

Speech: Lord Ahmad Speech at the Commonwealth Youth Roundtable Event

Your Royal Highness, distinguished guests and young leaders of the Commonwealth, it is an immense pleasure for me as Minister of State for the government, to welcome you here to Lancaster House and continue the conversation many of us started in April last year on the vision of CHOGM 2018, and most importantly the focus of the youth forum.

I am particularly delighted that we are joined by His Royal Highness, The Duke of Sussex, who will speak in a moment about his work as Commonwealth Youth Ambassador.

Your Royal Highness, may I say how delighted we are that the Duchess of Sussex has become patron of the Association of Commonwealth Universities and I know she will be an energetic and inspiring champion in every sense. There is a small event happening very shortly in your lives, but I'm sure, as The Duchess of Sussex said herself during the Commonwealth Summit, she's very much looking forward to her role within the context of the Commonwealth family.

Your Royal Highness, over the last 10 months, the UK as Chair-in-Office, has been working very closely with member states, the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Commonwealth's many organisations and networks to ensure that we deliver, and act, on the outcomes and ambitions of the Summit and Heads of Government meeting.

We have already allocated over £500 million towards projects under the four themes of the summit, and we have already made good progress.

We are building, firstly, a more secure future through programmes to strengthen countries' cyber resilience. This is a particular priority for me personally as the government's cyber minister. We are building a prosperous future by improving employment prospects for young people through investment in training and skills development programmes. And importantly we are also investing in a fairer future through supporting the provision of 12 years of quality education for girls and boys, with a commitment from the United Kingdom of over £200m of UK funding.

However, there is also an important priority which I know is close to your heart, Sir, on the issue of a sustainable future. We, together with Vanuatu, are co-leading the Commonwealth Clean Oceans Alliance to tackle marine plastics, which now has 24 members of the Commonwealth, to many of whom we are giving technical and direct assistance. And we are also funding research to accelerate the development of new malaria treatments.

The 1.4 billion young people of the Commonwealth will define the future. Indeed, you are already defining the present, as those of us in this room will testify. All of you are advocating for issues that matter to everyone;

you are involved in delivering development programmes; you are creating businesses, you are creating wealth and employment; you are holding your governments to account, and most importantly your personal examples of the work you do is inspiring others across the globe.

Direct engagement between governments and young leaders is not just a nice thing to do, it is the right thing to do, it is essential. We must have our young leaders working hand-in-glove with all the member states, the Secretariat, and the Commonwealth's networks and organisations. Young people must not just be engaged, they must be directly involved and I assure you that as a minister responsible I pledge, together with our team here, to continue working directly with you, throughout our Chair-in-Office period and beyond, and that's what brings us together here today.

Before we kick off the discussions I would like to now invite His Royal Highness The Duke of Sussex to speak to us about his role as Commonwealth Youth Ambassador. Your Royal Highness, we are again honoured you've joined us today, and it's over to you.