

Opening Remarks by H.E. Ambassador Luamanuvae Albert Mariner

Commonwealth Reception at the Residence of the

UK Ambassador, H.E. Dame Caroline E. Wilson

10 October 2024

YE Ambassador Martin Mpana, Dean of the Diplomatic Corp

YE Ambassador James Kimonyo, Representative of the current Commonwealth Chair-In-Office, the President of Republic of Rwanda, H.E. Paul Kagame,

YE Ambassador Taua'ika 'Uta'atu - Dean of the Pacific Islands Group of Ambassadors

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, friends

All protocols observed.

The Commonwealth Charter, agreed to by all HoGs and signed by Her late Majesty, The Queen in March 2013, outlines the values and aspirations which unites us in the Commonwealth. The Charter expresses commitment of our member states to the development of free and democratic societies, and the promotion of peace and prosperity to improve the lives of all the people of the Commonwealth.

The theme for this year's CHOGM in Samoa:

“One Resilient Common Future - Transforming our Commonwealth”:

- i) resilient democratic institutions, ii) a resilient environment,
- iii) resilient economies, and, iv) resilient societies and peoples.

2018 CHOGM theme in London - Towards a Common Future

Due to the pandemic - the next CHOGM after London was held in Rwanda in 2022 - and the theme in Kigali meeting was- Delivering a Common Future

Samoa CHOGM will place importance on the Leaders' Retreat where the Heads will discuss how a resilient common future for the Commonwealth could best be achieved, amidst the multiplicity of crisis we face in our world today.

As Dame Caroline highlighted, this CHOGM will also be associated with a few firsts:

It would be the first time for HM King Charles III to attend as the Head of the Commonwealth, first time for a small island country from the Pacific to host, but, it would also be the first summit for one of our newest members, the Togolese Republic (*and Gabon??*) to attend.

Gabon currently partially suspended in September 2023 following the military coup and the removal of an elected government.

One of the key items on the Leaders' Agenda, will be the election of a new Secretary-General, to lead the Secretariat in London, for the next 4 to 8 years. I convey in this regard my best wishes to all our colleagues here this evening, who have submitted their government's candidates for this important position in the Commonwealth.

Excellencies, we face a **multiplicity of crisis around the world**

We are still recovering from the COVID 19 pandemic; we are constantly threatened by the climate crisis; we see multiple theatres of war in Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Asia; the ongoing competition/tension between the big powers and the subsequent geopolitics - challenges our pursuit of national growth and development.

We have a crisis of confidence in multilateralism and we often question the efficiency and legitimacy of our global institutions. The global financial architecture is outdated and unfair on us, the developing countries. We have restricted access to capital and high costs for borrowing - contributing to the overwhelming levels of debt we face. And in pursuing the SDGs in the current context, we often ask ourselves - are these goals achievable within the expected timeframe?

All these issues and challenges requires difficult conversations. And with technology advancement, our reality today is that we are more connected, yet the global issues we face are more complex than ever.

However, our Commonwealth with its global reach and experience in consensus building, **still** has the potential, to assist the international community in building bridges across international divides.

Within our Commonwealth family, we have 2.7 billion citizens, a third of humanity. 60% of our citizens are under the age of 30. Our membership

spans all continents of the world, we have the world's largest democracy, we have 33 of world's 42 small states, 5 of our Commonwealth countries are members of the G20, *and one in the UN Security Council.*

Our Commonwealth Leaders' Retreat (only the leaders and no officials) therefore provides a unique and special platform for a North - South dialogue, and an unrivalled forum for pursuing a global agenda, unhindered by formal rules and procedures.

(Members: 21 African countries 12 members of the CARICOM 11 members of the Pacific Islands Forum
8 Asian members UK and Canada)

At the 1985 CHOGM in Bahamas, the late Sonny Ramphal, a proud son of Guyana and the Caribbean, and the longest serving Secretary-General said "Commonwealth conferences have a long record of turbulence and tempestuousness, but a record of achievement and consensus". The late SG Sonny Ramphal had every right to make such a statement, given his legacy in leading the Commonwealth's successful fight against apartheid and racism in Southern Africa. This led to Madiba, Nelson Mandela, on his first visit to London after he was released from prison, pronouncing that the CW makes the world safe for diversity.

Our CW has been a constant. Our members are primarily developing countries, therefore, the development perspective, the concern of the poor and most vulnerable in society, is always kept well in the foreground of CHOGM discussions and debates. The CW family has also been resolute in its support to our fellow members like Cyprus - aspirations to protect its sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity through support to the UNSG Good Office's Mission, our firm support to Guyana's long-standing controversy and the question of the definitive settlement of the land boundary with its neighbor Venezuela, and our solidarity with the Government and people of Bangladesh deeply affected by the influx of over 1 million forcibly displaced Rohingya refugees from Rakhine state in Myanmar.

Samoa will place climate change as one of the priority issues for Commonwealth leaders to discuss. Samoa's Prime Minister is the Chair of the Alliance of 42 Small Islands States, and we look forward to welcoming all our Commonwealth family members to our shores later this month. Thirty-four heads of government, including three monarchs, have

confirmed their participation at the summit, and twenty plus countries will be represented at ministerial level.

Excellencies, over the past four decades, our Commonwealth family has dealt with difficult and sensitive issues with political acumen, finding strength in the multiracial nature of the Commonwealth and with commitment to peace and development.

Our strength and uniqueness will continue to rely on our common language and common law, our diversity, our constant pursuit of development, the protection of our democratic values and processes, *all underpinned by dialogue and diplomacy*. And long may this continue.

Let me finish by sharing an African philosophy and a Samoan proverb.

Ubuntu - a beautiful African word with such a profound philosophical meaning. "I am because we are" "My humanity is linked to yours".

Samoan Proverb:

"O le tele o sulu e maua ai figota" - loosely translated as "through collaboration and partnership, any challenge can be addressed and overcome".

Finally to my co-host for the evening, Dame Caroline, to you and your team, I say "fa'afetai tele lava" thank you so much, for all the planning and heavy lifting, in organizing this important Commonwealth event.

Excellencies, I thank you for attending this evening's reception.

Please, raise your glasses: "To the Commonwealth"