

Commonwealth Day

Commonwealth Day is an opportunity to promote understanding on global issues, international co-operation and the work of Commonwealth organizations, which aims to improve the lives of citizens. The 2014 Commonwealth Day theme was #TeamCommonwealth, which expresses the spirit of friendship and motivation towards the shared goals and values that exist between Commonwealth members.

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association hosted a group young people from the various commonwealth states at the Houses of Parliament, for a day of educational enlightenment on political issues faced by various states. The day began with introduction by the United Kingdom CPA secretary and heads of state from Trinidad and Tobago and the United Kingdom. We were given the opportunity to get a greater understanding of the responsibilities and duties carried out by the CPA and its influence it has over decisions being made for the member states.

Following the speeches and general discussion, as a group we were given the opportunity to debate on issue we believed the Commonwealth, as an organization needs to address. Under the theme of 'Team Commonwealth' strong arguments arose over the collaboration or lack of, between Commonwealth member states. Issues such as offering aid during times of crisis was a main topic for discussion, and as suggested by a representative from a Caribbean member state, there needed to be a greater bond between the Commonwealth countries to offer help during times of need.

The day ended with a program, which took place at Westminster Abbey and featured speeches from Lord Sebastian Coe, Dame Tanni Grey-Thompson; a specially commissioned poem from South African poet Phillippa Yaa De Villiers; musical performances by Laura Mvula, and a keynote address by celebrated campaigner Malala Yousafzai.

Six members of the Royal family attended the event: Her Majesty The Queen, His Royal Highness The Duke of Edinburgh, His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales, Her Royal Highness the Duchess of Cornwall, His Royal Highness The Earl of Wessex, and Her Royal Highness The Countess of Wessex. The UK government was represented by the Hon Alan Duncan MP, and in attendance were also the Commonwealth Secretary-General H.E. Mr Kamallesh Sharma, senior politicians, High Commissioners, Commonwealth dignitaries and over 1,000 young people, with approximately 2000 people attending in total.

After the special observance day at Westminster Abbey, I was specially invited to attend The Commonwealth Secretary-General reception hosted by The Queen and representatives of the 53 members of the Commonwealth at the Commonwealth Secretariat in Marlborough House, London. The evening commemorates the Commonwealth Day theme.

This reception was by invitation only and it was a great opportunity to be able to attend and network with heads of state from the Commonwealth countries and other dignitaries. The highlight of the night was the appearance by the guest of honor Her Majesty The Queen and His Royal Highness The Duke of Edinburgh were given the opportunity to meet with both royalties and have a short casual conversation, after which guests slowly dissipated and the night ended at 9pm.

By: Moya Williams