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[UK Parliament](#) > [Hansard](#) > [Commons: 28 October 1997](#) > [Commons Chamber](#) > [Commonwealth Heads Of Government Meeting](#)

Commonwealth Heads Of Government Meeting

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3.30 pm

The Prime Minister

(Mr. Tony Blair)

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With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement.

The Commonwealth Heads of Government met in Edinburgh from 24 to 27 October—the first such meeting in Britain for 20 years. A Labour Government were in power the last time the meeting was held in this country and I am delighted that a Labour Government were able to welcome Commonwealth heads back to Britain. Fifty-one member states attended the meeting, 43 represented by heads of state or Prime Ministers—the largest ever gathering of Commonwealth heads. We also welcomed Fiji back to the Commonwealth.

I should like to thank the people of Scotland, and Edinburgh in particular, for the warm welcome that they gave my fellow Heads of Government and their delegations. I should also like to thank the police and everyone else involved in the organisation of the meeting for everything that they did to make the arrangements run so smoothly.

Her Majesty the Queen was able to address a Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting for the first time. The warmth of the welcome that she was given was a tribute to the regard in which she is held by Commonwealth Governments all over the world.

Also for the first time, a Commonwealth business forum was held immediately before the Heads of Government meeting. It reflected the clear focus of the meeting on economic issues, in particular trade, investment and development. After an excellent debate, we were able to agree the Edinburgh Commonwealth economic declaration on "Promoting Shared Prosperity". That demonstrates the unique role that the Commonwealth can play in bringing together developed and developing countries in this area. The declaration—the first of its kind—sets out economic principles shared by the Commonwealth to match the political principles on good government and human rights set out in the Harare declaration of 1991.

The declaration marks real progress in four areas: first, agreement that the Commonwealth should be a force for freer trade in the world. In particular, we supported the expansion of duty-free market access for exports from the least developed countries, the need for adequate successor arrangements for African, Caribbean and Pacific banana exporters and a study of steps to increase trade between Commonwealth countries.

Secondly, we recognised the important role that the private sector has to play. We strongly supported the conclusions of the business forum and in particular the decision to establish a business council to facilitate contact between businesses across the Commonwealth. We also agreed on the benefits that international investment can bring and decided to finalise a code of good practice for Commonwealth Governments to encourage private investment.

I attended the launch of the new south Asia regional fund in the margins of the meeting. The fund should provide some US\$200 million from the Commonwealth Development Corporation, countries of the region and others to promote investment in south Asia. The Government also intend that the Commonwealth Development Corporation should itself develop a new relationship with the

[Back to top](#) [Previous](#) [Next](#)

straight back into the development programme.

Thirdly, we endorsed the target of halving the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by 2015, and emphasised the importance of substantial and swift debt relief in achieving that. That built on the valuable work of the Chancellor of the Exchequer at the Mauritius Commonwealth Finance Ministers' meeting and the target of ensuring that every highly indebted poor country is launched on the process of debt reduction by the year 2000. The UK is willing to cancel aid debts of lower-income Commonwealth countries totalling £132 million provided they follow sensible economic policies. We have already made formal offers to seven countries with debts of £18 million and discussions have started with others.

Fourthly, the meeting sent a strong message to the Kyoto climate change conference in December that all countries, developed and developing, will need to play a role in achieving reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

In that context, I was able to announce that the Government will provide an additional £3 million for the Commonwealth's Iwokrama rain forest project in Guyana.

On the political side, Commonwealth heads reaffirmed their commitment to the Harare principles on good governance and human rights and agreed that any future Commonwealth members must meet the Harare criteria. We agreed that the Commonwealth ministerial action group set up at Millbrook in 1995 should continue to deal with serious and persistent violations of the Harare principles.

The meeting spent some time discussing our approach to the Nigerian regime. We unanimously agreed to continue the suspension of Nigeria. That excludes Nigeria from all Commonwealth activity.

The Commonwealth ministerial action group now has delegated power to invoke a number of specified measures, if the group decides that those would further the process of transition and respect for human rights in Nigeria. They include visa restrictions, withdrawal of military attaches, the cessation of military training, an embargo on the export of arms, the downgrading of diplomatic missions and cultural links and a ban on sporting contacts.

In addition, after 1 October 1998, the action group will assess whether Nigeria has satisfactorily completed its transition programme. If that assessment is negative, Heads of Government will consider Nigeria's expulsion from the Commonwealth and the introduction of further measures, such as a mandatory oil embargo.

I believe that those measures, taken together, send a clear and strong message to the Nigerian Government from all the members of the Commonwealth: if they do not improve substantially their respect for human rights and move back to democracy, they face severe sanctions.

Heads of Government strongly condemned the military coup in Sierra Leone and decided to continue the suspension of the military regime from Commonwealth meetings. We also called for the immediate reinstatement of President Kabbah, the legitimate head of state, whom I welcomed to the meeting as my special guest.

A final communiqué reflecting our discussions was issued at the end of our meeting yesterday morning. Copies of that and the economic declaration are available in the Library of the House.

In conclusion, I am pleased to report to the House that there was a remarkable degree of agreement at Edinburgh on both economic and political questions. Many heads said that it was the most harmonious Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting for many years.

I believe that the Commonwealth is needed now more than ever. It bridges the gap between developed and developing and provides a forum for co-operation and joint endeavour, and it can provide a strong moral lead in a world where basic human rights are too often under threat.

The meeting was also a success because the Commonwealth has a new focus on economic issues, it is showing the rest of the world the way on environmental problems such as climate change and it is setting an example in the field of human rights—our action on Nigeria makes it clear that the Commonwealth will not tolerate undemocratic behaviour and human rights abuses in its ranks.

At Edinburgh, my fellow Heads of Government and I began a process of change to prepare the Commonwealth to face the challenges of the 21st century and, in a striking testament to all that Nelson Mandela has done, with Commonwealth support, to transform his country, we agreed that the next Heads of Government meeting should be held in South Africa in 1999. There is no better place to ensure that a renewed Commonwealth is a force for good in the world.

[Back to top](#)[Previous](#)[Next](#)

(Richmond, Yorks)

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I thank the Prime Minister for his statement. On the Conservative Benches, we share his satisfaction that Scotland was host to the Commonwealth leaders and his pleasure that so many countries attended.

Does the Prime Minister agree that the constructive and friendly relationship that we now have with our friends in the Commonwealth is a tribute to decades of hard and difficult work? Is it not one more part of our heritage in which we can take pride? May I join the Prime Minister in his welcome for Fiji, his comments on Sierra Leone, and his tribute to Her Majesty the Queen?

I also welcome some of the conclusions of the summit. On the Conservative Benches, we hope that the Edinburgh economic declaration will act as a stimulus to greater and freer trade. We hope that the agreement that developed countries will work to produce a successful Kyoto conference will produce a cleaner world. To see whether those hopes will be turned into reality, will the Prime Minister tell us more of the detail of what was agreed in Edinburgh?

Although the Prime Minister has been described as relieved that the benefits of trade liberalisation were placed at the centre of the declaration, would it also be fair to describe him as disappointed not to win more explicit endorsement of a new round of world trade negotiations? While it is obviously right that steps should be taken to help smaller countries cope with the changes required by freer trade, does he share our conviction that we should support transitional but not protectionist measures?

May I also welcome the further progress made on debt and development at Edinburgh? Given Britain's history in playing a leading role in taking action to relieve debt burdens for the poorest countries, what new and further concrete steps do the Government propose to take? The Prime Minister has accepted some important and challenging statements on development aid. In particular, there is language about increased assistance from the international community. Should that be seen as an endorsement of the current spending plans on aid or as an intention to change them, or does the agreement instead mean a redistribution within our budget?

On the environment, the whole House will be pleased to see the commitment to success in Kyoto that has been so emphatically underlined, but when the declaration talks of significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, how significant are those meant to be? Will there be talk about hard figures or merely soft targets? What are the prospects of specific targets and a specific timetable? When there is talk of new resources to implement Agenda 21, how much might that involve and where will the resources come from?

What criteria will now be used to assess whether Nigeria has completed the programme for the restoration of democracy that has been demanded? Can the Prime Minister assure the House that he is satisfied with the mechanisms for enforcing sanctions and the plans for tougher sanctions later, should they be needed?

On future membership of the Commonwealth, will the Prime Minister confirm that the criteria applied to the membership applications from the Palestine National Authority, Yemen and Rwanda will be the same as those used in considering the position of other middle eastern states, including Israel?

I pay tribute to the huge number of people who worked hard to make the Commonwealth leaders so welcome in Edinburgh. Can the Prime Minister confirm reports in this morning's press, however, that delegations were angry about the allegedly patronising and arrogant attitude of a small number of his officials? Is it true that his press secretary gave briefings on talks believed by others to be confidential, and unilaterally and erroneously announced that the leaders had rejected the new applicants for membership, forcing the Secretary-General to clarify the position?

Finally, I congratulate the Prime Minister on his new role as a film producer. It is touching that he took so much trouble to make a film celebrating our world-class industries, entrepreneurial economy, consumer choice and flexible labour markets, all of which were created by Conservative Governments.

The Prime Minister

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I think that the right hon. Gentleman forgets that on 1 May the Conservative Government were rather overwhelmingly rejected. As a matter of fact, the film shows what a good job the people of Britain are doing.

[Back to top](#) [Previous](#) [Next](#)

golf, rather than any briefing. Those reports this morning were complete and utter nonsense. Everybody spoke of what a successful and harmonious Heads of Government meeting there had been. There was a tremendous fund of good will towards this country and the Commonwealth in general. We should brush off such press stories with the contempt that they deserve.

I shall deal with the right hon. Gentleman's serious points about the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting. In respect of freer trade, the most important outcomes were the statement of clear principle that we want to move towards freer trade, and the fact that the liberalisation process was clearly supported. Of course we would have preferred to go further, as would many of the developed countries. That is true, but all the countries accepted that it was a question not of whether we move towards more free trade, but of how we manage that process. That was a significant step forward. In respect of protectionism, I entirely agree; the last thing that we want is protectionism in any shape or form.

The right hon. Gentleman asked what specific steps we would take with regard to debt and development. First, as I pointed out, the Mauritius mandate that was negotiated by the Chancellor of the Exchequer took us a considerable way forward in giving debt relief to poorer countries. Secondly, the changes in the Commonwealth Development Corporation will help to bring more private investment, and therefore greater development, to some of the poorest countries in the world. Those were two significant steps forward.

With respect to the Kyoto targets, the right hon. Gentleman will know that the European Union has specific targets, of which Britain is a part and a strong supporter. The answer is that we want to get targets and timetables that are as good as possible. It was not the role of the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting to come to a declared view on specific percentages and timetables, but the important factor is that, for the first time, it was accepted that all countries, including the developing countries, have a role to play and an obligation to play a role in that process.

In respect of Nigeria, the right hon. Gentleman asked what would be the indications that Nigeria was moving from its present position. Obviously, elections would be the first and most important indication, and the second would be the release of political prisoners. Both must be undertaken. Contrary to some reports, a very strong series of sanctions is now in the hands of the Commonwealth ministerial action group, which can be used if proper progress is not being made. That was unanimously agreed by the Heads of Government meeting. Those tough sanctions, as I outlined in my statement, will give us an important lever to try to bring about greater democracy in Nigeria.

The right hon. Gentleman raised the question of new members. The same criteria will apply to all new members. He specifically raised the issue of Israel. No formal application has been made by Israel, but should such an application be made, the same criteria will be applied as to every other country.

Mr. Menzies Campbell

(North-East Fife)

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I welcome the Prime Minister's statement, and in particular the complimentary remarks that he made about Edinburgh and Scotland.

What the Prime Minister has told us about debt relief will be extremely encouraging to some of the poorest countries in the world. However, I confess some disappointment over the failure of the Commonwealth Heads of Government to take more decisive action in relation to Nigeria.

In his statement, the Prime Minister told us that any country applying for membership must meet the principles of the Harare declaration. If Nigeria was not a member and was applying for membership, it could not be admitted because it is in breach of those very principles.

The truth is that there has been no improvement in Nigeria since its suspension. The same regime is in place and the same breaches of human rights are part and parcel of the way in which that regime purports to govern the people of Nigeria. What justification is there for a country that so blatantly, obviously and defiantly flouts the values of the Commonwealth to continue to retain membership of an organisation that exists for the promotion of human rights, if it exists for anything? Is there not a risk that the harmonious atmosphere to which the Prime Minister has rightly drawn our attention may be achieved at the expense of decisive action?

The Prime Minister

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[Back to top](#) [Previous](#) [Next](#)

Commonwealth activity at present. The Heads of Government meeting in New Zealand a couple of years ago delegated power to the Commonwealth ministerial action group to come up with a series of recommendations, which we have now accepted and endorsed. They will include expulsion if Nigeria does not change. The list of sanctions is very strong. As I said at the press conference at the conclusion of the Heads of Government meeting yesterday, all those who want to see change in Nigeria should come together and get behind the recommendations of the ministerial action group. Those recommendations are strong and right, and they will lead to the expulsion of Nigeria if it does not change.

Mr. Donald Anderson

(Swansea, East)

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Is it not right to recall that during the South Africa crisis a decade ago, many establishment figures in this country were writing off the Commonwealth as irrelevant? Happily, a more relevant and dynamic Commonwealth has emerged from the Edinburgh CHOGM. However, does not the issue of Nigeria—to which the hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) referred—strain the credibility of the Commonwealth as a human rights organisation and the Harare declaration? My right hon. Friend said that a "clear and strong message" had been sent to Nigeria. A clear and strong message was sent last time. My right hon. Friend's colleagues must surely realise the damage that has been done to the human rights credibility of the organisation by the failure to take decisive action now.

The Prime Minister

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I simply do not accept that we have not taken clear and tough action, which includes a series of sanctions that are extremely strong. They could lead not merely to the expulsion of Nigeria from the Commonwealth, but to a mandatory oil embargo, visa restrictions, a military arms embargo and the cessation of cultural and sporting links. Those measures would have a very important and serious effect.

At Auckland two years ago, we agreed to delegate to the ministerial action group the task of monitoring what was happening in Nigeria and then producing a series of recommendations. It has done that and, to my mind, the most important thing now is to carry through that process. The deadline is 1 October 1998 and, if there has not been substantial progress by then, the sanctions will follow. There is no doubt about that. That is the best and the proper way to proceed.

Mr. John Wilkinson

(Ruislip-Northwood)

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It would be churlish not to express appreciation of Her Majesty's Government's recognition of the economic potential of the Commonwealth—not least in view of the fact that this country conducts a higher proportion of trade outside the European Union than with any other big countries within the Union. Britain also has a larger proportion of trade with the Asian region, where there are many Commonwealth countries. As the European Union takes a leading role in Britain's trade policy, how can the Prime Minister ensure that important reforms—such as safeguarding the banana regime that is so crucial to Caribbean producer countries within the Commonwealth—remain?

The Prime Minister

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That is precisely why we mentioned the position of the banana producers particularly in the communiqué and in our discussions. Britain can play a role as a bridge between the Commonwealth countries and the European Union. We can make clear to our European partners the importance of not having a fortress Europe and of taking account of the problems faced in other parts of the world.

Another thing that we can do—we shall stress this point very much in the coming months, particularly when we have presidency of the European Union—is emphasise the need for fundamental reform of the common agricultural policy.

[Back to top](#)[Previous](#)[Next](#)

(Linlithgow)

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May we welcome the timely £3 million help that has been given to the vulnerable and fragile Guyana rain forest?

What reflections does the Prime Minister have on President Mandela's comments about Lockerbie? Is having a trial in Scotland really more important than having any trial at all? In the light of the decision to discuss Bosnia in The Hague, is it, after nine long years, really impossible to send the Lockerbie issue to The Hague?

The Prime Minister

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I welcome what my hon. Friend said about the additional resources for the Iwokrama rain forest project.

As for Lockerbie and the position of the Libyan suspects, there is nothing that I can add to what I said yesterday and what I understand the Foreign Secretary said at Question Time today. Everyone wants these people brought to trial, but it is important that nothing is done which undermines the perception and the fact of the integrity of the Scottish judicial process. That will be felt very strongly by people in Scotland.

Mr. Bowen Wells

(Hertford and Stortford)

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Will the Prime Minister spell out exactly what the Government are going to do to support the Commonwealth agreement to support the Caribbean countries that are banana producers? In addition to working with his European partners, will he consult his friend President Clinton in the United States of America, who accepted a large donation to his re-election fund from a large banana producer and trader in the United States? Could not the Prime Minister combine his friendships with Europe and the United States to help the Caribbean producers?

The Prime Minister

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Fortunately, I am not responsible for anyone else's campaign donation funds. We are supporting the banana producers in the World Trade Organisation and other forums, which allows us to take account of their case. Everyone understands the problems of those countries as economies that are completely dependent on one particular form of produce. From the bilateral discussions that I had with people in the Caribbean states and, indeed, from Africa, I think that they are well aware of the support that Britain is giving them. The best support that we can give is to use our influence in the international forums where we are represented to take account of their case.

Mr. George Galloway

(Glasgow, Kelvin)

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I congratulate the Prime Minister on the great skill shown at Edinburgh at the weekend, including that shown in striking the difficult balance on the issue of Nigeria. However, I should like to press him on the two applicants that have been mentioned and which were rejected—Yemen and the Palestine National Authority. It was reported that Yemen, including Aden with which we of course have great historical connections, was rejected because of its perceived lack of democracy and some questions about its economy. However, there are already, of course, not a few members of the Commonwealth whose democratic systems are not all that far from that of Yemen and whose economies are not that far from that of Yemen, which is a sleeping giant of a country—it has enormous oil reserves and a great future.

Apparently, the Palestine National Authority was rejected because it is not yet a state. I understand that point, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) has argued, could not the peace process in the middle east be assisted by a show of hospitality and welcome from the Commonwealth to the emerging Palestinian state based around the Palestine National Authority?

[Back to top](#)[Previous](#)[Next](#)[Share](#)

I thank my hon. Friend for what he said about the meeting in general. As for the applications for membership made by Yemen, Rwanda and the Palestine National Authority, we did not reject them but said that we would keep them under review in accordance with the criteria that we then established at the Heads of Government meeting. We shall carry on doing that. They are not ruled out altogether; indeed, we specifically welcomed the interest expressed by the Palestine National Authority. However, there is no state there as such, and it is important that we apply the criteria—criteria to which we have held and which have been codified and accepted over time by the Commonwealth Heads of Government—entirely fairly and objectively to any state that makes an application to us. We shall do that. Applications are kept under review, and I think that each of the two countries—Yemen and Rwanda—and the Palestine National Authority understand very well that they are not shut out from consideration and that their applications will remain under review and be determined in accordance with the criteria that we have established.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing

(Moray)

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I join others in thanking the Prime Minister for his kind remarks about the hospitality offered by the citizens of Edinburgh and of Scotland in general. No doubt he will have noted that during the past 30 years, 50 countries in the Commonwealth have achieved full independence—perhaps Scotland will be next on the list.

On the issue of the cancellation of aid debt, will the Prime Minister expand on what he means by the pursuit of sensible economic policies? What criteria will be exercised and who will monitor the exercising of those criteria?

The Prime Minister[Share](#)

The short answer is that we need to make sure that the relief—and therefore, effectively, the aid money—that we are giving those countries will be properly used and that economic policies will be pursued to make best use of it. That will be done in respect of each country individually. It is important to know that whatever help we give will be properly used. It must be properly directed, not wasted, and should form part of a programme to put the economy of the country back on its feet.

The strong message came out from the contributions of all the poorer countries that they resent being dependent on aid. They want to escape from that situation and believe it to be in their best interests to do so. We must ensure that, by a combination of trade, investment and aid, we allow those countries to reach a position of self-sufficiency and independence. Many of them are enormously rich in natural resources, but a large part of the public spending of many of those countries is eaten up by debt repayment—often just the repayment of interest, without ever touching the debt capital.

A combination of measures is required. We must ensure that any relief that we give is properly directed, but we are doing that in consultation with those countries.

Mr. Mike Gapes

(Ilford, South)

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Will my right hon. Friend confirm that it is very important that there should be no attempt to develop an organisation such as the Commonwealth, which is based on consensus, into an alternative United Nations? It needs to work on the basis of its networks. May I draw to my right hon. Friend's attention the report produced in the previous Parliament by the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, which criticised the admission of Cameroon to the Commonwealth without specific democratic guarantees? Will he give us an assurance that any future new members will be required to meet the democratic criteria laid down in the Harare declaration?

The Prime Minister[Share](#)

[Back to top](#) [Previous](#) [Next](#)

hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd), met the Prime Minister of Cameroon and made our concerns clear. It is important to hold firm to the principles set out in the Harare declaration. There may be difficult judgments to make in certain cases, but those principles are clear and right and should be adhered to. The Commonwealth ministerial action group report dealt not just with the situation in Nigeria, but with the situation in Gambia and Sierra Leone.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton

(Macclesfield)

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While I share the concern expressed on both sides of the House and elsewhere about the situation in Nigeria, does the Prime Minister accept that it is important that the United Kingdom Government, the Commonwealth and other international forums should be even handed when dealing with such countries? The democratic structures and human rights records of several Commonwealth countries leave a great deal to be desired, let alone those of the People's Republic of China. Many countries, not least the United States, are prepared to extend tremendous hospitality and welcome to the leaders of that country. Is it not important that we do not isolate Nigeria and that there is on-going dialogue? It is a huge and important country in Africa.

The Prime Minister

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In one sense, what the hon. Gentleman says is right. We want Nigeria back in the Commonwealth, but there has to be a response from Nigeria. The Nigerian Government must obey at least the minimum requirements of the democratic rights and processes set out in the Harare declaration. As a military regime, and with the number of political prisoners that they have, they plainly do not qualify. Dialogue is fine, but they need to know where they stand. They now know where they stand. If they do not make substantial progress towards restoring a proper democratic regime, releasing political prisoners and obeying minimum human rights standards, they will face sanctions. Of course, everyone acknowledges that Nigeria has a large population and is rich in resources. We want it back in the Commonwealth, but the price of being in the Commonwealth is adherence to its principles.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn

(Islington, North)

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When human rights and human rights abuses were discussed at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting, what consideration was given to the routine harassment of Opposition forces and politicians in Kenya?

Was any pressure put on the Australian Government concerning their proposed amendment to the Native Title Act 1993, which would substantially remove Aboriginal land rights and would put the cause of Aboriginal people back decades if it was passed by the Australian Parliament? The amendment also contravenes United Nations declarations and other declarations concerning the rights of indigenous peoples.

The Prime Minister

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I have no comment to make on the situation in Australia.

In respect of Kenya, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary met a delegation from Kenya during the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting and made clear to them our concerns. We have repeatedly condemned the excessive violence used by the Kenyan police and we have repeatedly raised the problems of human rights there. It is an issue which we raise frequently, certainly on a bilateral basis.

Sir Sydney Chapman

(Chipping Barnet)

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[Back to top](#) [Previous](#) [Next](#)

the other Commonwealth countries? In contradistinction to what my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) said, given the serious nature of the violations of human rights in Nigeria, given the length of time for which they have been going on and given the Government's proud proclamation of their ethical standards in their foreign and Commonwealth policies, should not this country take a lead and give an example by introducing the severest sanctions on the Nigerian Government, which might help to concentrate their mind?

The Prime Minister

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Without repeating what I have already said about Nigeria a number of times, I make the point that it is simply wrong to say that the action that is being proposed by the ministerial action group is not tough. Indeed, Britain played the leading part in putting the programme together. The measures that will follow do not merely include expulsion. Nigeria is now suspended from the Commonwealth; it is suspended from all Commonwealth activity. To all intents and purposes, vis-à-vis Nigeria and the Commonwealth, Nigeria is out of the Commonwealth. The measures that we have proposed in addition, which I listed earlier, are in a sense of greater force in relation to the Nigerian regime.

We are taking action and we have played a significant part in the action taken by the European Union. We shall carry on, whether in the Commonwealth or elsewhere, making our position clear in respect of Nigeria and in respect of any other country whose human rights record we believe falls short of what it needs to be.

Mr. Norman A. Godman

(Greenock and Inverclyde)

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In sharp contrast to my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), I welcome the Prime Minister's unequivocal statement that the trial of those deemed responsible for the murders at Lockerbie will be held at the High Court in Edinburgh. I also welcome the invitations issued to representatives of Arab and African countries to visit Edinburgh to examine for themselves the fairness and transparency of our legal system. Would it not be a good idea for the Lord Advocate to suggest to the Libyan authorities that a small team of Libyan lawyers would be welcome to take part as advisers to those defending the accused at any such trial?

The Prime Minister

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I do not think that anyone can doubt the validity of Scottish justice and the strength of the Scottish judicial system. It is highly respected everywhere in the world and nobody has ever been able to produce evidence to cast any doubt on its independence or impartiality. The question of who may advise the people from Libya if they are brought to trial in Scotland is a matter which will be considered in accordance with the normal processes of Scottish law. As my hon. Friend rightly says, there can be no doubt about the impartiality of the Scottish judicial process. That is absolutely clear and that is what I have said.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown

(Cotswold)

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May I press the Prime Minister on a question that was asked by my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague)? I welcome the declaration by the Commonwealth countries in respect of the reduction of CO₂, and other greenhouse gases being a potentially significant environmental improvement. Is that merely an aspiration by the Commonwealth countries, or did that declaration envisage any fixed targets?

The Prime Minister

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[Back to top](#) [Previous](#) [Next](#)

conference. The Commonwealth was setting out its belief as a matter of principle, that all countries—including developing countries—have a role and the obligation to play a role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. My own view is that that is a tremendous help in the run-up to the Kyoto conference.

One of the big problems is that some industrialised countries will say, "Why should we reduce greenhouse gas emissions?" if the developing world and some of the countries that are or will become big producers of greenhouse gas emissions have no reciprocal obligations or at least an agreement to a process involving the developing countries. The importance of that part of the communiqué which we agreed at Edinburgh is that we can say in principle that Commonwealth countries will play their part in the process. Therefore, strategies such as the joint implementation strategy, where there is some recognition by developing countries that they have to play a part in the process and use more environmentally beneficial forms of energy, give us a foothold in achieving those aims. That is more important than setting targets.

Rev. Martin Smyth

(Belfast, South)

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I noticed that the Prime Minister clarified some of the latest press announcements. I welcome the fact that some of the earlier ones were equally fallacious, as Scotland would not have been Scotland without the skirl of the pipes. Having said that, let me welcome the statement about debt accommodation and press the Prime Minister especially on inward investment to those countries. Will there be any restrictions on raising interest levels over the years, as that is one of the penalties that have been imposed on many developing countries in the past? On the other side of the equation, is there any limitation on the growth of the Commonwealth? Apart from human rights issues, is it not also necessary to keep something of a family tie, or will it simply be an amorphous body competing with other bodies?

The Prime Minister

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There was a strong declaration in favour of encouraging inward investment and for developed countries to do everything they could to assist it. It is important to recognise that the developing countries themselves must welcome that inward investment, and the terms upon which it is made are obviously extremely important.

One of the best aspects of the economic declaration was—for the first time—the welcome in principle by Commonwealth countries for more private sector investment in their economies. That is a big move forward, which we should welcome. Of course, the south Asia regional fund—the \$200 million facility for encouraging greater inward investment in south Asia—is an example of the type of practical arrangement that we can put together on the back of that general principle.

It is immensely important that we keep the concept of the family of Commonwealth nations. Many other things happened during the conference. For example, children from each of the Commonwealth countries spent a week together. In a sense, they were symbols of the fact that the Commonwealth is and must be more than a trade and investment gathering; it is also a body of nations with a strong common heritage, a common language, shared values and—if we use the next period of time imaginatively—the possibility to be a bridge between the developed and developing countries.

One of the good things about the Commonwealth meeting last weekend was that, partly because we have got over all the problems in South Africa, which meant that sanctions were the only issue that was talked about, Britain is now in a position to play a far more constructive role in the Commonwealth.

Mr. Bob Russell

(Colchester)

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Bearing in mind the Prime Minister's condemnation of human rights abuses in Nigeria, will he give an assurance that there will be no more deportations to Nigeria of people who currently reside in this country?

The Prime Minister

[Back to top](#)[Previous](#)[Next](#)

That is a matter for the courts and for my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary to decide in accordance with the normal rules. Those rules will be applied properly.

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