

Rt Hon Baroness Patricia Scotland



On 27 November 2015 the Commonwealth Heads of Government appointed The Rt Hon Patricia Scotland QC of Dominica as the first woman and the sixth Commonwealth Secretary-General. She assumed office on 1 April, 2016. Her role involves promoting and protecting the Commonwealth's values; representing the Commonwealth publicly; and the management of the Commonwealth Secretariat. Baroness Scotland joined the House of Lords in 1997, then served as a minister in the Foreign Office, Home Office and Lord Chancellor's Department. Her many achievements include undertaking major reform of the criminal justice system, including the introduction of the Domestic Violence Crime and Victims Act and founding the Eliminate Domestic Violence Global Foundation in 2011.

28 September 2016

UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office - Conference

Preventing Violent Extremism by building inclusive and plural societies: How Freedom of Religion or Belief can help

Video message from The Rt Hon Patricia Scotland QC, Secretary-General of the Commonwealth

It is a pleasure to greet you as you assemble to consider fresh approaches and new ways of working together across boundaries of faith or other affiliation to prevent violent extremism.

I very much wish that I could be with you to learn and think with you about these vitally important topics, and I am pleased that my Deputy Secretary-General, Dr Josephine Ojiambo, will be contributing to your discussions.

Other Commonwealth organisations too will be adding to the rich diversity of perspectives represented at your gathering, as is most fitting in this year when we are celebrating 'An Inclusive Commonwealth'.

The Commonwealth is a goodwill of nations, and our 53 member states - collectively and individually - have long been pioneers in building the inclusive, pluralistic and resilient societies which, as the title of your conference suggests, are the strongest bulwark and most powerful antidote to the poisons of violent extremism and intolerance.

The need has never been greater for fresh thinking and new approaches that encourage attitudes of openness and acceptance towards the different and the other.

The 2005 Commonwealth Commission on Respect and Understanding made seminal recommendations on Civil Paths to Peace, and advanced appreciation of how our multiple identities as individuals provide sound foundations on which to build bridges and understanding.

With the establishment of a dedicated Commonwealth unit to counter violent extremism we are now embarking on a new chapter of Commonwealth cooperation that will build on shared insights and experience of how we can live together harmoniously in a spirit of goodwill and mutual respect.

The unit will carry forward in our distinctive Commonwealth way the renewed commitment to countering radicalisation, violent extremism and terrorism made by the Heads of Government of our member states when they met in Malta last November.

Important aspects of the work this new CVE Unit will be to promote peaceful societies through civil society networks, through education, and by empowering young people as positive actors, and also to share practical prevention strategies and best practices

Open and equitable societies that embrace freedom of religion and belief, in which all citizens can depend on the impartial protection of the rule of law, are central to our Commonwealth focus in building safer and stronger communities.

I have faith in the Commonwealth, and I have faith in all of us – that together we will find pathways which will enable us to celebrate that which joins us, our faiths, and our countries, and by understanding those areas where we differ, overcome the causes of discord and disharmony.

It is my prayer and fervent hope that your time together will be fertile and fruitful for the greater safety, welfare and happiness of all.