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The Commonwealth Column: The Modern Commonwealth

By Louise Martin CBE, CGF President

Everyone across the Commonwealth Sport Movement believes in the exceptional power of sport as a force for good. A force that brings us together, reconciles our differences and has the inspiring potential to change lives for the better. A force that drives our commitment to humanity, equality and destiny. A force that encapsulates our passion for and belief in the triumphant, generous spirit of humanity.

We are seeing this every day, in action, as the Gold Coast 2018 Queen's Baton Relay visits every terrain and time zone of the Commonwealth. The Baton is a powerful, celebratory and tangible symbol of today's Commonwealth Games – carrying Her Majesty's message of peace and unity – and celebrating and showcasing today's Modern Commonwealth as it is passed from athletes to citizens, community leaders to school children.

Indeed, this message and this vision brings to life the Commonwealth itself - a voluntary association of 70 nations and territories. Among our membership are some of the world's largest and smallest countries, from India, with over 1.2 billion people to Nauru with a population of just 10,000. Our combined population of 2.4 billion represents a third of the world's total population. More than 60% of Commonwealth citizens are under the age of 30.

The Commonwealth Charter brings together the values and aspirations which unite our diverse membership, outlining our joint commitment to democracy, human rights and the rule of law, to promote peace and prosperity and to improve the lives of all peoples of the Commonwealth. No matter the person's race or religion, sexual orientation or gender identification, all people of the Modern Commonwealth should be treated equally.

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In recent times, our Federation has done a lot of soul-searching to look at our impact and meaning. It is no accident that we built upon the very foundations of the Commonwealth, as enshrined in the Commonwealth Charter, to define what sets us apart as a thriving, relevant and modern sporting movement. In fact, I would argue that today, in 2018, the Commonwealth is more relevant than at any time in history.

In 2010, the Commonwealth Sport Movement reached a challenging chapter in its existence – when the very word and purpose of the ‘Commonwealth’ was questioned and the negative impacts of a Games on a host community were highlighted.

On the back of an extensive strategic review, and through a collaborative approach of cross sector partnerships at the local, national and global level - we all sought to change the script for the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games and beyond – reflecting on who and what the Commonwealth Family is and why a Mega Sporting Event of the Commonwealth Games’ stature was so crucial to the modern world.

This led us to being very explicit about the value we place on host communities and citizens, and the positive impact we seek to achieve in all that we do:

- From protecting, promoting and safeguarding clean athletes
- From publishing pre-Games and post-Games Human Rights reports
- To embracing the fair living wage
- To procuring ethically and sustainably, and implementing community benefit clauses in our tenders and contracts
- To changing the face of accessibility standards and services for events and tourism
- To actively promoting LGBT rights and embracing diversity every single step of the way
- To promoting and fundraising for children’s rights through a global partnership with UNICEF – where £6m was raised for children during our Opening Ceremony in Glasgow

These are just some examples of how one city, in one nation with the power of one Games made a difference. And we have capitalised on this momentum and formalised this ambition into our own strategic plan, *Transformation 2022*.

Today, the Commonwealth Games Federation (CGF) is far more than the curator of a great Games. Our strategic blueprint marks a historic change in the movement’s focus from the four-

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year cycle of overseeing the Commonwealth Games to a wider, ambitious role of delivering sports leadership within the Commonwealth, based on partnership, engagement and value generation.

The Commonwealth Games on Australia's Gold Coast in April will demonstrate just how far we have come, and how committed we are to ensure that the benefits of the Games stretch beyond the thrilling impact of 11 days of sport. All our efforts are focused on delivering worldwide recognition and respect for the Gold Coast and Queensland, jobs and economic growth, community engagement right across Australia and, above all, the promise of greater reconciliation and social justice. It's why Gold Coast 2018 will be the first Mega Sporting Event in Australia with a Reconciliation Action Plan, why Festival 2018 will celebrate the diverse and dynamic cultures of the Commonwealth, and why we're proud to become the first multi-sport event in the world to create a truly level playing-field of gender equality – with an exactly equal number of medal opportunities for men and women. These very clear examples of progress are the reason the resurgent Commonwealth Sport Movement is alive, and thriving, today. These societal-driven causes are the Commonwealth Sport Movement's raison d'être in the twenty-first century, and why we stand apart from any other sporting movement or institution worldwide.

With 6,500 athletes and officials from every corner of the Commonwealth, Gold Coast 2018 will be an inspiring and inclusive festival of community, culture and sport. It will be a loud and proud celebration of today's Modern Commonwealth, and for that very reason we can all be excited.

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About the CGF

The Commonwealth Games Federation (CGF) is the organisation that is responsible for the direction and control of the Commonwealth Games, and for delivering on the vision of the Commonwealth Sports Movement: to build peaceful, sustainable and prosperous communities globally by inspiring Commonwealth Athletes to drive the impact and ambition of all Commonwealth Citizens through Sport.

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