

Speech: Commonwealth has key role to play in the bright future for Britain: article by Boris Johnson

Do you know what occasion attracted one of the biggest mass gatherings in the history of East Africa? A Bob Marley concert, perhaps? Or a Papal visit? In fact, it was the Queen's arrival in Uganda to open a Commonwealth summit that inspired hundreds of thousands of people to come together in 2007.

As Her Majesty and Prince Philip drove from Entebbe Airport to the capital, Kampala, they were greeted by cheering crowds lining every inch of the 20-mile route. I cannot imagine any head of state except the Queen – or any international organisation except the Commonwealth – stirring such popular enthusiasm.

So I'm delighted to report to readers of the Sunday Express that Her Majesty will be opening another [Commonwealth summit](#) on April 19 and this time the occasion will be here in London.

We are unlikely to rival Uganda when it comes to mass gatherings – something that will be of comfort to the Metropolitan Police – but this event will demonstrate the immense value of the Commonwealth, now and in the future. In some countries, international meetings happen in plate glass conference centres – think sumptuous and functional but, dare I say it, rather bland.

That's not how Britain does these things, certainly not when the occasion is so special. We will hold the summit in Buckingham Palace, Lancaster House and St James's Palace. On the final day, the leaders will travel to Windsor Castle. I hope this will be a uniquely memorable gathering, showing just how much importance Britain attaches to the Commonwealth. And I believe that our faith is amply justified.

As we celebrate Commonwealth Day tomorrow, the Commonwealth's 53 members comprise a third of humanity. Of those 2.4 billion people spread across 6 continents, 60% are under the age of 30. They are joined with us by ties of history and friendship and the English language. They share our values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. And our natural affinity finds its expression through the institution of the Commonwealth.

When you're looking for future opportunities, any good businessperson will tell you to go where the growth is. And for decades, if you untangle the numbers, you will discover some remarkable facts. Since Britain decided to join what became the European Union in 1972, the EU has recorded average annual economic growth of just over 2%. Yet, over the same period, the Commonwealth's economies have expanded twice as fast – by an average of 4.4% every year. Today, the Commonwealth has a combined GDP of \$10.5 trillion, accounting for almost 14% of the global economy.

India alone has an economy of \$2.3 trillion and annual growth of 7% – faster than any EU country. All of this represents a huge opportunity for British business.

The good news is that when we leave the EU, we will regain the power to sign free trade agreements with our Commonwealth friends, allowing the UK to make the most of thriving markets. Brexit will give us the ability to open a new era of friendship with countries across the world.

A key theme of the London summit will be how to boost trade within the Commonwealth. We'll also discuss how to improve security co-operation and take joint action to protect the world's oceans, bearing in mind that the Commonwealth includes island states in the Pacific, the Indian Ocean and the Caribbean.

And I will ensure that the summit focuses on the terrible injustice that deprives millions of girls of the chance to go to school. At this moment, over 130 million girls across the world are not in the classroom, many of whom – alas – live in Commonwealth countries.

My aim is for all governments to promise to deliver 12 years of quality education and learning for every child. The fact that we will discuss such a wide range of subjects – trade, security, girls' education, protecting the oceans – is yet more proof of the value of the Commonwealth.

This is going to be a great summit and a huge opportunity for a Global Britain.