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## **The Role of the Commonwealth in the New World Order**

An LKI Roundtable with Canadian Parliamentarians

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## **Three key takeaways from the round table with five Canadian parliamentarians of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association -**

- 1. The Commonwealth is valuable in the current world order, which is characterised by political and economic uncertainty. A common set of values from a diverse set of nations would help create structure and stability in such an uncertain order.**
  - 2. The voices of women, youth, LGBTQIA people and other minorities must be amplified within the parliaments and legislative assemblies of Commonwealth countries.**
  - 3. This is no time for complacency. The Commonwealth must become more active, especially in light of London's upcoming Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in April 2018.**
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## **Introduction**

- Ms. Yasmin Ratansi, MP, and Hon. Salma Atallahjan, Senator, addressed a Foreign Policy Round Table at LKI on “The Role of the Commonwealth in the New World Order” on 9 November 2017.
- Hon. Thomas Mulcair, MP PC, and Mr. Matt Jeneroux, MP, also contributed to the Round Table.
- The Round Table was attended by the High Commissioners of Canada and Bangladesh, representatives from the Australian, British and South African High Commissions, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and representatives of nonprofits and think tanks.
- The Round Table was moderated by Dr. Ganeshan Wignaraja, Chair of LKI's Global Economy Programme.

## **Takeaways from the Canadian Parliamentarians' Presentations:**

### Gender Equality and Feminist Foreign Policy

- Twelve Commonwealth countries do not have a single woman in their parliament.
- However, in Rwanda, 64% of seats in parliament are occupied by women.
- In Bangladesh, if 52% of women participated in the job market, GDP would increase by at least 3%.

### Youth Involvement and Engagement

- Among the two billion citizens of Commonwealth countries, 60% are below the age of 30.
- Youth must be engaged more consistently on a broader range of issues, not only on youth-related ones (such as tuition fees).

- The Commonwealth Youth Society engages young people on various topics; Canada's Prime Minister is simultaneously the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Youth.

### Human Rights within the Commonwealth

- The Commonwealth, by issuing a strong statement condemning Myanmar (the first time that the group has issued such a statement), has staked out a role for itself in the new world order. The Commonwealth must uphold strong values and stand up to injustice.
- Commonwealth human rights experts offered their technical assistance to Sri Lanka, to ensure equality and non-discrimination in the new constitution.
- The Commonwealth can build on political and economic synergies among member states, to help developing nations stabilise governance structures and uphold the rule of law.

### **Key Points from the Round Table Discussion:**

#### Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

- Heads of state must understand SDG goals in the context of gender issues.
- If SDG 1 (No Poverty) or SDG 5 (Gender Equality) are to be met – given increases in GDP resulting from female participation in the labour market – developing states must secure commitment from their heads of state.
- While Canada may uphold intersectionality of race, class, gender and other demographic factors in SDG 5, Canada maintains a policy of non-interference in foreign political affairs due to the differing cultural norms of states.

#### Common Law within the Commonwealth

- The common law, associated with Commonwealth countries, may have a role to play within the normative and legal gaps of the new world order.
- However, Canada and Cameroon have also integrated civil law into their judiciary. Common law must be acknowledged; however, it is more important to emphasise the common values underpinning common law.
- Cynicism towards common law can emerge in countries when the executive, legislative and judicial branches are not wholly independent.

#### Strengthened Commonwealth Economic Relations

- The International Monetary Fund predicts that the world economy will grow at 3.7% in 2018, bringing opportunities with the recovery of trade and investment among industrialised countries; nevertheless, political and policy risks remain.
- The Canadian-Caribbean Twinning Initiative involves cooperative engagement to capitalise on states' bilateral needs through trade, negotiations and better governance.

- Historical trade patterns and Commonwealth institutions could help foster increased trade and investment in an uncertain world economy. Researchers should explore trade creation resulting from the “Commonwealth effect”.

## **Suggested Readings:**

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Government of Sri Lanka (2017). *National Human Rights Action Plan 2017-2021*. Prime Minister's Office. [online] Available at: [http://www.pmooffice.gov.lk/download/press/D00000000063\\_EN.pdf](http://www.pmooffice.gov.lk/download/press/D00000000063_EN.pdf) [Accessed 18 November 2017].

Raja Mohan (2017). *Commonwealth in the Time of Brexit*. [online] The Indian Express. Available at: <http://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/narendra-modi-theresa-may-commonwealth-summit-london-queen-elizabeth-prince-charles-in-india-uk-brexite-4925727/> [Accessed 18 November 2017].

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