

Arcanum in the news

November 27, 2015

Press Release

AFRICA, AN HISTORIC MOMENT - PATRICIA SCOTLAND TO BE FIRST WOMAN SECRETARY-GENERAL

In what has been a true breakthrough for gender equality in the Commonwealth, Patricia Scotland of Dominica was selected new Secretary-General - the first woman to hold the post. Malta's Prime Minister Joseph Muscat made the announcement at a press conference during the Commonwealth summit.

Baroness Scotland, former UK Attorney General, will take office on 1 April 2016 as the sixth Secretary-General since the Commonwealth Secretariat was established in 1965. She will replace Kamallesh Sharma of India, whose eight-year tenure comes to an end in March next year.

While talking to the press, she singled out climate change as an "existential threat" to small island states and reminded the audience about the extensive damage caused to her country by Tropical Storm Erika. She referred to the Paris Climate Conference (COP21) in December as an opportunity for the Commonwealth to really make its mark.

"COP21 gives us an opportunity to put the Commonwealth on a different path. I hope the Commonwealth will be a beacon of knowledge and care to put this right," said Baroness Scotland.

Responding to a question about the high number of Commonwealth countries that violate LGBTI rights, Baroness Scotland said that if the Commonwealth chooses to work together it will find a way to bring about this necessary change.

She stated: "Human rights and development go hand in hand. We will walk with and work with our partners to help everyone appreciate human dignity."

In her final remarks, Baroness Scotland pledged to prioritise gender equality and combat domestic violence.

"I am incredibly proud to be the first woman Secretary-General," she concluded.

The selection of the new Secretary-General took place in a closed session during the 24th biennial Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM). The process was overseen by the CHOGM Chair and the Prime Minister of Malta Joseph Muscat.

At the end of the summit, which runs from 27 to 29 November, leaders will release a statement cementing actions on issues such as migration, violent extremism and climate change.

They will also issue a separate statement on climate change, supported by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon and the President of France, François Hollande, which is likely to influence the outcome of climate change negotiations at COP21.

Background

There is no formal job description for the post of Secretary-General. Candidates must be citizens of Commonwealth countries and can only serve two terms of four years. The role is to promote and protect Commonwealth values and principles set out in the Commonwealth Charter, represent the Commonwealth globally and manage the Commonwealth Secretariat and its various programmes.

The Secretary-General facilitates consultation and is responsible for convening the biennial Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings, Commonwealth Ministerial Meetings and a range of other meetings. The Secretary-General maintains contact with Commonwealth governments as well as with civil society and other leaders. Another important function is to exercise 'Good Offices' when the Commonwealth's fundamental values are threatened or when political tensions arise in member states.

The post of Secretary-General was created together with the Commonwealth Secretariat at the 1965 Commonwealth Prime Ministers Conference in London. Since then there have been six incumbents: Kamallesh Sharma (2008-2016) of India; Sir Don McKinnon of New Zealand (2000-2008); Chief Emeka Anyaoku of Nigeria (1990-2000); Sir Shridath 'Sonny' Ramphal of Guyana (1975-1990); and Arnold Smith of Canada (1965-1975).

Baroness Patricia Scotland, Sixth Commonwealth Secretary-General

Baroness Patricia Scotland was born in Dominica in 1955, then moved with her family to Britain. She obtained her LLB in 1976, was called to the Bar in 1977 and was appointed Queen's Counsel in 1991. She received a life peerage and was created Baroness Scotland of Asthal in 1997. Baroness Scotland has held the position of Attorney General (2007 to 2010), Minister of State (Home Office) (Crime Reduction) (2007 to 2007), Minister of State (Home Office) (Criminal Justice and Offender Management) (2003 to 2007), and Parliamentary Secretary (Lord Chancellor's Department) (2001 to 2003) in government.

Secretary-General candidates

Mmasekgoa Masire-Mwamba was born in Botswana in 1960. She served two terms as Deputy Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Secretariat from 2008 to 2014 where she was responsible for senior oversight of the political, human rights, legal and youth portfolio of the Secretariat's work. Mrs Masire-Mwamba was previously CEO at the Botswana Export Development and Investment Authority and Assistant Engineer to the Group Manager, Botswana Telecommunications Corporation. Her academic qualifications include a BSC in Electronics and Physics and an MBA in International Business plus a Bachelor of Laws Degree.

Sir Ronald Sanders was born in Guyana in 1948. He is currently Antigua and Barbuda's Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the United States and the Organisation of American States. His diplomatic career spanned two periods between 1982 to 1987 and 1996 to 2004. He was twice High Commissioner to the United Kingdom for Antigua and Barbuda and Ambassador to the World Trade Organisation. Sir Ronald was a member of the 2010 Eminent Persons Group on Commonwealth reform and was formerly Ambassador to the World Trade Organization. An international business consultant and writer, Sir Ronald holds a MA in International Relations. He was knighted by the Queen in 2002.