

Celebrating COL's 25th Anniversary



*Remarks at COL's Board of Governors Reception
Vancouver, BC, Canada, 13 June 2013*

*By The Honourable Burchell Whiteman, O.J.
Chair, COL Board of Governors*

Transcript

It is a particular honour and a real pleasure to be the Chair of this major Commonwealth organisation when it marks the successful completion of its first quarter of a century of operation. The Commonwealth of Learning is undoubtedly one of the outstanding examples of Commonwealth visioning and Commonwealth cooperation and I join with all of you in paying tribute to those who have made this institution what it is today.

I refer to the President, Professor Asha Kanwar, and her staff, previous Presidents and staff members, the Commonwealth Secretary-General and staff, the Heads of Commonwealth Governments, Ministers of Education, a host of activists across the Commonwealth, my colleague Board members and our predecessors (81 of us in total over the 25 years, including three previous Chairs, the Rt. Hon. Lord Briggs of Lewes, Dr. H. Ian Macdonald and the late Dr. Lewis Perinbam, who's widow, Nancy Garrett is here this evening) ... and the hundreds of thousands of persons across the Commonwealth and beyond who have by their engagement with COL, in one way or another, demonstrated their belief in the power of learning to support national development and the creation of a better life for individuals, families and communities.

I cannot help making reference to the continent of Africa which is now attracting a great deal of attention from developed economies as its current growth levels and prospects mark it out as what some have described as the continent of the future. I point out that two of the countries at the cutting edge of economic change, the Republic of South Africa and the Federal Republic of Nigeria are Commonwealth countries and indeed two of our major donors here at COL. Of course the now familiar four economic powerhouses grouped as the BRIC countries include India, which is also our very prominent partner and supporter.

At the risk of being politically incorrect on an occasion like this, I might attribute this situation to the foresight and imperial and military superiority of British interests centuries ago which placed these countries and many others in the now politically acceptable family of nations called the Commonwealth. However we look at it, I recognise that regardless of history, we Commonwealth

citizens, in the richness of our variety, have talents, skills, natural resources, traditions and proud civilisations which are cohering now to make us a valuable and respected force within the community of nations and the powerful economic blocs which have developed. Pardon me if I sound like an unrepentant believer in the Commonwealth, despite its current challenges. I am.

In this scenario, COL's mission to support and promote learning for development must be welcomed, appreciated and cherished. This small organisation with a modest budget has made an impact across the 54 member state Commonwealth very much out of proportion to its size. We use this occasion of our 25th anniversary to give us the encouragement to continue being responsive, innovative, dynamic and effective in our work and to give substance to the promotion and upholding of Commonwealth values – values which the world respects and which the world needs now more than ever.

Thank you for sharing with us. The city of Vancouver, the Government and people of British Columbia and the Canadian Government have been good to COL and good for COL. We look forward to your continued support and we ask you to be our eyes, ears and voices in your various spheres of interest and endeavour so that together we can create more opportunities for a more developed Commonwealth of Nations and a better world in century 21. I thank you.