

Criteria for membership in the Commonwealth of Nations

Criteria for membership in the Commonwealth of Nations is constantly changing. In 1931, after the passage of the Statute of Westminster, which granted full autonomy to the Dominions of the British Empire, the original British Commonwealth was set up whose members consisted only of British Dominions that were required to be united by a common allegiance to the Crown.

Besides the United Kingdom, members of the British Commonwealth consisted of:

Canada
Australia
New Zealand
Union of South Africa
Irish Free State
Newfoundland (until 1933)

They were later joined in 1947-1948 by:

India
Pakistan
Ceylon

In 1949, the British Commonwealth was replaced by the Commonwealth of Nations with the adoption of the London Declaration in which members were no longer required to have the British Monarch as sovereign, but could have their own head of state and were required to only recognise the British Monarch as 'Head of the Commonwealth'.

On 26 January 1950, India became the first country to qualify under this new criteria after becoming a republic. Pakistan became the second republican member in 1956. Malaya (now Malaysia) became the first member to have its own indigenous monarch, joining in 1957.

Membership criteria was further refined in 1991 with the Harare Declaration which **required members to abide by the principles of democracy and respect for human rights. These can be enforced upon current members, who may be suspended or expelled for failure to abide by them.**

After the accession of **Mozambique to the Commonwealth in 1995 becoming its first non former British Empire member, being a former Portuguese colony**, but interacting with Commonwealth members, membership criteria was even further refined by the Edinburgh Declaration of 1997:

- accept and comply with the Harare principles.
- be fully sovereign states.
- recognise the monarch of the Commonwealth Realms as the Head of the Commonwealth.
- accept the English language as the means of Commonwealth communication.
- respect the wishes of the general population *vis-à-vis* Commonwealth membership.

Today, the monarchy plays a small part in the Commonwealth.

It is believed by some that if Britain became a republic the British would lose the strong cultural, commercial and political ties they have with their Commonwealth partners and that the Commonwealth is kept together by the monarchy. This is simply not true.

The Commonwealth of Nations is a treaty organisation like any other, its roots may go back to the days of the British Empire, but its future has little to do with the Monarch. It is worth noting a few facts about the Commonwealth:

1. The Queen has been made its head in a personal capacity, that role is not vested in the 'Crown'. **In 2005 a Commonwealth spokesman was quoted as saying "It is not automatic that Prince Charles will become head of the Commonwealth, it will be decided by the leaders of the 53 member states." The Times has reported that "most members [of the Commonwealth] would prefer to make a break with the monarchy and choose a leader from another country."**
2. Most Commonwealth member states are republics - 32 out of 53. Five other members have their own 'home-grown' monarchies: Brunei, Lesotho, Malaysia, Swaziland, and Tonga.
3. Of the 16 nations which have Queen Elizabeth II as sovereign (of which only one is the UK) Barbados, Jamaica, Australia, New Zealand and possibly Canada are all actively talking about becoming republics or at least have significant public support for doing so.
4. **New members of the Commonwealth are not required to have been former British colonies - the organisation has moved on from its imperial past. As if to prove the point, former Portuguese colony Mozambique joined the organisation in 1995.**
5. **In 2007, it was recommended that an applicant country should, as a general rule, have had an historic constitutional association with an existing Commonwealth member, or a substantial relationship with the Commonwealth generally, or a particular group of members, for example, in a common regional organisation. Exceptional circumstances will be reviewed in a case-by-case basis.** This much widens membership criteria. What is clear from these points is that the monarchy plays a small and insignificant role within the Commonwealth - and that small role is far from secure in the future - so the future of the Commonwealth can play no role in a defence of the monarchy. Quite aside from these illuminating facts, it is clearly absurd to suggest that Britain's cultural, economic and political ties with say, Australia, are in any way reliant on the British monarchy. Britain's relations with other countries are based on the personal, political and commercial relationships built up over the years by ordinary people, by successful businesses and by elected politicians. This line of argument promoted by staunch monarchists simply underlines a mislead understanding of the Commonwealth.

So it is clear that the Commonwealth plays no part in the republican debate, and if challenged on this point by monarchists, there is no need to criticise or dismiss the organisation. It is not unique - in that other former empires have established similar organisations - and it is not bound up in any way with the future of the British monarchy.

Prospective members (new members will be agreed upon starting in 2009)

Based on the revised 2007 eligibility criteria, the following countries qualify for full membership in the Commonwealth:

- **Afghanistan** (British protectorate until 1919)
- **Argentina** (occupied and administered by British troops in 1806-1807)
- **Austria** (British-administered zone in southern Austria 1945-1949)
- **Bahrain** (British protectorate until 1971)
- **Bhutan** (part of British India until 1947, currently in constitutional link with India)
- **Egypt** (British protectorate until 1922)
- **Eritrea** (under British administration from 1941 to 1952 before being federated with Ethiopia)
- **France** (King of England (later of Great Britain) claimed the French throne until 1801; actual personal union with part or all of **Normandy, Aquitaine, Anjou** and other territories from 1066 to 1558)
- **Germany** (Personal union between Britain and Hanover 1720-1837, British-administered zone in north-west Germany and in Berlin 1945-1949)
- **Greece** (Ionian Islands were British protectorate until 1864)
- **Iraq** (British protectorate until 1932)
- **Iran** (British semi-Protectorate 1919-1920)
- **Israel** (part of British Mandate for Palestine until 1948). Israel has shown interest in joining the Commonwealth.
- **Republic of Ireland** (Part of the UK 1801 - 1921, British dominion 1921 - 1948) was formerly a member as the Irish Free State.
- **Jordan** (British protectorate of Transjordan until 1946)
- **Kuwait** (British protectorate until 1961)
- **Libya** (Anglo-French condominium from 1945 until 1951)
- **Myanmar** (British Colony of Burma until 1948)
- **Nepal** (British Protectorate until 1923)
- **Netherlands** (Personal union between Britain and Netherlands 1689-1704)
- **Nicaragua (Mosquito Coast was protectorate until 1850)**
- **Oman** (British protectorate of Muscat & Oman until 1971)
- **Qatar** (British protectorate until 1971)
- **Saudi Arabia** (British semi-Protectorate until 1927)
- **Senegal** (brief confederation with The Gambia as S en egambia Confederation from 1982 to 1989).
- **Somalia** (British Somaliland was protectorate until 1960)
- **Sudan** (Anglo-Egyptian condominium until 1956). Sudan has applied to join the Commonwealth.
- **Togo** (part of Anglo-French condominium from 1914 to 1916)
- **United Arab Emirates** (British protectorate as Trucial States until 1971)
- **United States of America** (much of its territory is formerly British; the original Thirteen Colonies, all US territory east of the Mississippi River save New Orleans, and the former Oregon Country were all under British control at some point or another)
- **Yemen** (South Yemen was British colony until 1967, Yemen has applied to join the Commonwealth)
- **Zimbabwe** (member of the Commonwealth until 2003)

Overseas territories and dependencies

Australia, Mauritius, New Zealand, and United Kingdom all have dependent territories that would be eligible for Commonwealth membership were they granted independence. As territories of Commonwealth members, they automatically qualify.

Australia

Christmas Island

Cocos (Keeling) Islands

Norfolk Island

Mauritius

Rodrigues

New Zealand

Cook Islands

Niue

Tokelau

United Kingdom Overseas territories

Anguilla

Bermuda

British Virgin Islands

Cayman Islands

Falkland Islands

Gibraltar

Montserrat

Pitcairn Islands

Saint Helena

Turks and Caicos Islands

United Kingdom Crown dependencies

Guernsey

Jersey

Isle of Man

In addition to those territories listed above, Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom maintain territorial claims in Antarctica. However, the Antarctic territories have no permanent populations (except scientific research stations). The same applies to three uninhabited Australian island territories: the Ashmore and Cartier Islands, the Coral Sea Islands, and the Heard Island and McDonald Islands, and the British Overseas Territory of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands. British Indian Ocean Territory is an overseas territory of the United Kingdom. However the UK has agreed to cede the Islands to Mauritius in the event that the Islands are no longer needed for defence purposes. Mauritius is a member of the Commonwealth.

Secessionist movements and other territories

There are several secessionist movements and other sub-national territories that, were they to gain independence, would be eligible to join the Commonwealth. The following countries would be eligible:

- **Ambazonia** (secessionist movement in Cameroon, being the area of Cameroon which used to be in the British Empire)
- **Barotseland** (secessionist movement in Zambia)
- **Hawar Islands** (secessionist movement in Bahrain)
- **Hong Kong** (British colony 1842-1997, returned to China in 1997. Secessionist Hong Konger Front wants independence within the Commonwealth)
- **Intenge (Caprivi)** (secessionist movement in Namibia)
- **Nevis** (there is a secessionist movement on the island of Nevis to break away from the current state of Saint Kitts and Nevis)
- **Normandy** (secessionist movement in France, Normandy having a direct constitutional link with early English kings (William the Conqueror etc))
- **Palestinian National Authority** (part of the British Mandate for Palestine until 1948, the Palestinian Authority has shown interest in joining the Commonwealth)
- **Somaliland** (former British protectorate until 1960 when it joined Somalia, has unilaterally seceded from Somalia but has yet to receive international recognition)
- **Southern Sudan** (as part of Anglo-Egyptian Sudan was part of the British Empire until 1956 — this English-speaking area is seeking independence from Sudan and will get to vote on the issue in 2011)
- **Tibet** (British protectorate until 1944)
- **Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus** (Turkish part of the island of Cyprus)
- **Waziristan** (secessionist movement in Pakistan near the Afghanistan border)
- **West Papua** (Indonesian occupied half of New Guinea island, which claims constitutional links with Papua New Guinea)
- **Constituent countries of the United Kingdom such as Scotland**
- **Quebec**

Other countries never parts of the British Empire

An application was received ahead of the 1997 CHOGM, before the criteria for membership were changed; the heads of governments considered the application in light of the criteria change, and rejected on the basis that the nation did not meet them.

- **Cambodia**

There are a range of other countries that have expressed formal or informal interest in joining the Commonwealth, despite not meeting previous criteria as they are now. However, with the criteria revised, they may be inclined to launch membership bids in the future:

- **Algeria** has applied to join the Commonwealth.
- **Angola**
- **Democratic Republic of the Congo**
- **East Timor**
- **Madagascar** has applied to join the Commonwealth.
- **Rwanda** has in 2003 applied to join the Commonwealth.

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