effective and more collegiate at this informal get-together of heads precisely because it was small. That if it was continuing to expand, it lost the degree of intimacy and the possibility of achieving substantive outcomes.

Sir John Holmes

When you are 50, 55 does not make much difference, to be honest.

Martin Hatfull

That is right. It had been too big to be intimate for quite a while. I do not think the British Government had – and probably still does not have – a clear idea of what it thinks the Commonwealth is for and what it thinks the Commonwealth is best at achieving. In a sense, you need to sort that out before you decide on your strategy for expanding it. I do not think, though, that that would have been an issue.

Stuart Mole

That is right but, at the same time, an extra leaf or two was put into the table at Marlborough House for regular Commonwealth meetings. By the time we got to 54 or 55, either end of the table was in the respective fireplaces, so there will be an issue down the road if we get much bigger.

Amitav Banerji

Just to pick up on John's point: many years later down the track, the UK was one of the strongest supporters of Rwanda being brought in and was quite instrumental in that.

Dr Sue Onslow

Ms Hunter, could I ask you about the Commonwealth summit and the press? I know that there was a certain tension that Alastair Campbell gave a briefing before the Commonwealth Secretariat Information Department had briefed, which was normally the protocol and the practice. You had outlined very much the determination of visibility and to have a strong narrative of achievement, dynamism and impulsion forward. Were you using key members of the press corps? Were you trying to target it particularly beyond the broadsheets, or was it 'Any visibility is good visibility'?

Anji Hunter

It was not 'Any visibility is good visibility'. It was targeted. I cannot remember which journals or magazines were picked out to take with us but there was a very careful press strategy worked out beforehand. They were briefed separately but with the same briefing, so it was not like you gave somebody some extra bit of information. I have to say – and I know have repeated this and everybody will be bored of it by now – that we had had our worst week of press ever in the week preceding the CHOGM. It was the honeymoon period and he could do no wrong, and then August and the beginning of September was taken up with the death of Princess Diana and all the fallout from that. Then you get into the conference season and they all make their

great speeches. Then we hit this crisis point in terms of whether or not we should join the euro. We know now that Gordon Brown was less keen on it than Tony Blair. As we were saying in our break, that was probably right now in retrospect, when you look back, but you never know: if we had joined, would we have got Brexit? You just do not know the answers to these things.

However, out of nowhere, the Chancellor suddenly produced five tests as to whether we should join EMU. Daily, instead of having our plan of talking about CHOGM, even when Robin Cook went on the *Today* programme to talk about CHOGM and the new way that we were going to do it, he was skewered on EMU and was furious because he felt that he had not been given a proper briefing. All the Cabinet ministers were speaking on different prospectuses all together. We went up to Edinburgh in a state of absolute turmoil and the press were baying for our blood. You could not get the press interested in the minutiae of what was happening at CHOGM. They covered the opening ceremony and the Queen, because it was her first time, but we could not get anything through with the media on CHOGM. When they get their tails up on something, there is not a lot you can do to divert them.

Dr Sue Onslow

Sir John, as the Prime Minister's PPS at that point, how did you feel CHOGM had gone? What did you feel were the positive outcomes from the summit?

Sir John Holmes

I think we thought it had gone perfectly well, without wanting to think it was a fantastic triumph, for all the reasons that Anji was hinting it, because it had emphasised some of this newness which was part of the general media strategy. In substance, we thought it was okay and probably no more than that, but life moved on pretty quickly, frankly.

Anji Hunter

Newness and renewal. Maybe you were just being very nice with us, but you were complimentary to us and said, 'There is a sense of regeneration among the Commonwealth members'. I do not know whether that was true or not.

Stuart Mole

There was a very positive mood and there was that sense.

Sir John Holmes

By the way, one very positive element was the relationship that both John Major and Tony Blair had with Chief Anyaoku, who was seen as a good, positive, everything, business-like interlocutor, which was not always the case before. That was a good thing.

Dr Sue Onslow

Mr Hatfull, from the point of view of the FCO, do you think that there was a greater learning and understanding about the dynamics of the Commonwealth? Or was it, 'We have addressed the summit and now, just given the speed of events, British foreign policy has moved on', and you moved on in a different department too?

Martin Hatfull

I did, as is usually the way. Yes, in answer to your question, it was an opportunity for a lot of people in the FCO. I said earlier in my remarks that, before the CHOGM preparations, most people in the FCO knew very little about the Commonwealth. Let us not overestimate it, but all of the people who were involved in the FCO's Economic Department and in the various political departments were much more aware of the potential of the Commonwealth – and, indeed, the challenges of dealing with the Commonwealth as well as the opportunities as a result of hosting CHOGM. This is because it gives you a direct handle on the Commonwealth in a way that you do not get if you are simply turning up and worrying about the bilaterals which the Prime Minister is going to have in the margins of a meeting in Harare or Durban, or wherever it might be.

From that point of view, it was a good opportunity to understand more about the Commonwealth and try to take forward that process of working out how we can make more use of the Commonwealth, which I think the FCO has continued to try to do over the years.

In terms of the overall outcome, I largely agree with John. From my point of view, the great thing was that nothing went spectacularly wrong, which is always your worst fear. By and large, things worked; by and large, people went away feeling that it had been a good occasion, with the participation of the Queen at the opening ceremony and the high-profile role of Mandela. Whether or not you liked the positioning in terms of the branding of the event, it was evident that we – the UK – were making an

effort and were taking it seriously. I think that that went down well. Overall, I think that that was successful from my point of view.

In terms of the substance of the communiqués, from an FCO point of view, we would probably be a bit more generous in the assessment of ourselves than you were, Anji, in terms of not getting everything we wanted. We knew we would not get everything we wanted, but most of the things that we wanted most were in the economic declaration and in the communiqué in terms of the trade-and-investment stuff and in terms of the business council, the business forum and, on the political side, the endorsement of the role of CMAG etc. We were reasonably content, I think.

Anji Hunter

I would say, in the same way that the FCO felt their eyes were opened by hosting CHOGM and the opportunities that could be taken up, so did we in Downing Street. We were brand-new in there and we did not know how the world was and how it worked. For us, in our first six months, to get CHOGM and all these heads of state here in our country and interacting with Tony, it did open our eyes up too. I know we were distracted that particular weekend, but it just made us realise there was a big stage out there and we could perform on it as well.

Dr Sue Onslow

Ms Scarlett, from the perspective of an NGO, what do you feel were the successes and legacies of the Edinburgh summit?

Prunella Scarlett

I think we would claim really quite major changes as a result of the Edinburgh summit and its legacies. If I could just pick on one or two things that happened: the Queen invited the NGOs to come to a party at Holyrood. She has always been and continues to be very much pro the people of the Commonwealth, and that strengthened that. Chief Anyaoku somehow managed to persuade a large number of the heads of government to come to the Commonwealth Centre, which made an impact in both directions. I picked up from some of the delegations that they had no idea about what was going on or the strength of the people's Commonwealth until they saw it. From the point of view of the NGOs, it was just wonderful.

As far as the delegations and the NGOs were concerned, because we were there in Edinburgh with all these events going on, it was possible to involve senior officials –

or even comparatively junior officials – and ministers in the events that was going on. That made a terrific impact. Not all NGOs thought the Commonwealth was wonderful at all but, when they saw it in action and when they saw what they could do because of the proximity of the two conferences going on, that made a considerable difference.

There were various other things that came out of it. The whole relationship – the official Commonwealth with the unofficial Commonwealth – changed dramatically and, from then on, every Commonwealth conference had accredited NGOs of varying kinds.

One of the disappointments was the Durban conference. When I went to the NGO centre there, South Africa had failed to involve the people, so it was an empty and extremely dreary place, and the NGOs were very sad about that.
In Edinburgh, the Commonwealth Youth Exchange Council, backed by British Airways, brought in two young people from every Commonwealth country to a youth conference. There is always a youth conference attached to the CHOGM, dealing with the real live issues of young people, and that is one of the results.

Then there is the People's Forum organised by the Commonwealth Foundation, and the various manifestations of that. Always with a Commonwealth summit, there are all these events that happen around it. It is also accepted by most governments that the NGOs play a valuable role and should be encourage to be there and to make their own contribution. That has really carried on in a very big way.

Dr Sue Onslow

The Edinburgh summit was an innovation and an inflection point.

Prunella Scarlett

That was the moment when it all changed.

Dr Sue Onslow

Amitav, do you want to add any comments on your feeling of the summit itself and its legacies going forward?

Amitav Banerji

It was certainly billed at that time as a bit of a renaissance feeling, not so much because of the economic emphasis – people remember the Harare Declaration rather more than they do the Edinburgh Declaration – but partly because the good-governance flagship that the Commonwealth had adopted since 1991 was seen to be working. There were imperfections. Even while Sierra Leone's legitimately elected President was invited, Yahya Jammeh was sitting in the room and there were questions about Gambia. Some had questions about the way Jerry Rawlings had legitimised himself through elections in Ghana. Further down the track, CMAG itself would face the questions that you were asking earlier: does it really have teeth? Have those teeth worked? The whole issue of Zimbabwe, which came to the fore after Edinburgh, would put CMAG's credibility into question. CMAG could not come to a conclusion and referred it to a troika of heads of government. Further down the track, Gambia was still there, and the Maldives more recently.

Coming back to your question, Edinburgh was, overall, a good CHOGM for its time. It saw the largest-ever presence of Commonwealth leaders at a Commonwealth summit. To that extent, it gave it a fresh wind. The Commonwealth then went back to a new, democratic South Africa, then under Thabo Mbeki, probably with a chapter closed in terms of the more vexed relationship with Africa in the past.

Dr Sue Onslow

If I may, I would like to invite questions from the audience.

Questions and Answers

Richard Bourne, Institute of Commonwealth Studies

This is more a contribution, really: I was at Edinburgh on the fringes as an agitator, in that I had set up, with friends, the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) – a campaigning organisation to hold the Commonwealth to account for human rights – but also as a civil-society person. I was on the group formed by Sir David Thorne at the RCS and had been commissioned by the Secretariat and the RCS to write a pamphlet on the UK in the Commonwealth.

I have three fairly brief points: first, on the issue of royal participation and the fact that, for the first time, the Queen made a speech. We on the fringes were pretty satisfied that what Stuart said was correct, but this was part of a reconstruction, backed by both Tony Blair and Chief Anyaoku, who was a strong monarchist, of the role of the British crown in the Commonwealth post the Diana tragedy. That was a very general view that that was what was going on.

The second point is to do with the CHRI itself and the interaction with the heads over Nigeria in particular and human rights more generally in the Commonwealth. We had an extremely successful televised press conference with Flora MacDonald, the former Canadian foreign minister, whom I drove up to Edinburgh, with Soli Sorabjee, the former Attorney General of India, who was subsequently UN Rapporteur on Nigeria, and with Wole Soyinka, the well-known Nobel prize-winner. Our Nigerian advisory member had been imprisoned by Abacha and we made a big noise, which impacted. The relationship that Pru has referred to between the NGO Commonwealth and the working Commonwealth of the heads was undoubtedly there and it was 'mediated', if I may use the word, by the media.

My final quick point is about the Edinburgh Declaration. I had a row with an Australian official after the conference, saying, 'This thing is never going to be remembered in two or three years' time, in contrast to the Harare Declaration', where people like myself, in my agitational role, had helped to make this a reality with CMAG etc. He said, 'No, Richard, this is a very important thing. It is going to change the Commonwealth and it is going to change the world'. Sadly, it was not the case, and the Commonwealth Business Forum, which was set up at Edinburgh with British money, did not have the role of either an external organisation like the CHRI, or the set-up of CMAG to carry forward the Edinburgh Declaration. Sadly, in Edinburgh, the city of Adam Smith, this never really happened.

Mary Mackie, Commonwealth Secretariat

My first CHOGM was in January 1971, in Singapore, where the British, I must say, were going around in a little huddle because of arms to South Africa. Trudeau and Ivan Head were the people who moved around and got people together – the Canadians were very impressive.

I would like to say a couple of things. The Secretaries General have a lot of discussions with heads and they do so mostly in private and do not disclose what they have discussed. I am sure that our Information Division found it very frustrating, but I know a lot of things that went on that were never discussed because they were done quietly, 'undercover'.

The other thing that I think is important is that the small countries had and have a voice, which they do not in a lot of forums. It is true that, the bigger it has become, the more formal it has become, sadly. When I started, it was 24 or 25 countries, and you sat around a table where wonderful people like Nyerere would make a quick remark and everyone laughed. Now, however, it is much more formal, because of the size.

Amitav Banerji

Can I just pick up on Mary's point about small states? It is an important point. Perhaps it was mentioned in passing but, for the first time in the margins of CHOGM in Edinburgh, there was a ministerial meeting on small states, which Robin Cook chaired. This was a huge boost for these small countries, which were a majority and, today, still constitute a majority of the Commonwealth. Their special concerns and their special vulnerabilities were addressed at the political level.

Stuart Mole

Furthermore, it is always useful to see what that led to. Following from the Edinburgh summit, as far as small states were concerned, there was a growing recognition from the World Bank and other international financial institutions of the special vulnerabilities of small states. Small states would say that following on from that was where the World Bank in particular recognised the special nature of small states.

Can I say something about Nigeria? It is interesting how personalities were involved in that one as well. It was a great test for CMAG and, in a sense, it could well have been that CMAG got out of jail by the timely death of General Abacha in unexplained circumstances. However, there was a heavy investment in the engagement with Abacha's regime, with 16 meetings over the course of two years or so, and criticism early on that there had not been, unlike the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group in South Africa, an insistence on visiting Obasanjo in jail. I think Ransome-Kuti was in jail at the same time. After Edinburgh, Yar'Adua died in prison.

We expected that, at any moment, Nigeria might flounce out of the Commonwealth. Had Nigeria either been expelled or flounced out, it would have been, at the least, a deep embarrassment to Chief Anyaoku as a Nigerian national. Perhaps it would have questioned his very position, because you are not supposed to hold office in the Secretariat if you are not a national of a Commonwealth country. I am not saying that that conditioned, in any sense, his behaviour towards Nigeria in this context but it was an underlying issue.

The other interesting one is that Mandela's – and those who have looked at Mandela's foreign policy – own pursuit of sanctions, both at the Auckland meeting in 1995 and continuing in Edinburgh – got quite a kickback from other African countries that said, 'You do not do this to your fellow African' in that respect, and yet he persisted with that. Thabo Mbeki is someone who registered some of the negativity that came back from that. In the end, the Commonwealth gave a timeframe, which is what the Millbrook Action Programme had said it should do. It had these sanctions in the locker and it never had to see whether or not it would deliver those sanctions, because of Abacha's death, but it would have been a very significant test.

Dr Sue Onslow

Just on Mandela and the issue of Nigeria: that caused tensions and frictions within the African National Congress (ANC) itself, because his Cabinet colleagues felt that there needed to be a much more collegiate and collaborative way of formulating South African foreign policy, and Mandela's stance compromised South Africa-Nigeria bilateral relations. It was not simply a matter of tensions within the Commonwealth, but also within the ANC government itself.

Dr Balasubramanyam Chandramohan, Institute of Commonwealth Studies

I attended three CHOGMs: in Port of Spain, in Perth and in Malta. From my experience, I have two questions, and I do not know if this was the case in Edinburgh as well. I was trying to see the vertical links between participating forums and the idea of passing on that particular discussion to the heads. That particular route was very different in different CHOGMs. It was very quiet in Port of Spain. In Australia, the foreign minister had arranged a meeting between the foreign ministers and the civil-society organisations. In a way, this allowed for interaction. I was wondering how it was in Edinburgh?

Second, I was also looking at the interfora connections and whether there was any contribution from the Business Forum to civil society, or civil society to the People's Forum etc. What I found was that the venues were far apart and it was difficult to travel from one to the other. The Youth Forum in Perth was organised in Freemantle, which is another town. Although these forums meet at CHOGMs, there is no interaction between them. I suggested in many forums that there should be some interaction. Just because someone goes to the Business Forum, that does not mean that there is nothing else interesting happening in another forum.

Just as an example, in Port of Spain, I was at the People's Forum. I was interested in education. The Business Forum had a session on private-public partnerships. I wanted to check how this would apply to education. The forum was on a cruise ship, so we had to register separately. The head of the Business Forum at that time helped me to get in. If these happened in silos, do you think there was much cooperation before these three CHOGMs?

Dr Sue Onslow

Do you recall any interaction between the broader Commonwealth summit narrative at Edinburgh, or were you still focusing very much on the intergovernmental dynamics of a CHOGM?

Sir John Holmes

I was focusing very much on the intergovernmental dynamics, so I cannot answer your questions.

Martin Hatfull

There was no communication that I was aware of between the different forums – the Business Forum and the NGO centre. They were innovations in the case of Edinburgh. The Business Forum took place in London just before. There was the report from the Business Forum to the heads, which was reflected in the Edinburgh Declaration, but there was certainly never any suggestion of trying to find a way of communicating between the two. Clearly, as these things develop, that may make sense, but there was not in Edinburgh.

Prunella Scarlett

No, it was such an innovation that that had not been sorted out at all.

Stuart Mole

Interestingly, however, it will happen in the London CHOGM. On the Tuesday or whatever, there is going to be an interconnection between the four forums.

Diana Bailey, former Programme Manager, Commonwealth Foundation

I retired 15 years ago, so I am a bit out of touch with what has happened more recently, but I was appointed to the Commonwealth Foundation in the 1980s to initiate their NGO programme. That was my role. I would differ a little with Pru over saying that Edinburgh changed everything in terms of the relationship between civil society and CHOGM, because, from my perspective, it was an evolutionary process. Edinburgh was really important in that evolution but it was part of a process.

If I could just tell you a little bit about the history, we started the NGO programme in the Commonwealth in 1986. Initially, what we focused on was NGO networking within Commonwealth countries. At that time, all the Foundation's work was about cooperation and exchange, and most of our work involved moving people from one country of the Commonwealth to another. We worked regionally and Commonwealth-wide in doing that. The NGO programme was unusual in that we started with networking in-country. In the first two or three years of our work, we organised regional seminars. Our first Commonwealth forum was in 1991, prior to Harare. We did not have the funds to organise a forum in relation to every CHOGM. The first three forums were held at four-yearly intervals, not at two-yearly intervals. We had a forum in 1991 in Harare; the second one was in 1995, in Wellington; and the third one was in 1999, in Durban. Edinburgh fell between the bigger forums. The other thing about the early forums was that we held them six months before CHOGM. There was a lot of discussion about this but the idea was that the forum – and we called it an NGO Forum then, whereas it is now called the Civil Society Forum – was held in advance, so that the report could be written up and the recommendations from the forum could be received by CHOGM. In answer to your question about the link between the forum and CHOGM, in those first two years it was the Director of the Foundation who attended CHOGM and who took to CHOGM the recommendation of the NGO Forum. There was a special meeting with the Secretary General and with whichever country was chairing CHOGM to hand over those recommendations.

In Edinburgh, it was the RCS who organised the Commonwealth People's Centre, but one of the reasons why the Foundation's programme was successful – insofar as it was successful – in involving NGOs in the work of the Commonwealth was that we were very fortunate in attracting a very able and high-level group of NGOs who acted as an advisory committee for us. We brought that advisory committee to Edinburgh. They met prior to CHOGM. We took them up to Loch Lomond on a retreat and had a meeting with them. Alongside the Commonwealth People's Centre, we had quite a high-level but small seminar. All the members of our advisory committee were involved in that. We brought in a few other NGO leaders from around the Commonwealth. We also brought in some senior Government officials.
At that time, we were working on one of the most exciting projects while I was working for the Foundation. We produced an absolutely superb set of guidelines on NGO governance and operation. They included guidelines on NGOs' relations with Commonwealth heads of government. Because of the nature of the Commonwealth Foundation, that interface between NGOs and governments has always been at the centre of our work. It did not have a high profile but that was going on as part of the NGO activities alongside CHOGM.

After the Edinburgh experience and as a result of the fact that the Commonwealth People's Centre was held at Edinburgh, at the next CHOGM in Durban the Commonwealth People's Centre and the Commonwealth Forum, which was a much bigger meeting of Commonwealth NGOs – at the forums that we held in Harare, Wellington and Durban, we brought in representatives of every Commonwealth country. For us, it was a very important part of a process. Of course, as the gentleman here said, the interaction between the civil-society element and the CHOGM has gradually become closer. I was not at Abuja, but that was very important.

Arif Zaman, Commonwealth Businesswomen's Network

My question is about the golden thread. Now we have 'prosperity' as one of the themes, but there was a time when economics was not being discussed. You have been talking about the Commonwealth Business Forum. At that time, I was working for British Airways. We all knew that Lord Marshall was a great supporter of the Commonwealth, and there was no surprise, therefore, that he gave that level of support, but I would be interested to know the extent to which there was a receptiveness to the private sector beginning to take shape at the Edinburgh Forum. I do think that there is a golden thread that one could perhaps identify in terms of the

Commonwealth's engagement on economics and globalisation, which goes straight to Edinburgh with the establishment of the Commonwealth Business Council. What was the reaction to private-sector engagement? What was the thinking around some of the ideas of the private sector at that time? To what extent was there even a recognition that an institutional structure was required, which, of course, is what happened with the Business Council that really developed that for 17 years? Was that sort of vision there or was it just in one or two heads at the time?

Martin Hatfull

There was a recognition of the importance of the role of the private sector, and that is explicit in the Edinburgh Declaration. The establishment of the Commonwealth Business Council was seen as an important step. Your question implied whether it was in the minds of a few people or whether it was really something that was out there as a major motivating force, and I think it is probably more the former than the latter; in other words, certainly we and the Secretariat were committed to it. Humphrey Maud was very supportive and there were some other delegations who really got it.

It is always difficult because the Commonwealth is still not fundamentally an economic organisation. It has to mobilise itself within the framework of the World Trade Organization (WTO) or whatever other international structures we are talking about, so it does remain difficult. In the early stages, there was a lot of talk about rather than simply investment from the UK, Canada or Australia into developing Commonwealth countries, promoting more trade among African countries, for example, and across Southeast Asia and so on. The messages were a bit mixed, frankly, but there was a serious commitment to it.

Just to pick up very briefly on the points that have been made about NGOs and about the importance of the Commonwealth Foundation: certainly my experience, from the time I spent dealing with the Commonwealth, not just in relation to CHOGM, was that, very often, it was the non-official parts of the Commonwealth that were, in a sense, the most efficient, with all due respect to Stuart and Amitav, in that the role that organisations like the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association or the Commonwealth Journalists or the Commonwealth Lawyers can play in providing practical support for people in other Commonwealth countries certainly was then – and, I imagine, still remains – very significant.

Sir John Holmes

I just wanted to make a point that follows on very neatly from what Martin was saying. Some would say that the Edinburgh Declaration on the economic side is less influential and less important than the Harare Declaration on the political side, and I am sure that is right. One of the reasons is that, precisely as Martin was saying, the Commonwealth does not have any economic levers to operate. It cannot change tariffs. It cannot really make trade easy between member countries, except exhorting them to do it. It does not make much difference. The business-sector voice is important but is not going to change anything about investment conditions by itself, so you are always going to lack that.

On the political side too, in a way you lack levers, but there is one important lever that the Commonwealth has, which is membership of itself. You might have thought that countries could say, 'Who cares? What does it matter whether or not we are a member of the Commonwealth?' In practice, however, they have minded historically. It is part of their legitimacy and respectability to be a member of the Commonwealth or to re-become a member of the Commonwealth if they have been suspended or expelled. That has created some leverage that has given some meaning to the Harare Declaration and the values, which is simply not really there on the economic side, for all the bodies that they are supposed to be promoting in.

Richard Nzerem

I retired from the Commonwealth Secretariat about 17 years ago. I still work for the Commonwealth Secretariat. I want to make two points: first, Britain's record as a country where the press are free to say what they want to say is undisputed. What do you think can be done, either by the Commonwealth Secretariat or the British Government, to educate the British press particularly about what the Commonwealth stands for? I have been here long enough to know that, just about every time CHOGM comes around, some sections of the British press come alive. The permanent question is: what use is the Commonwealth? I would have thought that, by now, they would know what the Commonwealth is, but they do not know because they come out with quite a few outrageous things about what the Commonwealth does, which is quite untrue. I do not know whose fault it is, but I hope that something can be done about that. I do not know what you think can be done either by the Commonwealth Secretariat itself or by individual governments.

The second one concerns the Commonwealth Business Council, which has been mentioned a couple of times. I have to confess that I am totally ignorant about how the Business Council operated, but my understanding is that it is now dead. I do not know what caused it. Would it be fair to say that whatever caused it to die was wrong and that it should be revived? I know it has been mentioned that it was started with British Government money. I am quite happy that Brexit has not been mentioned at this venue, but would it make any difference if there was a Commonwealth Business Council, not necessarily to promote British business interests but the business interests of the Commonwealth as a whole? It is an organ that really should be organic; in other words, one that can grow bigger or smaller, as circumstances may require.

Sir John Holmes

If we knew how to influence the British press, we would all be much more successful at what we do. They are a law unto themselves and I am not sure that there is a lot to be done about that.

The second point is that you just need to be careful about trying to claim too much for the Commonwealth because you think it is a great institution. You do it a disservice by that because it can never match the expectations that you then create. To go back to the Brexit point, there are some people who say, 'Brexit is the Commonwealth's great opportunity. The Commonwealth is the new grouping to replace the EU'. It is not and it cannot be. It is simply stupid to say that and it will be damaging to the Commonwealth if that idea is allowed to gain credibility, because it will not be able to live up to that expectation. You have to be a little careful about what you claim for the Commonwealth and what you do not.

Stuart Mole

I agree with that but I do think that the economic theme, which was the first time the theme was used at a CHOGM, and the Business Council itself and its successor – the Commonwealth Enterprise and Investment Council – has changed the mindset in the Commonwealth about the way that business and development is viewed. That does not mean to say that overseas development assistance has been downgraded in that respect, but it has changed the approach from a first-world/third-world attitude that there was for so many years to a sense of there being great mutual advantage and that there are very fast-growing economies in the world that have markets that are of great value to the UK and elsewhere.

At the time of this Foreign Affairs Committee report in 1996, Catherine West wrote about that, and that talked about the Commonwealth advantage and so on. It did change the mindset but I absolutely agree that it has been overblown, in particular in terms of the Brexit debate, notwithstanding the very interesting research that the Secretariat has done on the trade links and the level of Commonwealth trade.
The other little footnote on knowledge of the Commonwealth is that, at Edinburgh, there was the Tom Symons report on studying the Commonwealth. It was on studying and promoting the Commonwealth. I am afraid that that is one area where, if you had a look today, we seem to have very substantially fallen down on the ambitions of that report. Now, the Institute of Commonwealth Studies must be about the only place in higher education at least that has a dedicated institute to the study of the Commonwealth.

Dr Sue Onslow

I would just like to ask for your final concluding comments. Ms Hunter, do you recall whether Tony Blair changed his attitudes towards the Commonwealth in any way with his first encounter, or was he simply a very busy man with the pressures of so many other issues that he felt he had managed it well and quickly moved on?

Anji Hunter

I do think that he was affected by it for the better. As I said earlier, he had not really known much about it before. He got to speak to some of these people who he had never spoken to before. His eyes were opened up and it did affect him. Look at Sierra Leone a few years later and various other countries that he became interested in and involved in, and the work that he does now with governments. He has worked really closely with Sierra Leone and Rwanda. These relationships started to be forged at that time because he did not have relationships prior to then, so it did have an effect on him.

On the earlier point, I just want to say that I do agree with John entirely on wishing that we could influence the media more than they are able to be influenced. The way that certain sections of the media have treated Baroness Scotland has been absolutely shocking and very disappointing. The media that have been doing that, however, are the fierce Brexiteers, and I think you might find that, contrary to what John said, while not trying to build up the Commonwealth's role in the future post-Brexit, I do think that you might find more sympathy and more publicity being given to the Commonwealth countries.

I now work for a company called Edelman and, each year, we produce something called the Edelman Trust Barometer. It is a very highly regarded study that has been going for 18 years. It measures people's trust in various institutions – government, politicians, business, banking, media etc. The main finding this year is that, unfortunately, a large number of people are not watching and listening to news in the way that they used to, and that those who do are going off social media and want to return to the old familiar ways of reporting; i.e. high standards of journalism. They are extremely concerned about fake news, so we may find that there will be more educated articles and statements made in the media – let us keep our fingers crossed anyway. I am going to leave on an optimistic note.

Sir John Holmes

As an addendum to what Anji said, Edinburgh was probably very good for Tony Blair's relationships. If we are honest, I do not think it changes his basic attitude to the Commonwealth, which was one of benevolence but not particularly seeing it as an instrument that he could use and therefore, something that he needed to be particularly interested in, as an institution or an organism.

Dr Sue Onslow

Mr Hatfull, how quickly was there a contraction of the FCO's attention to the Commonwealth? I know that there was supposed to be revitalisation and renewed energy, but was it 'back to business as usual'?

Martin Hatfull

Inevitably, there was contraction because, simply from the point of view of resources, you ramp up for an event and a project like hosting a CHOGM, and then come back down again. As I said before, the fact is that the experience of hosting CHOGM will have made a difference, although it is quite difficult to put your finger on it. It renewed awareness of the Commonwealth, to put it selfishly in terms of British foreign policy, as a potential vehicle for advancing different objectives.

A personal observation is that I knew nothing about the Commonwealth before I took on the role and I found it hugely enjoyable and stimulating. The opportunity, which is mirrored in the experience of everybody else who works with the organisation, to interact with so many people from so many different places within one framework is pretty much unique. Coming back to the point about informality, which is not simply a characteristic of the CHOGM itself, the ease of those relationships within the

Commonwealth framework is mirrored at other levels as well and I found it extremely rewarding.

Dr Sue Onslow

From your perspectives at the Secretariat, do you want to add concluding observations on the Edinburgh summit?

Amitav Banerji

I have probably said all I wanted to about the summit. The only final observation I might make is to link it once again to what is coming here next month. Picking up the point about Brexit, it is being built as a summit in the UK that will allow the UK to fashion new relationships within its natural constituency – the Commonwealth – to try to, to some extent, atone for what Brexit will make the UK lose. It is appropriate to remember the fact that the 2018 Commonwealth summit was decided well before Brexit happened. It is something that happened after that decision was taken. It is comparing apples with oranges to think that what you lose by way of getting out of the EU will somehow be atoned for and made up by your links with the Commonwealth.

That said, I think the summit next month offers a wonderful opportunity to look at what the world is today. In the past, the Commonwealth has been rather good at responding to current situations involving the rise of populism, xenophobia, right-wing politics, China as a behemoth on the global stage that goes beyond just economics to political influence, and now perhaps the rise of another Cold War. The Commonwealth perhaps should look at the challenges that it can face in this context.

Stuart Mole

First of all, I want to say that, in the Secretariat, we hugely appreciated Martin and his team in the Commonwealth Coordination Department, because we had known some of his predecessors, who had been less open to the Commonwealth. I will not mention any names but life had been a lot more difficult with others in earlier times, and Martin and his team were a complete breath of fresh air. There was huge creativity. Maybe this was also a sign of the times. In terms of the UK Year of the Commonwealth – and we were just reminiscing about that – there was a hybrid committee of NGOs, the Secretariat and the FCO working together on this programme, and that was really exhilarating.

The other thing worth mentioning is that Edinburgh was good for Edinburgh and for Scotland. Bear in mind that, despite the absence of kilts and thistles, Edinburgh had really had its fingers burnt in 1986 with the Commonwealth Games, when there had been a substantial boycott of the games by nearly all the African and Asian countries. Robert Maxwell had been in charge of the finances, so that left Edinburgh with debts that it must have only just paid off. To have the summit in Edinburgh helped it regain the positive side [of the Commonwealth connection]. Nowadays, the links between the Scottish Parliament and the Commonwealth are very good.

Dr Sue Onslow

Scotland held the referendum on establishing a Scottish Parliament shortly before the CHOGM was convened.

Prunella Scarlett

I would just echo what you were saying. Edinburgh was special in terms of the relationship between the organisations. For us in the NGO Centre, which was bang in the middle of a lot of this, it was very impressive in terms of the way that everybody was prepared to work together and learn from each other. It is one of my strongest memories of the whole occasion.

Dr Sue Onslow

Thank you very much indeed, honoured speakers. My sincere thanks, too, to the audience. This has been an excellent comparative exercise as we face the London summit next month: an opportunity to reflect on the inputs, the dynamics and your own personal reflections and reminiscences around the last time Britain hosted the summit. I am enormously grateful and I think now we all deserve an excellent glass of wine.

Appendix 1	**Delegates to Edinburgh Heads of Government Meeting** UK Delegation Commonwealth Secretariat Commonwealth Foundation CHOGM Committee on Cooperation through Sport Commonwealth of Learning Commonwealth Partnership for Technology Management
Appendix 2:	**1997: The UK's year of the Commonwealth** Round Table (1997), 86:341, 3-14
Appendix 3:	**Britain's new Labour Government and The Commonwealth** Round Table (1997), 85: 343, 299-308
Appendix 4	**Looking forward to the Edinburgh CHOGM,** Round Table, (1997), Vol. 344, Issue 1, 451-459
Appendix 5	**Extract from Chief Emeka Anyaoku:** *The Inside Story of the Modern Commonwealth* (London: Evans Brothers Ltd, 2004) **Extract from Alistair Campbell**, *Diaries (Power and the People), Volume II (*London: Random House, 2011)
Appendix 6	**Reports by *The Economist,*** 25 October 1997
Appendix 7	**Edinburgh Diary**, Round Table, (1998) Vol. 345, Issue 1, 13-17.
Appendix 8	**Edinburgh Commonwealth Economic Declaration**
Appendix 9	**The Commonwealth in the light of the Edinburgh CHOGM,** Round Table (1998), Vol. 345, Issue 1, p.3-13

Appendix 1: The Delegations

Britain

The Rt Hon Tony Blair MP
Prime Minister

The Rt Hon Robin Cook MP
Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

Mr T Lloyd MP
Minister of State
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Baroness Symons
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Mr G Foulkes
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Sir John Coles KCMG
Permanent Under-Secretary of State and Head of the Diplomatic Service

Mr R N Dales CMG
Director
Africa and Commonwealth
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Mr S G Eldon OBE
Director for Conferences
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Mr T Faint

Director (International)
Department for International Development

Mr C Roberts
Director General of Trade Policy
Department of Trade and Industry

Mr J E Holmes
Principal Private Secretary to the Prime Minister

Mr A J Campbell
Chief Press Secretary to the Prime Minister

Mr J D K Grant
Principal Private Secretary to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.

Mr N E Sheinwald
Head of News Department
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Mr M A Hatfull
Head of Commonwealth Coordination Department
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Mr N J Westcott
Head of Economic Financial and Development Department
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Mr P Grant
Head of International Economics Department
Department for International Development

Mr P Barton
Private Secretary to the Prime Minister

Mrs F M Mylchreest
Private Secretary to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Mr J J Gimblett
Private Secretary to the Minister of State

Mr W G Clare
Private Secretary to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State

Mr G S Cowling
Deputy Head of Commonwealth Coordinating Department
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
(and Delegation Secretary)

Mrs A Hunter
Personal Assistant to the Prime Minister

Ms F C Millar
Personal Assistant to the Spouse of the Prime Minister

Mr R Fosker
Deputy Head of Information Department and Chief Press Officer,
Department for International Development

Mrs M Cleaver
Assistant Press Secretary to the Prime Minister

Commonwealth Secretariat:

HE Chief Emeka Anyaoku
Commonwealth Secretary General

Mr Stuart Mole, OBE
Director and Head of the Private Office of the Secretary-General

Ms Mary Mackie
Personal Assistant to the Secretary General

Mr Chuks C Ihekaibeya
Special Assistant to the Secretary General

Ms Priscilla O Omenai
Senior Executive Secretary to the Secretary General

Ms Marilyn Benjamin
Executive Secretary

The Hon Sir Humphrey Maud, KCMG
Deputy Secretary-General (Economic and Social Affairs)

Mr Nick Hare
Deputy Secretary-General (Development Cooperation

Mr K Srinivasan
Deputy Secretary-General (Political)

Conference Secretariat (included)

Mr Jon Sheppard
Conference Secretary

Mr Amitav Banerji
Deputy Conference Secretary

Dr Moses K Z Anafu
Deputy Conference Secretary

Ms Judith Pestaina
Deputy Conference Secretary and
Secretary to the Committee of the Whole

Mr Syed Sharfuddin
Conference Officer

Advisers:
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Dr Gelase R Mutahaba
Ms Eleni Stamiris
Dr S K Rao
Mr Rumman A Faruqi
Mr Richard (Dick) Gold
Mr Rickie Sankar

Record Editors
Professor Stephen Matlin
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Media Unit
Mr Michael A Fathers
Conference Spokesperson

Ms Cheryl J Dorall
Deputy Conference Spokesperson

NGO Liaison
Mr Terence Dormer
NGO Officer

CHOGM Committee on Cooperation through Sport
(8 delegates, including)

Mr Hon R Roy McMurtry
Chairperson

The Hon Fiame Naomi Mata'afa
Minister of Education, Samoa

….

Commonwealth Foundation
(9 delegates, including)

Ambassador Don Mills
Chairman

Mr Humayun Khan
Director

Mr Don Clark
Deputy Director

Commonwealth of Learning
(3 delegates, including)

Mr H Ian MacDonald
Chairman of the Board of Governors

Dato' Professor Gajaraj Dhanarajan
President

Commonwealth Partnership for Technological Management
(7 delegates, including)

Tan Sri Omar A Rahman
Chairperson

Dr Mihaela Smith
Chief Executive

Professor Noel Zrab-Adami
Director

Appendix 5

Extract from Chief Emeka Anyaoku, *The Inside Story of the Modern Commonwealth* (2004)

The dominant theme of the Edinburgh CHOGM was economic. It was the first Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting that Tony Blair… would be attending. It had become clear to me in my pre-conference consultations with him that he, as the prospective chairman, was keen to bring a more practical focus to the meeting's deliberations. Hence the adoption of 'Trade, Investment and Development: The Road to Commonwealth Prosperity' as the special theme for the summit. As it turned out, the discussion of the theme was not controversial; in the end, Commonwealth leaders adopted the Edinburgh Commonwealth Economic Declaration titled 'Promoting Shared Prosperity' on 26 October 1997.

The two other aspects of the meeting that I consider worth noting were the discussions of the potential new members of the organization [Palestine, Israel and Rwanda] at the retreat at St Andrews, and the presentation of collective personal gifts from Heads of Government to Her Majesty the Queen and Prince Philip to mark their 50th wedding anniversary in 1997.

[Rwanda had raised the issue February 1996, followed by formal application]
[Demarche from Ambassador of Republic of Yemen, January 1997. This was not followed up by formal application]
[Palestine General delegate to the UK, Afif Safieh, sounding in February 1997, followed by PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat's visit to Marlborough House, September 1997]
[SG Anyaoku also sounded out Israeli Ambassador on possibility of Israel applying to join the Commonwealth]

Extract from Alistair Campbell, *Diaries, Power and the People, Volume Two* (2010)

Sunday September 7

… I was picked up by Jack McConnell [general Secretary, Scottish Labour Party] and we headed for the Caledonian [hotel]. TB arrived, did a quick doorstep .. then we

went upstairs for a drink with GB. He was in very good form, regaling us with stories of how [Kenneth] Kaunda and [Milton] Obote [Presidents of Zambia and Uganda respectively] had responded to a display of Scottish culture at a CHOGM during the last devolution campaign. 'Are you sure these people are ready for self-government?'

Thursday October 16

India was our main problem early on, the Queen's visit being seen as a debacle, especially after it emerged the Indians had stopped her making a toast to Madras. RC (Robin Cook) was getting a bit depressed with it all and blamed a mix of the royals and [Sir David] Gore-Booth [high commissioner to India] who said on Radio 4 that it was 'just a snafu'. TB had a meeting … with RC on environment, Kyoto planning and on India a fightback strategy based on RC articles and a lobby briefing. We put out a line from TB that the visit was far more successful than people imagined, not least in the eight big contracts being signed. RC briefed the Cabinet and put a brave face on it all. But he had been pretty well stitched up on Kashmir. He said Pakistan was an overwhelming success but the Indians really went for him.[2]

.. I was also having a few meetings re planning for CHOGM, and trying to build an argument around the question – what is the Commonwealth for?

Thursday October 23

Cabinet was mainly on the EMU and most of them were saying how important it was to keep the option open. It was striking how pro the majority were. GB was not saying much. …
RC did a number on CHOGM emphasizing how we were trying to give it a bigger business and economic pitch…

Friday October 24

.. TB said we had to be pragmatic but positive and I fed that thought into the briefing note I was preparing for 4.30 to announce GB's statement. TB and I were both moving to the view that he should do the statement because it was in large part his credibility that had been hit, and he was better at nuance and tone. Peter M and Jonathan were both against, feeling it should be GB, but through the day we all mulled it over and moved around on it. By the time we landed at Edinburgh [for CHOGM] he was back to thinking GB should do it. I worked on a note on it on the plane and felt it was getting there, not ready for '99, so unrealistic this parliament but sensible to prepare for after that…

TB threw a spanner in the works. He came back from the opening ceremony and said he thought he should do the statement. ..

[Robert] Mugabe arrived with a little posse of expensively dressed officials. He said in the past he used to get invites to Labour conferences in Scarborough, but it was too far to travel, and how Labour was always on their side against colonialism and imperialism. The Tories always looked at them as elements to be avoided. TB said colonialism was something one now read about in history books …They ran around

[2] Indian accusations of a new British imperialism following suggestions by Robin Cook that the UK could mediate in any negotiations over the disputed territory of Kashmir.

the main issues on land distribution, during which we got another history lecture. He was pretty repulsive.

…
TB was in a better mood and quite enjoyed chairing the summit. I asked how the Queen had been with him and he went into one of his impersonations. 'Now, Blair, no more of this People's Princess nonsense, because I am the People's Queen.' He said she was fine, and brilliant at the way she handled all those very different characters. She got terrific coverage on the news, although she looked a little bemused at the modern rendition of the national anthem. The news was fine on EMU. TB spoke to GB a couple of times, and drafts were now flying back and forth. ..

Saturday October 25

TB was chairing the summit, and packing in bilaterals as we went while in truth he had nothing but EMU in his mind. The briefing went well, and we got stacks of fairly straight coverage. … I went to the conference centre to do a briefing, mainly CHOGM related, but I used it to get it out, as we had agreed, that Peter Temple Morris was writing to his constituency chairman to say he could not support them on Europe.
…
The main story out of CHOGM was Mandela saying the Lockerbie bombers should not be tried in Scotland. After a visit to the NGO Centre, I went to the Queen's reception. I was hanging back just keeping an eye on things when Fellowes said I ought to meet the Queen. He took me to where she was listening to a gaggle of heads [of government], and as she turned from them [Sir Robert] Fellowes said to her how much help I had been to them in the week after Diana's death. She looked deeply unimpressed, nodded a little and then said, 'Do you always travel with the Prime Minister? I said, yes, usually, and that was about it.
…
We organized pictures of Mandela and TB going for a walk… then John H and I went to play a few holes of St Andrews… I was able to cheer up TB a bit when I described how I almost killed someone with a slice on the seventeenth. We went for a walk down the beach. He said he was really frustrated at having to spend so much time on CHOGM stuff when he ought to be sorting this damned statement (on EMU) ... After twenty minutes or so, we were ambushed again by camera crews and headed back after doing some clips on Lockerbie, Mandela and EMU.

The only briefing I did was by video link back to all the hacks in Edinburgh. They liked the stuff on EMU but as I left the briefing room, Magi said I had committed a huge faux pas in full view of top guys from the Commonwealth secretariat. Apparently there should never be any briefing of the discussions themselves until the communiqué, and also I had briefed that Yemen and Rwanda were likely to have their applications rejected, after which the Commonwealth spokesperson went out and said I had been badly briefed and got it wrong. On EMU I spoke to one or two after that and they liked the TB words and felt it was turning our way a little.

Monday October 27

.. CHOGM finished on time. TB telling us how brilliantly he had chaired it. TB was regaling us with a few stories ... Mandela being difficult on a couple of issues and TB saying to him, 'You are so revered you can come out with any old nonsense and nobody is allowed to say it is nonsense.' Mandela laughing. ..

Appendix 6

From the Economist, 25 October 2017

International
The Commonwealth

It's a minefield

Summits of Commonwealth leaders have a habit of straying into unmarked minefields. Scripted for harmony, they can sometimes end in rage and acrimony. This weekend's meeting in Edinburgh is supposed to discuss trade and investment, but many unexploded issues lie beneath the surface. Unless Malaysia's Mahathir Mohamad lets rip again on the money markets, it is a safe bet that these worthy subjects will not figure prominently in reports of the conference.

Many conference countries have dissidents in Britain who will take advantage of British laws in order to shout at their rulers. Tamil and Nigerian demonstrations are expected. Inside the conference room, the Caribbeans will complain about threats to their banana deal with Europe and the Pacific islanders will splutter about pollution from Australia. Britain is open to attack on several fronts. Some see Britain's new 'ethical' foreign policy and concern for human rights as a neo-colonial attempt to impose 'western values' on them.

Some former colonies still have an imperial bone or two to pick with Britain, and what better place to do it than at a Commonwealth summit on British soil? Mauritius will ask why Britain still holds onto the Indian Ocean island of Diego Garcia, on loan to the United States as an airbase, now that the Cold War is over. A truculent Robert Mugabe has announced that he will confiscate some white-owned land in Zimbabwe without compensation, adding that Britain can pay 'its children' if it wants to. Then there is the aftermath of Queen Elizabeth's bumpy passage to Pakistan and India and the prickly issue of Kashmir.

Taking evasive action, the British government hopes to distract the visiting heads of government with a video about Britain and a speech by the Queen. The visitors are also being deprived of their special overnight retreat, a valued tradition which allows them to solve the world's problems together in undisturbed overnight chat.

Britain will want to spend time discussing Sierra Leone, where it believes democratic government will soon be restored. It financed a meeting for the exiled

Sierra Leonean government this week, and Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, the country's elected president who was overthrown by a coup in May, has been invited to take Sierra Leone's chair in Edinburgh. From there, Mr Kabbah is expected to fly to a small area of Sierra Leone not in the hands of the soldiers who overthrew him. If all goes well, he will seek to reclaim his job, either by negotiation or by the use of military force.

But that brings the summiteers up against the vexed question of Nigeria. Nigerian troops form the core of the West African peacekeeping force which holds Sierra Leone's main airport. Only they are capable of restoring Mr Kabbah. Though Nigeria is suspended from the Commonwealth, it will try and exploit this leverage to the full.

At the last Commonwealth summit, two years ago in New Zealand, Nigeria was threatened with expulsion if it did not restore democracy. But its military ruler General Sani Abacha, has done none of the things demanded of him. Instead he has managed to force the Commonwealth to accept his own programme and timetable for a return to civilian rule. And on the eve of the Edinburgh meeting he is threatening to gatecrash it by flying in a delegation to put Nigeria's case. The empty chair at the summit may be the most troublesome.

From the Economist, 25 October 1997

More than a cosy club

The Commonwealth has principles. It should defend them

For an organization that owes its membership to the accidents of history, the Commonwealth is a remarkably popular club. Of the 52 heads of government invited to the two-yearly summit to be held this weekend in Edinburgh, 45 have said they will be there. By contrast, the opening sessions of the UN General Assembly in New York last month attracted only 18 heads of state and 14 prime ministers out of a total of 185. The geographically, linguistically and culturally disparate members of the Commonwealth used to have at least one thing in common: they were once ruled by Britain. With the admission of Mozambique, even that rule has now been broken. Meanwhile, Yemen, Rwanda and the Palestinians want to join. There is even talk of Ireland rejoining after nearly 50 years outside. Clearly the Commonwealth is as cosy a club as only the British could devise. But what is it for?

Until recently the club offered simply, well, clubbiness. It provides an informal but reliable network of advice, expertise and contacts. It can help members write a new constitution or run an election, manage a forest or even the national debt. The smaller fry can rub shoulders with members of the G7 group of rich, industrialised countries and one of the permanent members of the UN Security Council, who can then speak for them at the world's top tables.

But the Commonwealth is now meant to be more than that. Summits used to be a colourful collection of democrats and dictators; the way they ran their countries was their own affair (even Idi Amin, Uganda's notorious dictator, was merely asked, politely, to stay away from the meeting in 1977). Then six years ago, at Harare, the club set itself new goals: the establishment of democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights among all its members. Two years ago, in Auckland, leaders were discussing how to give teeth to these principles when Nigeria's military regime executed one of its harshest critics, along with eight others. Outraged, the summiteers suspended Nigeria and threatened that if, by Edinburgh, it had not released named political prisoners and bowed to the Harare principles, it would be expelled.

Nigeria has thumbed its nose. Delegations of foreign ministers sent by the Commonwealth to press its demands have been humiliated. Nigeria's boss, General Sani Abacha, has kept them waiting refused them permission to visit imprisoned political leaders and demanded instead that the Commonwealth apologize to Nigeria for suspending its membership. Yet, if the Commonwealth is to be seen to keep its word, it should surely carry out its expulsion threat. The case could not be clearer. But that will not happen. Instead, General Abacha is to be allowed to carry through his transition to civilian rule next year (though this had previously been denounced as undemocratic and not speedy enough). Minor sanctions are threatened if he does not keep to the schedule.

Moral suasion but suasion nonetheless

So was the Commonwealth wrong to take up the moral cause of human rights and democracy? No, though its moral authority has suffered through the Nigerian debacle. Here, clubbiness is a failing. Most members, especially the poor ones, feel that the Harare principles are to be aspired to, not rigidly adhered to. If cads could be booted out, they worry, how many other members might be found wanting?

Yet even as a more soft-centred club, the Commonwealth can still do good. The power of embarrassment is well worth using. And there are tougher sanctions than those tried so far on Nigeria, such as freezing the bank accounts of its generals, perhaps. If the Commonwealth's principles are to be worth aspiring to, they need defending.