

Report from the Commonwealth Meetings in Malta November 2015

The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) was held in Malta from 27-29 November 2015. Prior to the Ministerial meeting a number of events were held by Civil Society and related Commonwealth Organizations. CHEC had a large delegation with all individuals being active in many different events, including the Commonwealth People's Forum, Commonwealth Youth Forum and the Commonwealth Round Table Summit, as well as distributing CHEC publications, including the latest issue of the *Journal* and the *Bees and Pollinators* Report. Particular thanks should be given to those who organized events, both within and outside the formal Commonwealth Structure. Jane Samuels organized a well-attended *Bees and Pollinators Event* with the collaboration of Friends of the Earth England, Wales and Northern Ireland (EWNI) and Friends of the Earth Malta. Nicholas Watts convened a Side Event at the Youth Forum, as well as making invited presentations at both the People's and Youth Forums. This CHOGM represented the culmination of CHEC's advocacy work, led by Nicholas Watts, since the Trinidad and Tobago CHOGM in 2009 on fisheries, oceans, and latterly the blue economy. The table below summarises all the other activities by the CHEC team.

Activities by CHEC representatives in Malta in November 2015

Date	Event	Aim	CHEC Participation
20	Commonwealth People's Forum (CPF) Education Policy Dialogue	Transformative Education for Sustainable Development in Small States: Building Resilience through Skills and Livelihoods	<i>Nicholas Watts</i> : invited presentation on "Higher Education and the Blue Economy"
21-25	Commonwealth Youth Forum (CYF)	To achieve cross-cultural connection and learning between participants and consensus on policies to address the challenges and opportunities facing young people.	<i>Jane Samuels and Nicholas Watts</i> : panellists with the Youth Network on Climate Change Environment Agenda "Protection of Natural Resources: Balancing Production and Consumption Patterns with Sustainable Development"; <i>Nicholas Watts</i> organized and chaired a CHEC 'setting the context' session (side event) on "Skills and knowledge for the blue economy, including: the contribution of education, particularly the role of the Virtual University of Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC)"; <i>André Lombard</i>
22	Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI)	To discuss justice and the new 2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emphasizing Section 16 on "access to justice and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels".	<i>Mark Robinson; Donnell Davis</i>

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22	CEER, University of Malta and Friends of the Earth Malta	Open day devoted to Bees and Pollinators at CEER Centre in Fawwara Siggiewi: bee event organized by Friends of the Earth Malta, Slow Food Malta, CEER and Greenhouse Malta	<i>Jane Samuels</i> spoke on the importance of Commonwealth action for bees and other pollinators; <i>André Lombard</i>
22-24	Commonwealth Women's Forum	To raise awareness of women's issues in Commonwealth countries and show how women's actions can have a positive impact politically, economically and socially.	<i>Donnell Davis; Mark Robinson</i> attended the opening as Donnell's guest
23-26	Commonwealth People's Forum	What makes societies resilient? To add diverse social and cultural perspectives to the discourse, following the Samoa Declaration.	<i>Donnell Davis; Eva Ekehorn; Per Ekehorn; André Lombard; Levi Oguike; Mark Robinson; Jane Samuels; Nicholas Watts</i> who spoke on behalf of the CPF at a meeting with policy makers.
24	Bees and Pollinators: A Commonwealth Concern (CHEC and FoE Malta and FoE EWN)	To make the issue of bees, pollinators and food security a matter of importance to the Commonwealth.	<i>Jane Samuels</i> (Organiser); <i>André Lombard</i> (Communications); <i>Eva Ekehorn; Per Ekehorn; Mark Robinson</i>
24-26	Commonwealth Business Forum (CBF)	The major business event in the Commonwealth calendar, bringing together Heads of Government, Ministers and top business leaders.	<i>Donnell Davis; Nicholas Watts</i> attended the closing session; <i>Mark Robinson</i> attended the Business Women's Awards Dinner
24	Commonwealth Roundtable Summit: The Commonwealth's New Beginnings?	To discuss the question of whether the Malta Summit represents a crossroads, new beginnings, for the Commonwealth	<i>Mark Robinson</i> : chaired concluding session; <i>Nicholas Watts</i> : presentation on "The Commonwealth and Small States – a changing global agenda"; <i>Per and Eva Ekehorn</i> attended; <i>Donnell Davis</i> attended part only.
26	Commonwealth Secretary General all candidates dialogue with civil society	A dialogue between the four candidates and an opportunity for civil society to interact directly with the participants	<i>Donnell Davis; André Lombard; Levi Oguike; Mark Robinson; Nicholas Watts</i>
27	CHOGM Opening Ceremony and Secretary-General's Reception	Address by Her Majesty the Queen	<i>Levi Oguike; Donnell Davis; André Lombard; Mark Robinson; Nicholas Watts?</i>
27	CHOGM foreign ministers meeting	Adding Global Value	<i>Donnell Davis; Nicholas Watts; Mark Robinson</i> (Civil Society Observers)
27	Round Table Lecture by Dr. Lawrence Gonzi, former Prime Minister of Malta	To examine the potential of the Commonwealth to influence events of a global nature as long as its component parts – specifically each one of its member states – are prepared to embrace this potential and do something with it.	<i>Mark Robinson; André Lombard</i>
28	CHOGM foreign ministers meeting	Small Island States	<i>Nicholas Watts</i>
28	The Prince of Wales 'Out of the Blue' photographic exhibition	Related to event at the Business Forum by the Prince's International Sustainability Unit.	<i>Nicholas Watts</i> attended at the invitation of the Prince's International Sustainability Unit.
27-29	End of CHOGM: Press conferences	CHOGM Malta 2015 was evidence of how constructive conversations can occur.	<i>Mark Robinson</i> , who had media accreditation, attended.

Goals and outcomes of the Malta CHOGM

The goal of CHOGM as a whole was “Adding Global Value”, with the underlying message that by working together Commonwealth countries could have a beneficial influence on events at the world scale. Hence the main focus by Heads of Government was on the discussions on global action on Climate Change in Paris in the following two weeks, as was emphasized by the presence of their special guests on Saturday 27th November, President Hollande and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon. In addition to the usual Leaders’ Statement at the end of CHOGM (<http://thecommonwealth.org/media/news/commonwealth-heads-government-statement>), there was the Leaders’ Statement on Climate Action (<http://thecommonwealth.org/media/press-release/commonwealth-leaders-statement-climate-action>).

Significantly the Commonwealth Leaders’ statement emphasized the importance of the *Blue Economy*, on which Nicholas Watts has worked hard for over a decade. The Leaders particularly welcomed the first Commonwealth Women’s Forum, where the discussions included leadership, justice systems, education, health, women and the media and technology (with lots of lessons we can all learn to be more sensitive news reporters and storytellers), the role of women in social development /changing societies (family units, business, community and country), and as effective implementers of sustainable development goals (SDGs). Zena Daysh would have been pleased to see such progress: she was proud to have taken part in the UN Women’s summit in 1996. Donnell Davis reported that the women’s parallel sessions focused on recommendations to CHOGM, including: political empowerment (in its many forms); child marriage (where Canada recently led reform on “girls: not child brides”) and abuse including FGM; enterprise development; gender and youth leadership; and education as key to end poverty and strengthen choice. Although this list seems disjointed, the synthesis was strong and the call for action declaration can be found at <http://thecommonwealth.org/sites/default/files/news-items/documents/CHOGM%20Women%27s%20Forum%20Outcome.pdf>. The work on gender mainstreaming in water resources in East Africa led by Governing Board member Patricia Kabatabazi would have had a place in these deliberations.

The Commonwealth People’s Forum

The Commonwealth People’s Forum (CPF) aimed to contribute to the theme of Adding Global Value by emphasizing how societies can become resilient, a particularly significant question for small island states. The keynote address was given by Vandana Shiva, who spoke well, especially in highlighting the link between climate change and global security. However, some delegates felt her remarks did not reflect the values of the real world, while others felt she provided an inspiring model for activism, and the individual responsibility advocated by Zena Daysh, that encourages every individual to look to her or his own potential and to leave no one behind

Interpretations of the word “resilience” varied. The ‘old’ usage of the term ‘resilience’ in the sense of ability to bounce back or recover from a catastrophe was discarded. The concept of resilience as societal ability to withstand and cope with shocks and changes was developed by Professor Lino Briguglio of the University of Malta, an old friend of CHEC. In the CPF it was interpreted in many ways: as ‘life’ and ‘living systems’ by Vandana Shiva; as culture (Moreno Mujica, Sydney); as culture that cannot be stopped, that is essential to resilience and should not be separated from life; as ‘self-sufficiency, food security, social security and cultural identity’ (Elise Huffer, Vanuatu); and according to representatives from Small Island States something that comes back from the efforts of others. Uchita de Zoysa from Sri Lanka commented that ‘Nature is resilient but can cities be so?’ The CHEC/FoE Bees and Pollinators event emphasised the key role of these organisms in the food security aspects of resilience.



Left: *Vandana Shiva speaking at the People’s Forum Opening*; Right: *Nicholas Watts addressing the CPF Policy Makers Meeting*

A debate on “deconstructing resilience” allowed delegates to hear from Commonwealth communities that are rarely represented at CHOGM – such as the indigenous communities in Canada. Speaker Clayton Thomas Muller spoke powerfully about the resilience of indigenous people around the world in the face of challenges, both environmental and human.

A discussion on “What to measure? Alternatives to GDP” revealed that not one of the top ten countries for GDP is in the top ten for happiness. Vanuatu is rated as the happiest place on earth, according to the new "happy planet index". Local people say that although they have 83 different islands and people speak many languages, they all live in harmony and feel a link to each other and their culture. Life is very peaceful. Third in the happiness list is Costa Rica, which combined its energy and environmental ministries and achieved the milestone of generating 100 per cent of its energy from renewable resources, with a combination of hydropower and geothermal energy, for 75 days in a row, in early 2015.

The programme for the CPF was rich in diversity. A more practical session discussed sustainable energy under the heading ‘Renewable resilience: Sustainable energy in practice’. Examples came from Caribbean where for instance 30% of energy supply in Barbados came from renewables and from a biogas plant built in Fiji for a pig farm run by a prison and a fish smoking plant in Cameroon. The Fijian biogas plant run on waste from the prison farm was partly funded by the Commonwealth Foundation as a local participatory project. It reduced pollution in local streams and thus improved downstream fisheries. In the fish smoking plant, that produced excellent tasting fish from mangrove wood smoke, but at a cost to the mangrove forest resource, new, better insulated stoves cut air pollution and used less wood. The health risks from excessive smoke for the women workers decreased and the mangrove forest began to re-generate. In discussion about the replication and funding of these projects, speakers said they wanted them to grow out of local support and contributions. Renewable energy such as wind farms was expensive for locals, but their projects were community driven, using local artisans and local skills.

The People’s Forum transmitted the “Malta Declaration on Governance for Resilience” (<https://chogm2015.mt/news/malta-declaration-on-the-governance-of-resilience>) to CHOGM. Its wide coverage of topics reflected the varying interpretations of resilience, with themes such as building resilient societies, indigenous peoples, sustainable energy, urbanisation, climate and small states, LGBTI, migration, education for sustainable development, women, cultural responses to conflict, access to resources for all, small states and colourful economies, global policy, food, and health systems for an ageing population.

Commonwealth Youth Forum

Nicholas Watts spoke on the Panel addressing Sustainable Consumption and Production, with a focus on the blue economy and the principle of universality, so that consumer patterns in the North have to change in line with planetary boundaries so that countries of the South still have scope for development. (This principle was close to what Aubrey Meyer described as ‘Contraction and Convergence’ at CHEC meetings in Manchester in 1993 and 1994!) Jane Samuels spoke on the growing concern of the decline of bees and pollinators and their loss of habitat, biodiversity and climate change impact on food security across the Commonwealth,

introducing the CHEC FoE Bees and Pollinators report that was distributed at the meeting and the role of Youth in activism and advocacy.

The session on “Skills and Knowledge for the Blue Economy, convened and chaired by Nicholas Watts considered the roles of culture and museums in raising awareness and valuing traditional knowledge; the importance of sound ocean and marine governance; and their importance in the work of the International Ocean Institute, and the impressive progress made by the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) Virtual University for Small Island States in making blue economy skills available across the SIDS. Inspiring presentations were given by Dr. K. Balasubramanian (Bala) Vice President, Commonwealth of Learning; Dr. Catherine C. Cole, Secretary General, Commonwealth Association of Museums and Dr. Alan Deidun, International Ocean Institute (IOI), University of Malta



Left: Jane Samuels (left at table), Nicholas Watts (right at table) and co-panellists at the Commonwealth Youth Forum; Right: Jane Samuels and Clive Harridge at the Bees and Pollinators Event

Bees and Pollinators Event

Realising the potential role of the Commonwealth in addressing the global importance of bees and pollinators, CHEC’s Bee and Pollinator’s Steering Group worked to set up a participatory team with NGOs, expert academics and volunteers to collaborate and work together to produce a report and event in Malta taking advantage of both newspaper media, social media in UK and Malta to raise awareness of pollinators and their decline. Social media and advocacy in Malta would be a key factor as the subject of Bees and Food Security was not on the CPF or CHOGM programme. Jane Samuels took the prime co-ordinating role and drove the initiative forward, forging an alliance with Friends of the Earth to develop a report “Bees and Pollinators: A Commonwealth Concern” which was launched at the event on November 24th. Over the preceding days, at both the Youth Forum and People’s Forum, publicity about the event helped to ensure an excellent attendance of over 100 people for the presentations and discussions.

Jane Samuels introduced the event reflecting on the theme of this year’s People’s Forum on what makes societies resilient and providing the background on why CHEC chose to address the decline of pollinators due to the damaging impact of climate change, loss of habitat and pesticides and impact on food security. In setting out a strategy for CHEC’s steering committee she explained the importance on partnerships with Friends of the Earth EWNI, Friends of the Earth Malta and the role of youth. Jane explained how key academics contributed evidence and solutions to the report including Dr. Katherine Baldock on urban pollinators, Dr. Simon Potts on global food security for the intergovernmental panel on biodiversity and ecosystems, Dr. Wanja Kinuthia in coordinating a UNEP pollinator project in Kenya, and Dr. Nigel Rayne’s contribution on Canada and Dr. Mario Balzan’s case study on Malta. Because different species of bees and pollinators play differing roles in the variety of global crops, their biodiversity must be protected. The next panellist was Friends of the Earth EWNI director of nature, Paul de Zylva on key concern of food security with stark facts on our human ecology response to bees and the risks to their survival. In 2005 pollinators were worth 164 billion dollars to the global economy. They pollinate 87% of the crops we consume. Yet we

have lost 20 species of bee since 1900 in the UK and 35 further species are currently under threat of extinction. As Mr. De Zylva said – “We have to be the generation that saves the bee”. Paul provided much needed examples of their efforts in England including inspiring members of parliament to agree a national pollinator strategy and even getting Prime Minister David Cameron to help plant a wild flower meadow to restore the habitats needed for pollinators.



At the Bee and Pollinators Event: Left: *Paul de Zylva*; Centre: *CHEC's Poster and local Maltese honey*; Right: *Peppi Gauci*

Clive Harridge, from the Commonwealth Association of Planners, emphasised how the new Sustainable Development Goals including work on the interconnection of sustainable cities, food security and protection of biodiversity could focus on bees and pollinators. Clive provided possible solutions to protect urban agriculture and necessary ecosystem habitats with both participatory planning for inclusion and implementing planning controls to protect these areas from over development.

Peppi Gauci who grows and builds permaculture habitats, winning awards for his efforts, explained how nature responds almost instantly to whatever efforts we make. He described his astonishment in seeing how quickly the bees and pollinators respond to newly planted habitats he creates. Dr. Balzan from Malta ended the panel's presentation by grounding the discussion in the practical reality and way ahead for Malta. Reminding the audience how the biodiversity provided by bees is vital for food security, he said “you can have the pasta, but you can't have the pasta sauce”. About 15 per cent of Malta's total agricultural produce – or €8 million a year – depends on bees and other pollinating species. He also spoke about the moral obligation to save pollinators as well as their contribution to Maltese cultural identity.

After the event there was a chance for the audience to network with each other, taste local honey, drink mead and pastries and ask further questions of the panellists. It was particularly heartening to see the number of young people and students who felt inspired to attend the event. The success of the event was demonstrated by the panellists not having time to answer the huge number of questions raised. The work on bees and pollinators will carry on with more events and efforts to establish new practical projects.

Commonwealth Business Forum

At the closing session of the *Commonwealth Business Forum* a sustainable future for the Commonwealth was addressed impressively in a panel session convened by the Prince's International Sustainability Unit (ISU) and voicing the concerns of business (including Aviva and PwC). It made a persuasive case for a decisive shift in approach to climate risks at the Paris COP that was due to start a few days later. In a well-judged and persuasive closing address HRH the Prince of Wales appeared to have the business sector audience's attention and positive support for a blue-green future. One major output of the ISU's efforts at the Business Forum in partnership with the Commonwealth Enterprise and Investment Council promises to be a Blue Bond for the blue economy.

Commonwealth Secretary General all candidates dialogue with civil society

Clause 16 of the Commonwealth Charter recognises “... the important role that civil society plays in our communities and countries as partners in promoting and supporting Commonwealth values and principles, including the freedom of association and peaceful assembly, and in achieving development goals.” In the spirit of this, a dialogue between the candidates for the position of Commonwealth Secretary-General was held in Malta’s House of Representatives as a special session of the Commonwealth People’s Forum with an opportunity for civil society representatives to directly question candidates. Mark Robinson thought all three candidates performed well, although he thought that Baroness Patricia Scotland gained loudest applause for the points she made. This was the first time anything like this had been held, but it has to be remembered that none of those voting for the Secretary-General were present.

Later it was announced that Baroness Scotland had been elected. Baroness Patricia Scotland was born in Dominica in 1955, and then moved with her family to Britain. She obtained her LLB in 1976, was called to the Bar in 1977 and was appointed Queen’s Counsel in 1991. She received a life peerage and was created Baroness Scotland of Asthal in 1997. Baroness Scotland has held the position of Attorney General (2007 to 2010), Minister of State (Home Office) (Crime Reduction) (2007 to 2007), Minister of State (Home Office) (Criminal Justice and Offender Management) (2003 to 2007), and Parliamentary Secretary (Lord Chancellor’s Department) (2001 to 2003) in government. She will take up office in April 2016.

Speaking during a press conference at the end of CHOGM, Baroness Scotland expressed her pride and gratitude at being given such a privilege at the same time when the first-ever Commonwealth Women’s Forum recognized the importance of women in leadership. She added that “The Commonwealth shares a great deal. It has 33 per cent of the world’s population. It has the capacity to bring together people of all religions; concentrate on what joins us. It’s a real opportunity to invest and work together. If you work together with people respectfully, you can bring about change. Human rights and development go hand-in-hand.”



Left: Mark Robins and Donnell Davis in Malta; Right: Commonwealth and EU flags in Maltese streets

The Round Table lecture with former Maltese Prime Minister Lawrence Gonzi

The lecture is available at:

<http://www.commonwealthroundtable.co.uk/commonwealth/commonwealth-european-union-challenges/>.

Lawrence Gonzi said that “The realities of today’s globalised world mean that we are all facing common challenges. They also mean that our values are being put to the ultimate test: one where we need to prove to

ourselves that we are prepared to practise what we preach”. He urged people to re-discover the spirit that inspires the Commonwealth in order to recognise the opportunities, the challenges – indeed the responsibility that is shouldered by the political leaders forming part of this organisation when faced with the extremely difficult and complex problems of a modern globalised world that continues to witness the desperation of millions of refugees escaping, war, hunger and persecution.

He quoted from a special edition of the journal ‘The Round Table’: “The opportunities offered by the EU–Commonwealth nexus remain largely untapped, despite punctual partnerships and diffuse circulations...more strategic dialogue between the Commonwealth and the EU would be a valuable asset for international organisations, as well as their member states and their citizens. Malta’s CHOGM will, hopefully, give concrete evidence of this.” Lawrence Gonzi was particularly cogent on the issues of war, conflict and brutality urging leaders not shirk from working together to find solutions to the misery human beings are inflicting on others and so creating the problems of refugees, forced migration, and escape from terror. He insisted that there is a role for the Commonwealth here – it is a role that is inspired by the very values he quoted in this speech.

Remarks by Heads of Government at the final press conference

Prime Minister of Malta, Hon. Dr. Joseph Muscat expressed his satisfaction at how Commonwealth leaders have managed to converge and agree almost unanimously on the issue of climate change as well as migration. He also stated that despite the differences between Commonwealth countries’ points of view, CHOGM Malta 2015 was evidence of how constructive conversations can occur.

Baron Waqa, President of Nauru said that this was a gathering of some of the biggest, smallest, wealthiest and poorest nations and although it might be intimidating discussing certain concepts with countries larger than one’s own, all of the nations have the ability to play their part. He also noted that ‘The issue of Climate Change should not be hijacked by the occurrences during the last few weeks’.

Ghanaian President, HE John Dramani Mahama noted that the Valletta Summit on Migration and CHOGM Malta 2015 dovetail into each other. There is a lot that we can learn from this Commonwealth Meeting mainly how we can increase cooperation and embrace the values of good governance and democracy.

Hon. Jerome Stuart, Prime Minister of Barbados, described how this meeting reinforced the relevance of the Commonwealth. He emphasised how as a citizen of the Caribbean region, climate change is one of his main concerns. He noted that ‘when the planet speaks, we have no choice but to listen. And the planet is speaking to us with certain eloquence’.

Finally, outgoing Secretary General HE Kamallesh Sharma recounted this as a ‘memorable and water-shed CHOGM with the Commonwealth establishing an ambitious threshold for the coming years and a force creating global good’.

Commendations from CHEC’s Honorary President, the Hon. Levi Oguike

On December 2nd 2015, the Honorary President wrote:

“I would like to commend all who participated or supported the CHEC outing in Malta. It made a good impact, as CHEC had a very strong presence and representation. I guess Eva deserves our collective appreciation for the supreme efficiency demonstrated in the accreditation matters with the CF and management of financial support for all CHEC representatives”.

On December 14th 2015, he wrote:

“I do not think it will be out of place to mention the post CHOGM reception I was honored with at CHEC Headquarters and general conversation in a very convivial atmosphere, of which I remain most grateful to the Chairman and the Hon. Secretary for the full house and lunch”.

Commonwealth Human Ecology Council: www.checinternational.org/ contact@checinternational.org