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**COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES**

**DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND DIPLOMATIC STUDIES**

**COURSE CODE: HDS 411**

**COURSE TITLE: HISTORY OF THE COMMONWEALTH**

**LECTRER: M.A. ADEROJU**

**TOPIC: COMMONWEALTH TODAY**

**INTRODUCTION:**

The present day Commonwealth is just over 64 years old. The idea about this organisation was birthed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Canada was the first colony to be transformed into a self – governing “Dominion”. This took place in 1867. Indeed, it was a new status that meant equality with Britain. As the empire was changing gradually, Lord Roseberry, a British politician, described it in Australia as a “Commonwealth of nations” in 1884. Some parts of the empire joined, too, when they became Dominions. We had Australia (1901); New Zealand (1907); South Africa (1910); and Irish Free State (1921) (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2003).

However, the modern Commonwealth is an association of 54 countries. The present population of about 1.7 billion – 30 percent of the world’s population, “are drawn from the broadest range of faiths, races, cultures and traditions”. There are members from big countries such as Canada to small islands like Malta; even from the largest democracy in the World – India, with more than one billion inhabitants, to Tuvalu, with a population of about 11,000. In fact, they are at different stages of development, highly developed and industrialised to predominantly less developed and agrarian.

Currently, 33 members are republics 15 (apart from the U.K) practise constitutional monarchies that recognise the British Monarch; HM Queen Elizabeth II, as their Head of State. They include parliamentary democracies like Australia and Canada.

Also, five have national monarchies. They include Brunei Darussalam, Lesotho, Malaysia, Swaziland and Tonga. Indeed, they are proud of their differences. Commonwealth nations today share so many characteristics; they have similar legal and administrative structures, “a shared history and the English Language and common values and objectives”. They include a commitment to democracy, rule of law, good governance and respect for human rights.

In fact, all the member countries have had historical and constitutional links with the U.K. Queen Elizabeth is taken as the symbol of the free association of independent member countries, and as such Head of the Commonwealth. But, this is more than historical ties that keep the bond alive. In fact, the present day Commonwealth is a family with members, virtually in every continent, and their association is as much “a commonwealth of peoples as of nations; it is a network not only of governments, but also of non–governmental organisations, civil society groups and individuals”.

**Conclusion:**

The Commonwealth today, indeed, is not only about intergovernmental organisations and large institutions. The commonwealth is very much “about people – to – people contacts and it is here that another face of its co–operation and it is here that another face of its co – operation becomes visible”.

**Reading list**

1. Commonwealth Secretariat, *The Commonwealth Today*
2. W.D.Mc dongall, *The Commonwealth of Nations*
3. J.D.B. Miller, *Britain and the Old Dominions*