

Press release: British High Commission celebrates the Commonwealth

The Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports, British High Commissioner to Brunei and other VIPs being served lunch by members from Hand4Hand

The British High Commission in partnership with local NGOs Green Brunei, Beach Bunch and Hand4Hand organised a beach cleanup and tree planting followed by a Commonwealth Big Lunch with over 200 volunteers to celebrate the Commonwealth, community and build connections.

All the volunteers at the Commonwealth Big Lunch: Beach Cleanup and Tree Planting

The Commonwealth Big Lunch: Beach Cleanup and Tree Planting took place at Berakas Beach, the Berakas Forest Reserve and was supported by the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, Forestry Department, Department of Environment, Parks and Recreation, Brunei Shell Petroleum, International School Brunei and Standard Chartered Bank. This location is also one of the forest areas which Brunei has dedicated as part of The Queen's Commonwealth Canopy.

The Guest of Honour at the event was the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports, Yang Berhormat Major General (Rtd) Dato Paduka Haji Aminuddin Ihsan bin Pehin Orang Kaya Saiful Mulok Dato Seri Paduka Haji Abidin. Also in attendance was the Bangladeshi High Commissioner to Brunei; officials from the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports; members of the National Service Programme and representatives from International School Brunei.

British High Commissioner to Brunei, His Excellency Richard Lindsay, said:

We are delighted to organise the Commonwealth Big Lunch in Brunei.

The point of the Big Lunch is to celebrate our joint membership of the Commonwealth over a shared meal.

It is wonderful that we were able to combine with these excellent Bruneian organisations to clean litter from the beach and plant new trees within Berakas Forest Reserve, one of the areas Brunei has dedicated to the Queen's Commonwealth Canopy.

The great turnout we had today is a sign of youth engagement across the Commonwealth to ensure that we work together to achieve a more sustainable future.

This will be a focus for discussion at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in London this April and the UK looks forward to welcoming His Majesty at this important event.

I am really grateful to the hard work of our partners and supporters, and all the volunteers who participated this morning.

Volunteers picking up rubbish on Berakas Beach

The beach cleanup was organised by Beach Bunch. Assistance was provided by The Brunei Four Wheel Drive Association to collect and transport the collected rubbish along the beach. Among the 53 Commonwealth nations, 46 are ocean states and 24 are small island developing states that are reliant on strong 'blue' sectors, such as tourism, fisheries and shipping. The world's oceans are essential to life on our planet: they provide humanity's largest source of protein, capture around a quarter of our carbon emissions and provide a livelihood for hundreds of millions of people across the world.

But the health of the world's oceans is under threat: each year, around 12 million tonnes of plastic is dumped in the ocean, which can have devastating consequences for marine life. Without urgent action to reduce vulnerability and increase resilience, the impacts of climate change could push an additional 100 million people across the world into poverty by 2030. This is particularly relevant for the Commonwealth as 39 of 53 members are small or other vulnerable states. Each year across the Commonwealth, natural disasters affect 28 million people and cause economic losses of almost \$8bn.

At the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, the sustainable development of the world's oceans will be discussed and there will be a push for action to reduce plastic waste, underlining the Commonwealth's on-going commitment to tackling climate change, protecting the environment and increasing the resilience of its members.

The Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports watering a sapling he had planted on Berakas Beach

The tree planting was organised by Green Brunei in partnership with International School Brunei's One Million Trees Project, sponsored by Standard Chartered Bank. First launched back in 2006 The Million Trees project aims to support tree planting and forest conservation projects across Borneo and beyond, but especially in the areas defined as The Heart of Borneo, with the specific focus on Brunei. 400 saplings were planted by 100 volunteers with the support of Forestry Department. So far, the project has replanted over 300,000 trees in the Heart of Borneo area. The project aims to plant 500,000 trees in Brunei by 2020 and one million trees in Borneo by 2025.

Volunteers enjoying the Commonwealth Big Lunch after the beach cleanup and tree planting

The Commonwealth Big Lunch was organised by Hand4Hand, whose founder, Iqbal Damit, was recently awarded the Commonwealth Points of Light Award, and was generously sponsored by Brunei Shell Petroleum. Reusable, eco-friendly water bottles were sponsored by Cuckoo International (b) Sdn Bhd. The gathering in Berakas Forest Reserve with over 200 volunteers is one of many Commonwealth

Big Lunches happening across the 53 Commonwealth nations from 12 March – Commonwealth Day – until Sunday 22 April.

Launched by the Eden Project in partnership with the UK Government, thousands of people from across the Commonwealth are coming together to celebrate, discover and share their Commonwealth links, stories and experiences with one another over a shared meal.

Lunches are being held ahead of and during the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 2018. Unfolding over five days, leaders and foreign ministers from up to 53 countries and over 2,000 delegates will gather in London and Windsor, UK, from 16 – 20 April to discuss and agree how to work together to address shared global challenges.

Further information

Photos from the event can be found on our [UKinBrunei Flickr](#).