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CERTIFICATION WITHIN
The Commonwealth of Nations known for short as the Commonwealth, evolved from the British Empire after the Balfour Declaration of 1926 and the Statute of Westminster of 1931, and is a free association of the United Kingdom and her former dominions and colonies.

The Commonwealth, like most other international associations, at its formation set out aims and objectives towards which it endeavoured to work. Undoubtedly, one of the aims of the Commonwealth was to exert a positive influence with a view to bringing about global peace. To this end, at the Commonwealth Conference held in Singapore in January, 1971, the Commonwealth nations then assembled adopted the Declaration of Commonwealth Principles which states inter alia: "The Commonwealth of Nations is a...
Voluntary association of independent sovereign states, each responsible for its own policies, consulting and cooperating in the common interests of their peoples and in the promotion of international understanding and world peace. As to whether the Commonwealth could be said to have achieved its aims is a matter of contention. However, events over the years have clearly shown that the Commonwealth has ceased to have a strong influence on world affairs.

Indeed, today's Commonwealth encompassing 49 scattered and sundry nations covers one-quarter of the land surface and includes about one-fourth of the earth's peoples. Yet despite its size and variety, the Commonwealth as a unit has failed to exercise any significant impact on the world.

With the turn of the mid-twentieth century, and with it the attainment of independence by most Commonwealth countries, the Commonwealth has had to face the challenge of taking decisions on world issues, though in most cases, the decisions thus made may not be collective. Differences of opinion among member countries usually stem from racial difficulties and differences between rich and poor nations, which naturally lead to strain and stress and conflict of interests in a multi-racial Commonwealth.

A case in point was the decision of Canada to pass over Jawaharlal Nehru's urging and refuse to recognize the
Peoples' Republic of China in 1949. With the independence in the early sixties of a number of African countries, and the simultaneous rise of Pan-Africanism, the Commonwealth member states in Africa became, and are more devoted to Pan-Africanism than to the Commonwealth. This in effect means that in the event of a decision being taken on a world issue by the Commonwealth, the African countries within the Commonwealth will invariably take a stand favourable to African interests, if such interests exist. This, however, cannot be said to apply to African countries alone.

With the Commonwealth engulfing various political groupings, for example, the Organisation of East Caribbean States (O.E.C.S), it will not be out of place to suggest that members of such organisations will adhere to decisions taken by such better-knit regional groupings to the detriment of the Commonwealth. Even Britain have been known to have taken an opposing stand against other Commonwealth states especially with respect to its handling of Rhodesia's Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI). It is on record that some Commonwealth African countries, notably Ghana, broke off diplomatic relations with Britain apparently over their disappointment at London's reaction to Rhodesia's white supremacist government's refusal to accept plans for an extension of equal political rights to the Negroes but rather went ahead to issue a UDI on November
11, 1965.

Barely six years after Rhodesia’s unilateral Declaration of Independence, yet another issue cropped up which saw most African states in bitter opposition to Britain. It was the question of proposed British arms sales to apartheid South Africa. Such a proposal was bound to put Britain in an unfavourable position, at least where opponents of the obnoxious apartheid system are concerned. Such a situation was bound not only to affect Britain in particular, but the Commonwealth at large, since it presented it with a divided front and consequently weakened its influence on world issues.

Diverging views existing within the Commonwealth, though not unexpected, considering the varying backgrounds of its member states, has caused considerable harm within the Commonwealth itself. Apart from rendering the association politically impotent it has taken a toll on its numerical strength. South Africa with its racial policy at variance with the principles of its fellow members left the Commonwealth in 1961. The tenuous nature of this voluntary association was further revealed hardly more than a year after the adoption of the Declaration of Commonwealth Principles.

In 1972, India and Pakistan both members of the Commonwealth, fought a brief but bitter war. Immediately after her defeat in that war, Pakistan opted out of the Commonwealth because other Commonwealth countries were willing to recognize the
The newly-formed nation of Bangladesh as an independent sovereign state, Pakistan felt the Commonwealth had not been helpful. It had neither helped her to avert the war nor to win it. Why, reasoned the Pakistanis, should they remain in what was a politically impotent organisation? Burma in 1947 and the Republic of Ireland in 1949 have withdrawn their membership under various reasons. The above examples clearly illustrate the weak bonds binding member-nations, which results in the lack of cohesive power to which is needed to make the Commonwealth's impact felt on the global level.

Sports have had its fair share of the squabbles and controversies that have clouded the Commonwealth scene. In 1981, New Zealand violated the 1977 Gleneagles Agreement which called for voluntary athletic boycott of South Africa, by allowing the South Africa national rugby team, the Springboks, to tour New Zealand. This sparked off fierce opposition to and sharp criticisms against the New Zealand government both within and outside the Commonwealth. Organised protest marches and demonstrations in New Zealand cut short the proposed tour. A similar sporting contact between New Zealand and South Africa led to a twenty-one nation African boycott of the 1976 Olympic Games in Montreal, Canada, in protest against New Zealand's action. It goes without saying, that such unilateral decisions of Commonwealth member states regardless of declared principles or ratified agreements gives the
Commonwealth a bad name. Such an impression of course puts the Commonwealth in low esteem in the eyes of the outside world and subsequently decisions taken by the Commonwealth are not given the attention and respect they would otherwise have carried.

In 1979, on the question of the recognition of the first Zimbabwean government of Bishop Abel Muzorewa, the Commonwealth was divided on whether to recognize the Zimbabwean government or not. Whilst African countries refused to recognize Bishop Muzorewa’s government on the grounds that proper elections did not take place and described the government as a puppet regime, Britain initially recognized the Zimbabwean government and apparently influenced the United States to take a similar stand. The African stand eventually prevailed and fresh elections were held. Mr. Robert G. Mugabe’s Zimbabwean African National Union won the elections and led Zimbabwe to independence in April, 1980. It should be observed that racism and apartheid has continually threatened the very unity of this voluntary association and has greatly affected, as it were, its world image. However, recent events have more than brought the marked differences of opinion between Commonwealth countries to light. In October, 1983, a coup d’état in the Common wealth’s only Marxist state, Grenada, resulted in the invasion of that country by United States combat troops. After the withdrawal of the United States troops, troops from six
Commonwealth Caribbean States namely Jamaica, Barbados, Dominica, Antigua, St. Lucia and St. Vincent and Grenadines stormed the island of Grenada. The presence of these troops caused some friction between the Grenadian authorities and the Commonwealth Secretariat. Mr. Shridath Ramphal, the Commonwealth Secretary-General visited Grenada in January, 1984, to discuss the Secretariat's insistence that all foreign troops should leave before any Commonwealth assistance could be sent. This condition was opposed, especially by Jamaica and Barbados, and was described by the Jamaican Prime Minister Edward Seaga as "blackmail."

The controversy did not end there. At the Heads of Government of Commonwealth Nations meeting in New Delhi in November, 1983, member states expressed differing views on the United States invasion of Grenada. For instance, though it was condemned by African and other members of the Commonwealth, the East Caribbean States that had invited the United States action claimed it was appropriate. The lack of consensus on Grenada was reflected in the mild language of the declaration issued at the close of the conference.

Even individual personal views of heads of states differed. The question of the presence of foreign troops in Lebanon started off a controversy between the late Prime Minister of India, Mrs. Indira Gandhi and Australia's Premier Robert Hawke. Whilst India, Gandhi argued that the presence of Syrian forces in Lebanon was somewhat more justifiable than those of other countries, Mr.
Hawke was opposed to this position.

On the whole at the Heads of Government meeting in New Delhi, unanimity of approach was not achieved on most issues discussed. This was indicated by the use of such phrases as 'most' or 'many' or 'the overwhelming majority' in the final declaration on such issues as the proposals of the South African government for constitutional change, the international status of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO), the presence of foreign armed forces in Lebanon, nuclear testing in the Pacific and the 1982 Convention on the Laws of the Sea. The above examples of wide differences in viewpoints among Commonwealth countries clearly reveal the weaknesses of the Commonwealth as a body.

How true is the late first Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru's description of the Commonwealth as "a rather strange and odd collection of nations which has found some kind of invisible link by seeing that practically there is no link!" Even former Canadian Prime Minister Elliot Trudea, a zealous supporter of the Commonwealth summed it up thus "It is a meeting place..." and that is just about all today's Commonwealth is - a forum, a place to talk, a Hyde Park of the world."

Finally, as the above dissertation lucidly illustrates, and given the loose nature of the Commonwealth and the varying social, political, economic, cultural and ideological backgrounds of its member nations,
the resultant differences of opinion coupled with the lack of cohesive power, has made the Commonwealth what it is today - a "toothless bulldog" so to say. And that, surely is a problem the Commonwealth will have to grapple with for sometime to come.

LIST OF BOOKS CONSULTED.
1. Encyclopaedia Britannica
2. Encyclopaedia Americana
3. From Empire to Commonwealth