



The Commonwealth

Commonwealth ICT Ministers Forum 2016

Welcome Address by The Rt Hon Patricia Scotland QC
Secretary-General of the Commonwealth

Tuesday, 14 June 2016

Honourable Ministers, Excellencies, Secretary-General Taylor, distinguished guests, Commonwealth friends; welcome.

It is a great honour for me to address you as your Secretary-General and in the tenth week of my time as Secretary-General. I can't think of a more important conference.

I know some of you may be thinking that ICT is not necessarily the most exciting thing to be doing today, but let me assure by saying as far as I'm concerned, it absolutely is. I want to thank each and every one of you round this table for having come because the fact that you're here, the fact that you're willing to talk together, work together, I hope plot together to change the paradigm that the 2.3 billion people in our Commonwealth are in, to make a difference is extraordinarily important. And so I want to thank you, each of you, for what you have already done in this regard, but I also want to thank you for what you will do as a result of this conference, that you may not have done if you hadn't had the opportunity to collaborate and share and listen.

In the last ten weeks, I have already seen what has felt like almost a sea change in the way in which the Commonwealth is seen, because increasingly, people are understanding the opportunities that there are as a result of this quite extraordinary partnership between our nations.

Understanding the value and impact that the governments and people of our member states create if we come together, and the importance of ICT in all that we are and all that we do will come as no surprise to any of us. Interaction and interoperability are central to the way the Commonwealth works and acts together to implement change and achieve progress.

The Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation (CTO) has a most remarkable pedigree and an outstanding record of pioneering and facilitating

collaboration between Commonwealth member states and I think it's wonderful to be able to celebrate the 115th anniversary - and in this regard you have beaten Her Majesty. So this remarkable record is our starting point because the impact of our work of our building understanding and sharing progress and increasing prosperity for the benefit for all is immense, and it is largely thanks to this organisation that we can speak, to use the words of our 2016 theme, of 'An Inclusive Commonwealth'.

The proliferation of technology and increasing access to the internet have developed new digital pathways to address the Sustainable Development Goals.

It is estimated that by 2017 every person in this world will have a mobile device - we need to fully exploit this phenomenon to improve health, education, commerce and provide government services to citizens.

We are living in a new world and our children will have a different experience. With over 7.8 billion mobile telephone connections on the planet, equivalent to over 100 per cent of the world's 7.4 billion population, and some three billion mobile internet users, the global digital platform is one where the improbable has become the inevitable, within our generation. And it's something that all our people of whatever age now have access to.

Technology provides opportunities for youth to participate in the digital economy since they are far more 'tech savvy' and increases the participation rate for women in the workforce.

However, we all know that there is a darker side to this technology revolution - child online exploitation, cybercrime, attacks on national critical infrastructure, for example electricity grids, health facilities, all of that, is increasing with our small states not immune to these cyber events but highly vulnerable to these attacks and not all have the capacity to respond. This is where the Commonwealth family becomes so important, because the challenges that we face as 53, whether on a micro or macro scale, are very similar.

The globalisation of those problems are real, and therefore the extraordinary opportunity that we in the Commonwealth have, by virtue of the fact that we have a common language, common and similar institutions, similar structures of governance and government following the parliamentary model that we all share, gives us a platform which is extraordinarily valuable and something that the rest of the world doesn't have. So our ability to use that technology to help one another is real too.

The Commonwealth has had a long and distinguished partnership with the CTO, for example:

- We developed a Mobile Technology Strategy toolkit that was based on our collective experiences and field tested in Vanuatu;
- We implemented the Technology Community Centres in Trinidad and Tobago to provide access to technology to remote and disadvantaged communities;

- The CTO sits on the Commonwealth Cybercrime Initiative Executive Management Committee that oversees and provides direction to the Initiative programmes;
- We have also developed a series of products and services designed especially for Small States.

There is the eGovernment handbook for Small States that is based on experiences in the Caribbean, Africa and Pacific. The handbook provides detailed frameworks to develop strategies, policies, standards and procedures and our assistance to the Government of Seychelles contributed to their number 1 ranking in the Africa region on eGovernment according to the United Nations in 2013. The key philosophy guiding the implementation of eGovernment strategies is 'Think Big, Start Small and Scale Fast', that is, coherent vision, quick wins to build experience, convert the sceptics and then move on to more complex projects.

Many of you will know that I will want us to share the legal tools that we need to combat cybercrime and also the legal tools to generate more business. There is at the moment a 19 percent advantage to all Commonwealth countries if we work together because of our history, our common law and our common language. What if we could together, with the use of IT and other tools, create an advantage that is 30 per cent. An operational, practical advantage because of the interoperable measures we create together so it makes it faster, easier, cheaper to work with each other, than to work outside the Commonwealth. We have that reality, we have that possibility if we choose to collaborate.

I just want to mention two of the initiatives taken by our member states that have made a radical difference to their country. If we just look at what Rwanda has done by introducing 4G across the whole country. As a result of that interconnectivity and interoperability, Rwanda has been able to use the 1000 doctors they have for a population of six million, and by creating 55,000 nurses and giving each nurse a smart phone, they have been able to have an interoperable health system where pharmacists, doctors and clinicians in communities are interconnected in real time. So you will have triaging taking place in the most remote areas of the country.

Kenya has used the internet and connectively to deliver interoperable banking—telebanking. I know from the Antiguan Minister, who was here last week, that he is now looking at how he can bring in banking in relation to telecommunications and he is struggling, he told me, to get the capacity to deliver it. Kenya has already done it. So partnership in sharing good ideas is a huge opportunity for us and delivers interoperability.

I am sure if we were to go around this table, every single one of us has done something which the other 52 have not yet achieved, but would be incredibly valuable if we could share it. So the research and development that we are collectively developing through the ICT capacity could be life changing for the people of our countries who are so vulnerable and so in need of our help.

I want to create an Office of Civil and Criminal Justice Reform so that we can collate the information we have and we can share it. I have to tell you that one of my aspirations has always been to create an e-assisted criminal and civil justice system.

Many of the new countries who are now setting up new systems, do not have to replicate the old arcane, cumbersome and expensive systems that we have. Which one of us around this table has the capacity to build, for the first time, a common law, effective compliant system, assisted by technology? What if we could fine people fairly, openly on Skype, on a telephone. You can plead guilty, you can plead not guilty and you can pay your fine online. All of it is possible. Small claims courts, which are virtual, as opposed to real, meaning that we could have hearings in the remote areas of the country where people live, as opposed to getting them to travel. It's not a dream, it's a reality if we choose to work together.

The United Kingdom is at this very moment looking at how to restructure the whole of its civil justice system. That review is being undertaken by Lord Justice Michael Briggs who is seeking to amend the rules which were undertaken and made by Lord Woolf. Those reforms are being emulated all across our Commonwealth.

I know from speaking, for example, to the Minister of Justice of Nigeria, that he too is looking at how to reform the position and many of your countries have told me that you wish to do the same. What of instead of us all doing it separately, we look at our global challenges collectively. I want to create a system which is the Commonwealth best practice that anyone can implement and we can assist each other in creating something which is best practice for the small, the medium and the large as a template. If all our judges, who already all talk together anyway - I've been speaking to all the Chief Justices, and there is not one Chief Justice, who does not know another Chief Justice, what if we could get them to work with us so that we can have a portable, transportable system, and we can get interoperable processes. Our businesses would then be able to work in all 53 countries, having a similar mirrored process. All of these are possible, and I think incredibly exciting, but only if we work together. And the Ministers responsible for ICT are the ones that make this a reality.

I am incredibly excited by the opportunity to work with all of you, incredibly committed to doing all I can to facilitate the best practice, to share the knowledge between us all, and I'm really hoping that each of us will choose to be part of this new endeavour, choose to problem solve, choose to share, choose to connect and choose to make the paradigm that our families, our children and our grandchildren are currently in: so different from what we have had in the past. I think the thing for all of us is to acknowledge that in partnership we can choose to do this, or we can choose not to. We can swim together or drown separately. I am for swimming.