

Glossary

Act – A law made by a legislative body and given assent by the head of state.

Aso Rock (Nigeria) Declaration of 2003 – A meeting of the high-powered experts on development and democracy that stressed the necessity for development efforts to take a pro-poor stance.

Auditor General – Also called the comptroller, this official is responsible for scrutinizing the executive, especially in its financial operations, without receiving reports from the Auditor General and being able to rely on that official's assistance in deliberating on his or her findings at the meetings of the Committee on Public Accounts and, where it exists, the Committee on Public Enterprises.

Balfour Declaration of 1926 – The document that first gave definition to dominions as autonomous communities within the British Empire, though united by a common allegiance to the British Crown and freely associated as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations.

Bicameral legislature – A System of government in which the legislature comprises two Houses. Originally it served to represent the interests of both the common people and the elite to ensure deliberation over legislation. Each House has powers not held by the other, and measures initiated by one House require the approval of both Houses to become law. Many contemporary federal systems of government have bicameral legislatures.

Bills – Drafts of proposed legislation.

Cabinet Paper – A request from a government department that will be passed to the drafting authorities to be converted from an administrative document to a legal one.

Casting vote – A vote given to the presiding officer of a council or legislative body in order to resolve a deadlock.

Committee on Public Undertakings – A parliamentary committee that examines the reports, context, autonomy and accounts of public undertakings.

Committee of Selection – The group that appoints committees on private bills, selects Members to serve on standing committees, and chooses the membership of all select committees. Names are put forward to the committee by the party whips and the committee can either accept or reject these recommendations. The committee's recommendations must be voted on by the Whole House and are sometimes overturned.

Committee of the Whole House – Consisting of all Members, this committee provides a forum for a bill to be analyzed in a more informal manner, for example Members are able to speak more than once and raise specific issues on the operation of the legislation. It allows a question and answer session to take place between Members and the Member in charge of the bill. The Committee of the Whole is presided over by the Chairman of Committees instead of the Speaker and its functions are exercised apart from the House so much so that the House does not recognize its proceedings until the Chairman makes a report. The function of the Committee is to go through the bill clause by clause and if necessary word by word with a view to making the bill more acceptable to a majority of the Committee.

Commonwealth – A voluntary association of independent nations and dependent territories linked by historical ties as parts of the former British Empire and cooperating on matters of mutual concern.

Commonwealth Business Council – The organization that provides leadership in increasing international trade and investment flows, creating new business opportunities, promoting good governance and corporate social responsibility, reducing the digital divide and integrating developing countries into the global market. In fulfilling its mission, CBC strives to provide a bridge between the private sector and governments, between emerging markets and developed markets and between small businesses and the international private sector.

Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation – The principal means by which the Commonwealth delivers development assistance to member countries. It operates on the principle of mutual assistance, with member governments contributing financing on a voluntary basis and obtaining technical assistance as needed.

Commonwealth Foundation – An intergovernmental organization, resourced by and reporting to Commonwealth governments, and guided by Commonwealth values and priorities. Its mandate is to strengthen civil society in the achievement of Commonwealth priorities - democracy and good governance, respect for human rights and gender equality, poverty eradication and sustainable, people-centered development, and to promote arts and culture.

Commonwealth Games – A multinational, multi-sport event that is held every four years involving the elite athletes of the Commonwealth of Nations. Attendance at the Commonwealth Games is typically around 5,000 athletes.

Commonwealth Heads of Government (CHOGM) – Meetings among heads of parliamentary governments held every two years to reiterate the core values and principles of the Commonwealth and to review its performance and global relevance.

CHOGM Declarations – A series of agreements on the Commonwealth's principles and aims that are written through declarations or statements issued by Commonwealth Heads of Government at various summits. They constitute a foundation of Commonwealth values and a history of concern in global affairs.

Commonwealth Journalists Association – A network of working journalists throughout the 54 countries of the Commonwealth, with a head office in Trinidad. Its main purpose is to provide a professional network for help, training, and lobbying.

Commonwealth of Learning – A non-degree-granting Commonwealth University.

Commonwealth Local Government Forum – An organization that works to promote and strengthen effective democratic local government throughout the Commonwealth and to facilitate the exchange of good practice in local government structures and services.

Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) – A rapid action force that was set up as a result of the Milbrook Declaration to take action against all Members who did not uphold the Harare principles.

Commonwealth of Nations – Created as a result of the London Declaration, this is the term given to nations that are part of the British Commonwealth.

Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) – An organization with a total membership of around 15,000 and 53 nations that seeks to advance parliamentary democracy by enhancing knowledge and understanding of democratic governance by organizing conferences, seminars, and study groups that are aimed primarily at parliamentarians and parliamentary staff.

Commonwealth Policy Studies Unit – A think tank for the contemporary Commonwealth.

Commonwealth Secretariat – A commission meant to implement Commonwealth decisions and foster relations between Commonwealth Member countries.

Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians – A network of women parliamentarians that provides the opportunity for its Members to share experiences, discuss topics of interest and seek solutions to the issues faced by the female minority in parliaments.

Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative – An independent nonpartisan international NGO working for the practical realization of human rights in Commonwealth countries.

Constituents – A citizen residing in the area governed, represented, or served by a politician.

Constitution – The system of fundamental principles according to which a nation, state, corporation, or the like, is governed.

Coolum Declaration of 2002 – The document that gave new vision and structure for the Commonwealth in the 21st Century.

Counsel – The advocate or advocates engaged in the direction of a cause in court; a legal adviser or counselor.

Dominion – A former colonial state that is self-governed and independent in foreign affairs.

Edinburgh Declaration of 1997 – A declaration of Commonwealth states that deals with economic matters, globalization and people-centered development.

Election Observer Groups – Groups of non-partisan individuals who are charged with observing elections to ensure that the election process is fair.

Entrenched clause – A constitutional provision that makes certain amendments more difficult to pass than others, and may prevent the resignation by parliament of its legislative powers.

Fancourt Declaration of 1999 – A declaration that commits the Commonwealth to play a greater role in providing practical assistance for the creation of capacities needed to promote people-centered development.

First-past-the-post – A voting system in which a single winner is chosen in a given constituency by having the most votes, regardless of whether or not he or she has a majority of votes.

First reading – The first stage of a bill's passage through parliament. By practice in most countries, it is a purely formal measure to introduce the bill to the legislature, but in others there may be some discussion and even reference to a parliamentary.

Hansard – The official record of parliamentary debates.

Harare Declaration of 1991 – The declaration that reaffirms Commonwealth principles originally set down in 1971 in the Singapore Declaration. It makes a robust stand against terrorism, promises to pursue measures to make the equality of women and their full participation in public life a reality, made specific decisions related to the promotion of sustainable development, and stresses on the promotion of democracy.

Hybrid bill – A bill that applies to public and private life and is treated in legislatures as a public or government bill.

Institute of Commonwealth Studies – A research institute founded in 1949 at the University of London that has its base in the Commonwealth Policy Studies Unit, a think tank for the contemporary Commonwealth.

Joint Committees – Parliamentary committees that are set up to examine issues affecting both Houses.

Leader of the House – An individual who is usually considered a government Minister and who has special responsibilities for government business in the legislature and therefore for safeguarding the privileges and procedures of the House.

Leader of the Opposition – The title traditionally held by the leader of the largest party not in government in a Westminster System of parliamentary governance. This individual is seen as the alternative Prime Minister to the present incumbent, and heads a rival alternative government known as the shadow cabinet or opposition front bench.

Limassol Declaration of 1993 – A declaration on the Uruguay Round that calls for trade agreements, which allow poor countries access to the world, market and gives preference to them where necessary.

London Declaration – As a result of the meeting of Commonwealth Prime Ministers in 1949, this declaration allowed countries with republican constitutions to remain Members of the Commonwealth while accepting the British monarch as a symbol for free association and the head of the Commonwealth.

Lower House – One of two chambers of a bicameral legislature that, under parliamentary systems, usually designates the head of government or Prime Minister, and may remove them through a vote of no confidence.

Meeting of Commonwealth Prime Ministers – See Commonwealth Heads of Government.

Millbrook Declaration of 1995 – A declaration in which Commonwealth leaders decided that firm action would be taken against Members who did not uphold the Harare principles, even by suspension of participation at Commonwealth meetings or with complete suspension from the Commonwealth.

Motion – A proposal to the House on which a decision is sought. The motion is the basic building block of parliamentary procedure and is achieved by the process of debate, or the proceedings between the moving of a motion and the final vote upon it.

Opening of parliament – An annual event that marks the commencement of a session of Parliament.

Order Paper – A document issued daily that lists the business that will be dealt with during that day's sitting of the House of Commons. It provides MPs with details of what will be happening in the House throughout the day and gives details of when and where the standing committees and select committees of the Commons will be meeting.

Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration – The individual hired by parliament to investigate complaints from the public of maladministration that affects their rights.

Parliamentary committees – Groups of Members of Parliament that are established by parliament to carry out specific tasks or functions permitting parliament to stretch its resources both in terms of people and time.

Presiding officer – An individual in legislature who oversees the procedures of debate as an impartial authority. This individual may also be called speaker, president, chairman or chair.

Public Accounts Committee – A select committee that is responsible for overseeing government expenditures to ensure they are effective and honest.

Republican – A form of government in which the supreme power lies in the body of citizens who are entitled to vote for officers and representatives who are responsible to them.

Royal Commonwealth Society – A community that provides information and education about the Commonwealth to all interested persons.

Second chamber – The Upper House in a bicameral legislature.

Secretary General – The head of the Commonwealth Secretariat who holds the association's highest executive post.

Select Committees – Parliamentary committees that are constituted with very specific terms to deal with issues of major public concern.

Sergeant at Arms – The officer who is responsible for the security of the House and for physically enforcing the orders of the Speaker, for instance, in ensuring that suspended Members are removed from the House if they do not leave when ordered to do so by the Speaker.

Session – A period of a parliamentary post.

Sessional Orders – Standing Orders that automatically lapse at the end of that session of parliament.

Singapore Declaration of Commonwealth Principles – The declaration that outlines the core principles of the Commonwealth. It speaks of the belief that the Commonwealth can expand human understanding among nations, assist in the elimination of discrimination based on differences of race, color or creed, maintain and strengthen personal liberty, contribute to the enrichment of life for all, and provide a powerful influence for peace among nations.

Standing Committee – A committee that is set up to examine a proposed bill in parliament.

Standing Orders – Statements that describe the manner in which parliament should proceed under various circumstances. These statements can be amended by parliament by a simple majority vote.

Statute of Westminster in 1931 – A document that gave legal backing to dominion arrangements for colonies of the British Empire.

Subcommittees – A committee that is a subset of a larger committee.

Unicameral parliaments – A parliamentary system with only one legislative chamber.

Upper House – One of two chambers of a bicameral legislature.

Whips – A Member of a political party in a legislature whose task is to ensure that Members of the party attend and vote, as the party leadership desires.