

R1: The History of the Commonwealth

In the beginning...

The Commonwealth was born out of the British Empire, which at one time included countries in Asia, Africa, the Pacific, the Caribbean and the Americas.

The early years

In 1931 it was called the British Commonwealth of Nations, but in 1949 leaders decided to transform it into an organisation of 'free and equal members', and the modern Commonwealth was created.

Ghana became a member in 1957. It was the first of many African countries to join the Commonwealth as independent nations in the 1950s and 1960s.

In 1961 South Africa left the Commonwealth because of its policy of segregating white and black people. Commonwealth leaders supported the struggle against white minority rule.

In 1965 the Commonwealth Secretariat was created. It is based in Marlborough House in London to promote shared values across member countries. The Commonwealth Secretariat encourages members to get together to talk about their concerns and ideas.

Many other countries, big and small, from all parts of the globe and with different cultures, languages and faiths are now part of the Commonwealth. In 2018, The Gambia rejoined the Commonwealth, almost five years after leaving the organisation.

In the 1990s countries like Namibia, Cameroon and Mozambique, which were never part of the British Empire, also joined.

In 1994 South Africa returned to the Commonwealth as a multi-racial and democratic country, under the leadership of Nelson Mandela.

The Head of the Commonwealth is Queen Elizabeth II. She is also Head of State for 16 Commonwealth member countries. Other countries are republics or have their own monarch. The next Head of the Commonwealth will be decided by the heads of the Commonwealth countries.

About 60% of the people in the Commonwealth are under 30 years old. The Commonwealth Youth Council helps young people to work together and share their ideas with decision makers.

about 30% of the world's people live in the Commonwealth? That's nearly two and a half billion adults and children!

The Commonwealth is a vibrant family of 53 countries spread across every continent and ocean.

The people of the Commonwealth are a diverse group. Some live in very small islands like Nauru in the Pacific, and some live in big countries like India in Asia.

Commonwealth people work together by sharing ideas and experiences, skills and knowledge.

It is about friendship and respect between individuals and nations.

All countries in the Commonwealth are independent and equal nations.