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**VOICE FILE NAME: The Rt Hon Sir John Major KG CH**

**Key:**

**SO = Dr Sue Onslow**

JM = Sir John Major

AW = Dame Arabella Warburton, Chief of Staff, The Rt Hon Sir John Major

**SO: Sue Onslow interviewing Sir John Major at St. George's Wharf on Thursday, 17<sup>th</sup> May, 2018. Sir John, thank you very much indeed for agreeing to take part in this oral history project. I wonder, Sir, if you could please begin by outlining how much value you attached to the Commonwealth in your role in government, and then when you became Prime Minister in 1990.**

JM: I had some contact with the Commonwealth in my brief 94 days as Foreign Secretary, in particularly the Commonwealth Heads of Government conference in Kuala Lumpur. I had the unenviable job of negotiating the communiqué on South Africa [at the Retreat in Langkawi] at a sensitive time. I have several impressions - not just on the communiqué, which took over a day to negotiate with some very rough moments, because the British position was completely isolated from the rest of the Commonwealth. But I also got the clear message that Britain was seen as an outlier on the issue of South Africa. I learned that there was still a considerable amount of pent up resistance to the British trying to over-influence anything. The colonial legacy was plainly there in comments that were made to me. And the overall impression was that the Commonwealth felt that Britain didn't put as much into the Commonwealth as they believed our history meant we should. I had some sympathy with that argument. So I had that background before I became Prime Minister.

As Prime Minister we had two fora to magnify British influence: the first of these was the European Union, the second was the Commonwealth. They were both very different. The European Union was a power bloc that played principally to other power blocs. The Commonwealth had a different position. Because it embraced so many medium-sized or small nations, they were able to speak with a louder and more effective voice if they spoke collectively – not only to other small and medium-sized countries, but also to the big power blocs. The small nations listen and often obey the power blocks because they have no choice, but they have a closer relationship with their peers who are of a similar size. It always seemed to me that the Commonwealth was an important part of our voice to the rest of the world, and could, in certain circumstances, magnify our effectiveness.

I will give a practical illustration, if I may. Safe havens for the Kurds: this was very much a British policy. We persuaded the EU that safe havens for the Kurds were necessary. But the Americans, who had to provide the bulk of the military to bring that policy about, were unconvinced. We asked the Commonwealth in the United Nations and elsewhere to magnify the demand for it. And that was helpful. The Commonwealth agreed with us; the Americans saw the pressure for safe havens, came on board; and, as a result, the policy saved the lives of huge numbers of Kurds at the end of the Gulf War [when Saddam Hussein had begun to attack them again.]

**SO: Sir, if I may ask, please, was there a distinction within this Commonwealth support for the policy of creating safe havens for the Kurds, between those who collaborate through the 'Five Eyes' intelligence arrangement, compared to African governments, or a Caribbean grouping, or a South Asian grouping?**

JM: Not materially. The 'Five Eyes' were obviously the easiest, because in security matters, we were much closer to them. But there was not, as far as I recall, a single element of dissent from elsewhere within the Commonwealth. In fact, most countries thought it was the right thing to do.

**SO: Given that the international system was in a state of flux with the end of the Cold war, do you think the Commonwealth came into its own in the 1990s as an association representing a particular confluence of influences and interests?**

JM: I think it did at the Commonwealth conference in Harare in 1991. And we'll come to that in a minute.

I felt quite strongly - and it's maybe because of my own background – that we had a responsibility to Commonwealth countries that hadn't always been discharged fully in the past. Many of them had put their faith in us when they had joined the Commonwealth. When The Queen became Monarch, there was a handful of members of the Commonwealth. Most of the present Members of the Commonwealth joined during her reign, and for a large part of that time the Conservative party was in government. So, in a sense, the Monarch and the Commonwealth grew up together. Many countries put their faith in Britain when they joined the organisation. Others thought Britain had a post-colonial responsibility, that was an ever-present feeling. That responsibility was met, to take one example, when I went to Trinidad as Chancellor of The Exchequer [to the Commonwealth Finance Ministers meeting in 1990] to announce the Trinidad terms. The warmth we received was extraordinary. You could sense a relationship that was extremely good. They needed help, we were able to provide it, and we did provide it – and they felt that we should do so.

The Trinidad meeting was remarkable in that the relationship – once the other members of the Commonwealth realised what we were planning to do – changed. The room warmed up immediately. And it also seemed to me that we could use our influence to help *them*, but it was also a two-way street. There were occasions when *they* could use their influence to help *us*, and they hadn't always done so in the past. This was apparent in areas such as trade policy, and became more apparent over the Uruguay Round which we will come to a little later.

Let me give you a small illustration of what I mean. One of my fairly regular visitors to Downing Street, whenever she came to the UK, was Dame Eugenia Charles, who was the long-serving Prime Minister of Dominica. Nobody could have been more pro-British than Eugenia. And she went out of her way to make that entirely clear. She also made it clear that she had great trouble with selling Dominican bananas because of Costa Rica, and what could we do in the trade round to help with her bananas?

Of course, the Dominican voice in the Uruguay Round, was tiny. The British voice, on behalf of Dominica was a much larger echo chamber. And so there are areas like that where I believe we have an obligation to help the smaller members of the

Commonwealth. Those were the thoughts that were really in my mind in the early days in Downing Street.

**SO: So, Sir, you were influenced very much, as you say, by your own belief in the necessary British input into the Commonwealth. You emphasise the importance of the Trinidad terms, which built on Nigel Lawson's earlier work towards debt relief.**

JM: And a lot was done later by Gordon Brown. He doesn't often get the credit for this. But Gordon did a lot in terms of debt relief to help the Commonwealth.

**SO: How much importance would you attach to Kenneth Clark's work as Chancellor, for example, at the Malta Commonwealth Finance Ministers meeting in 1994? This seems to have been an important meeting as well in terms of emerging international policy on HIPC?**

JM: Well, I do think it's important. The fact of the matter is that debt relief, in truth, costs the British government very little. The reality is that the chance of most of these debts getting repaid, is quite small. And if we leave these countries heavily indebted, they're likely to become even more indebted, once they meet their obligations on interest. Writing off debt – incurred at a different time, in different circumstances – is a very attractive policy. I was very much in favour of it, and so was Ken.

**SO: To what extent can it be said that the Commonwealth in the 1990s in fact had a discernible influence on international economic institutions, or attitudes towards economic policies, particularly debt forgiveness, feeding into debates in the IMF and The World Bank?**

JM: I wouldn't overemphasise that.

**SO: Thank you.**

JM: Because there were many other countervailing forces as well. The truth of the matter is, uncomfortable though it is for anyone to say it, whenever you are negotiating on behalf of your *own* country your first interest is your country. Your first interest is what you are able to persuade your parliament to accept. Generosity often has a relationship to the size of your parliamentary majority. And that is true, not only in our

country, but in other countries as well. So I wouldn't overstate it. I think there was a predisposition to help on debt relief in particular. There was a predisposition in the trade rounds to make some effort to speak up for smaller Commonwealth countries where we thought they had a credible case; and where we were not actually sacrificing anything, or very little, but we were actually in a position to advance their case. I think in those two areas, there was a discernible push to do it. I wouldn't over-play that though, because there were a million other things going on in the 1990s. We had wars; a very deep recession; a tiny majority; and Parliament was split on many issues. So it would not be true to say that, on all issues, the Commonwealth was in the fore-front of our minds. But it was never neglected. I think we were actually more active within the Commonwealth than in almost any earlier period. But it needs to be put in context.

**SO: I completely agree, Sir. I appreciate you've firmly addressed this issue that we shouldn't over emphasise the influence of the Commonwealth's work towards debt relief, and therefore World Bank institutions policies on debt forgiveness. Nicolas Bayne has claimed that the Commonwealth was at the forefront of international policy making on the issue.**

**Sir, you mentioned the Harare heads of government meeting. That was your first Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting as Prime Minister. Please could you share your recollections – besides the cricket match!**

JM: Typical Bob Hawke.... He stole the bowling without telling me we were only batting for 10 overs!

I have many memories of Harare, principally, of course, the Declaration. The idea of the Declaration, of course, wasn't new. It was an updated re-tread of what had happened in Singapore 20 years earlier. But there's a very material difference. The Singapore Declaration was done in crisis, a crisis over [British policy towards] apartheid [South Africa]. In 1991, there was a much more hopeful atmosphere. Mandela had been released. There was a much more hopeful attitude about the Commonwealth generally. Namibia had joined the Commonwealth in 1990, indicating a different relationship was beginning to emerge with Southern Africa. The Cold War was over, decolonisation was essentially complete, and apartheid was beginning to head for the exit. All of those were changing the atmosphere, and provided a perfect backcloth to the Commonwealth updating the Singapore

Declaration, and being more clear-cut in terms of stressing additional principles. I suppose the main areas we were covering were human rights, democracy, good government, and gender equality.

**SO: Sir, if I may, you also emphasised economics, specifying free markets.**

JM: We did. We did emphasise free markets. We always emphasise free markets. You're absolutely right to remind me of that because I tend to look at the things we don't always do. Yes, it was standard practice for us to emphasise free markets, and also good government to do so. But it was gender equality and the human rights clauses that we got everyone to sign up to. Though to be frank, not everybody met the commitments they had signed up to in 1991 or, indeed, for some time later. But it seemed a very good way to set the standard. I tried looking at the notes I made the other day; we also stressed economic and social development, not just free markets. And we particularly had in mind gender equality, and also an underlying feeling for education.

**SO: Do you recall what the inputs were to this emphasis on particular aspects of the Harare Declaration?**

JM: Inputs by other countries, or by us?

**SO: Well, both. By other countries and particularly by the UK? I'm thinking particularly of Lord Armstrong's role, for instance, in drafting the Declaration.**

JM: I don't remember Lord Armstrong's specific input. He probably had a great deal to do with the drafting. I'm sure he did. But exactly what happened in the drafting and what particular influence Lord Armstrong may have had, I don't know.

**SO: You emphasise the Commonwealth moving into a position of moral authority. Did you have particular concerns about some countries? For example, how this was going to be addressed in those which were then run by military dictatorships, or were under one-party rule?**

JM: Well, we ran into trouble with that later with General Abacha in Nigeria. It wasn't until the Auckland heads of government meeting, in 1995, that we set up the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group. In retrospect, we should have set that up in

1991, when we set out these principles. But we didn't set up a policing operation for these principles, which we should have done. Would that have pushed the envelope too far then? Maybe, maybe. It was probably Mandela's influence [in 1995], his support, which would have made a difference. He wouldn't have been there in 1993, but he was there in 1995. I think in retrospect the Commonwealth Action Group should have been set up in 1991, and should have been policing it, because there were a lot of nations that fell a long way short of the principles we had set out. But that action in 1995 gave the Commonwealth a different position when they fell short of them. Setting up the Ministerial Action Group in 1995 was much less difficult than it might have been when you consider how many nations could have been in difficulty over it.

**SO: How much importance at this particular point would you attribute to Secretary General, Chief Emeka Anyaoku as a Nigerian Secretary General? That the political head of the Commonwealth came from Africa? It seems to me that so much of the Commonwealth's work in the 1990s was directed at addressing African issues. Would you say that Chief Emeka was particularly important in driving through, or providing a particularly moral stamp to the Harare Declaration at the time?**

JM: He could have gone out of his way to make it difficult and block it. He didn't – and that was very helpful. But I am not sure to what extent he actively pushed it. I liked Emeka Anyaoku. I thought he was a good Secretary General and my recollection is that he was supportive of it. I don't know what he may have done in the background. It was certainly the case that had he wished, given that his own country was not in a state of grace, he could have done a good deal to make it more difficult. To my recollection, he didn't. So I think he was probably pretty influential.

**SO: Do you remember particular advocates among your fellow heads at the time, or particular 'resistors', as it were?**

JM: I'm afraid I don't. I'd have to go back to the papers.

**SO: Thank you.**

JM: I'm afraid it's one meeting in the midst of many others over a seven-year period, nearly 30 years ago.

**SO: And you do say in your memoirs that ‘summitry exploded in the 1990s’.**

JM: It certainly did. It got to the stage of being crazy. The more summitry explodes, the more work is done before the politicians get there.

**SO: In view of that comment, how much importance did you attach to these biennial meetings and the regular get-togethers of your peers in the Commonwealth? Was the fact that they were biennial, rather than occurring more frequently, becoming problematic? As you say, the real business of international relations between governments was done in the periods between summits.**

JM: Of course, as I recall, the Ministerial Action Group, foreign ministers or their nominees met regularly. But there was obviously a lacuna in that Heads of Government only met formally every two years. A great deal of preparatory work was done in advance of those meetings. Ministers then got together and, in some cases, there was real debate – as there was at Langkawi, for example; and as there was over the Nigerians in 1995. But a great deal was rubberstamping by Member Nations of what had been agreed previously domestically in their own countries. So there always was, and still is, a lacuna in the Commonwealth about the extent to which they have regular collective meetings in between CHOGMs.

**SO: Yes. Since 2000, that has also been true for senior officials.**

JM: Absolutely. When we look forward, where are both the opportunities and the biggest problems in the world likely to be in the next 40 years? I would argue, in Africa: because of the changes that are inevitable; and because of the degree of capital expenditure that will be necessary to have a civilised development that cannot be afforded by Africans. So there are going to be big debates there. And the sooner we have a proper liaison system throughout the Commonwealth, the Commonwealth can speak with one voice rather than a whole range of different voices. At the moment, that is a very great lack.

**SO: Going back to the Harare Heads of Government Meeting, which was your first as Prime Minister, how much importance did you attach to the personal chemistry, the personal relationships that you were forming with other heads?**



JM: Always a lot, always a lot, absolutely a lot. If you trust someone, the chance of there being an agreement is much greater than if you *distrust* them. A good personal relationship between Blogs and Smith in different countries does not mean that they're going to make all sorts of concessions and reach a soft mushy compromise. What it *does* mean is that the suspicion is removed. And when the suspicion is removed, the chance of making a clear-eyed agreement grows correspondingly. So the personal relationship is very important indeed. And it shouldn't only be a personal relationship on the basis that you meet at the meeting and quite like one another. It needs to be a relationship that continues in between meetings.

There were two people in the world who used the telephone to brilliant effect, neither of them in the Commonwealth. One was George Bush Senior, and the other was Helmut Kohl. They were both inveterate users of the telephone. They wouldn't send a note, they would pick up a phone and talk to you. And it does make a difference. It is hugely worthwhile. That is why cutting our embassies and things like that is absolute folly. It's petty cash compared to what we waste on almost every other area of expenditure. And it is extremely damaging not to have the highest quality people in the Foreign Office. And we do have very high quality people in the Foreign Office. But I still travel around the world a lot, and it's no longer universally true. There are some absolutely superb servants of the state in the Foreign Office overseas. But there are some who are less good.

**SO: Other ancillary benefits of Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting have been identified as the 'bilaterals', the corridor encounters.**

JM: Yes, that's useful.

**SO: More useful in fact than the executive sessions?**

JM: [Laughs] They're different! They're different because within an executive session, once you say something you're utterly and completely committed. At an Executive Session, I can't say, "Well, hang on, I'm only talking things through with you."; or "Yes, okay, well, we'll think about that." because that's effectively a concession. But if it's a *private* meeting, I can say, "Come off it! But I'll go and talk about this and I may be able to do it. I'll see what I can do and I'll come back." There is a freer exchange; ministers are less bound to their brief. They've got time to go back and consult with their capitals. They've got time to talk to their officials about what we

might demand in return for their concession. Those backstage meetings are absolutely vital. And the more of them you can get, the better. It was always an important part of every summit in Europe. For example, the peace process in Ireland actually began in private discussions with Albert Reynolds in the margins of the European Council. So yes, they're very important indeed.

**SO: Thank you for elaborating on that. Sir John Holmes made exactly that point at a witness seminar I organised on the 1997 summit in Edinburgh. Anji Hunter and Sir John Holmes took part, as did members of the Foreign Office; and all of them made that very point about the value of private contacts.**

JM: Absolutely, for sure. You also learn a lot about people. You can learn a lot when you're talking to someone privately: whether they are a dealmaker or whether they're absolutely stuck to a departmental brief, with neither the confidence nor the will to stray beyond it. And the point is, if you wish to reach a consensus, you must *both* concede; and if you have people who do not have the confidence or the will to concede, then you cannot reach an agreement. So they are crucial.

**AW: Also I'd say around the Commonwealth, rum and cricket helped!**

JM: Rum and cricket certainly helped.

**SO: I haven't heard of rum before, but you've certainly mentioned cricket as 'the cement of the Commonwealth.'**

JM: Rum certainly helps in the West Indies! Even after leaving Government, I used to go to the Caribbean every year on holiday. Most years PJ Patterson turned up with a bottle of rum and we sat chatting together merrily until we had finished it.

**SO: I have to say, he was a pleasure to interview.**

JM: I bet!

**SO: Sir, if I could ask you - you don't refer in your memoirs to the Limassol Heads of Government Meeting in 1993.**

JM: In Cyprus?

**SO: Yes.**

JM: Yes. I don't have very clear memories of Cyprus, except on the Uruguay round. It looked for a long time as though the Uruguay Round would fail. It took the best part of a decade to actually succeed. But it did so eventually and probably had the biggest impact of any of the trade rounds we've had thus far. It was crucial to many of the smaller countries. So I do recall we spent a lot of time discussing its problems and intricacies. But if you're discussing what the impact of a particular tariff may be on bananas or something, it doesn't stick in the memory very clearly 30 years later! So Limassol was important in the sense that it provided us with a backcloth and an opportunity to discuss how important trade changes were to the Commonwealth. But there wasn't a specific or memorable issue compared to Nigeria or Harare in order to place it in my memory.

**SO: Sir, in your view, did the meeting in Cyprus play a part in the incremental process leading to the eventual creation of the WTO?**

JM: It was incremental, yes. I mean the success of these meetings sometimes depends on whether there is something big that needs to be decided. At that moment there wasn't. There were incremental things happening, Mandela by then had been released, although he was not yet president. I think nobody had any doubt what was going to happen in 1993. But a great deal of that meeting was really a follow-up to Harare.

**SO: What of the 1995 Auckland heads of government meeting? I know that in Harare you had been a leading part of the push towards shorter heads of government meetings and also that they should be less formal.**

JM: I wanted less formality in the G7 and in Europe. The G7 once decided – rather bravely in my own view – that the heads of government would meet entirely on their own. And that fell apart very quickly because the press demanded to know what they were doing at these secret meetings. And their parliaments demanded the same. And people wanted to know: what is the end product of all these fat cats meeting together in private? Is it all a jolly? And of course then officials had to start preparing something to be released, and when something had to be released the whole nature of it changed. The idea was a very good one. It was to have exactly what we were

talking about before: informal private meetings. And in my own view has always been that informal/private always achieves more.

[As for] formal meetings: with 53 or so members of the Commonwealth, an awful lot of people were too inhibited to say what they actually thought. And that's not because the Commonwealth were being cowardly, it's same in the European Union too: the net recipients of money in the European Union were often very reluctant to criticise the countries that paid more than they received. They were nervous about it. And many of the smaller countries were reluctant to raise their voices too high unless it was something that had a direct interest for them. Because they felt, I am sure, that there's only a limited number of occasions they could intervene, and so they ought only to intervene on the things affecting their own country.

**SO: In your view was Auckland was a successful Commonwealth summit?**

JM: More than that. The Millbrook Declaration, which incorporated the Action Group, was a direct follow through from Singapore in 1971, Harare in 1991, and provided an enforcement and policing process for Harare. You can argue about how successful CMAG has been, but it was necessary to have that. I believe it would have been a success on the grounds of the Millbrook Declaration alone. But there was also a discussion about Nigeria. There was a lot of backstage discussion there. I remember talking privately to Mandela about suspending Nigeria because, plainly, it was just after the execution of Ken Saro Wiwa, which looked entirely unjustified on any count. I remember an early morning meeting with Mandela, because I knew if it was the British pressing for action against Nigeria, it would be less effective than if it were an African leader arguing for the suspension of Nigeria. I felt strongly about it because I have a particular affection for Nigeria, having worked there many years ago. And so to get Mandela and others on board was extremely important. And Nigeria was, of course, duly suspended, and I don't think returned until after Abacha had died.

**SO: Others in the Commonwealth have described it to me as Mandela used his supreme moral authority to demand Nigeria's suspension. Your description suggests you felt that there was a degree of needing to persuade Mandela?**

JM: No, I don't think he needed persuading. I went to see him to make sure we were on the same page. No, he didn't need persuading.

**SO: I see. Did he in any way indicate that this might be problematic for the ANC's relationship with the Nigerian government? I know it caused problems in the ANC Cabinet back in Pretoria, who felt that Mandela had behaved as a one-man independent pressure group.**

JM: I don't think he mentioned it. But I think it was evident that he would have difficulties with the ANC, because Nigeria in the past would certainly have helped the ANC and they were very loyal to people who helped them when they were in trouble. So nobody doubted that there would be some difficulty. But I don't recall any hesitation in Mandela when we talked privately. And certainly he argued persuasively – as did Britain and others – that we couldn't ignore what was happening in Nigeria. And we had to take action, particularly in view of what we had agreed in 1991.

**SO: Indeed. I know that you also announced the suspension of British arms sales to Nigeria and you called for the end of Nigeria's participation in the global oil trade.**

JM: I'm scratching my memory now, but wasn't the background of Ken Saro-Wiwa a great deal to do with oil?

**SO: He and the eight other Ogoni activists executed by the Nigerian government were from the Delta region. So it was exactly to do with the politics of oil in the Delta.**

JM: That's right, yes, that's what I recall. So I had forgotten that announcement, but you're quite right. I did make it. And as far as I remember it faced no criticism.

**SO: In 1996 Britain agreed to host the next summit. Were you an integral part of that decision, made in discussion with Chief Anyaoku?**

JM: I would certainly have been involved, but I would not have been the instigator. It would have been discussed at official level. We would have been asked whether we were prepared to host it. And I would have said, "Yes". So far as I'm concerned there would have been nothing controversial about it. So, yes, I would have been involved. Would I have been consulted? Most certainly. Would I have argued against it? Certainly not.

**SO: Thank you very much indeed. Just to go back then to put the Commonwealth in overall context of British foreign policy in the 1990s. You have indicated that the plethora of issues that Britain had to confront, not least over Europe: the end of the Cold War, the reunification of Germany...**

JM: Quite right. I didn't mention the reunification of Germany, but I could have done.

**SO: And also, of course, the accelerating war in former Yugoslavia, which caused considerable tensions in your government's management of foreign policy.**

JM: In everything – everything, but mainly within the Conservative Party. There are always two elements of the Conservative Party. And they don't go where you think they'll go. You would think that the naturally hawkish far right of centre of the Conservative Party is hawk like. But they are also very concerned that our country becomes involved in foreign policy *only* if there is a direct national interest. It was that side of the party that was so hostile to our involvement in the Balkans. Douglas Hurd and I took several decisions that angered them very much indeed when we became involved.

When the situation in the Balkans became intolerable, I called together all the heads of the armed forces. And I asked them, "How do we keep the warring parties apart? How many soldiers would we need?" And they went away and came back and told me we would need 400,000, which was about three times the size of the British army, a little more perhaps. And so plainly we couldn't do that. None of our European partners – with the exception of France – was prepared to put troops on the ground. When the chips are down, the French are always apt to be more reliable in putting troops out than anybody else in Europe. The Americans weren't interested in doing it at that stage. And so we had to settle for peacekeeping missions, delivering food and life-sustaining assistance in different ways. It was a bit hard later to be accused of not being warlike enough, when nobody would join us at the beginning. Later on, others wanted to bomb from 30,000 feet when we had our troops on the ground underneath the bombs. We would have had to stop the food and other aid.

**SO: Do you recall if Britain's policy towards the war in Bosnia also created tensions in Britain's bilateral relations with other Commonwealth countries?**

JM: Well, it would have almost certainly done with some of the Muslim countries.

**SO: Well, I'm thinking particularly of Malaysia and its policy towards...**

JM: We had a policy of constructive engagement with Dr Mahatir. You never really knew whether the good doctor was going to turn up. He did like to show that the big bad wolf of Britain could be bopped on the nose at regular intervals, and he was 'bopper in chief'. And here he had a classic opportunity.

**SO: Well, another emerging 'bopper in chief', as you put it, was Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe.**

JM: Well, Mugabe had got past his democratic phase then. He was still in his democratic phase in Harare in 1991. He was moving away from it by 1993. That would have been after Sally Mugabe died, wouldn't it?

**SO: Yes, she died shortly after the Harare meeting.**

JM: He changed after she died. I knew him less well than others, like Lynda Chalker, for example. And if you haven't talked to Lynda it might be well worth doing so.

**SO: I shall certainly follow up that idea, thank you.**

**Was the Commonwealth in any way relevant for British policy towards South Africa during your premiership, or did you feel that it was more a question of a bilateral British relationship with Pretoria, rather than needing to take cognisance of the Commonwealth broader view?**

JM: That's an interesting question. In terms of ending apartheid and moving towards civilised behaviour, I don't think our views differed from others in the Commonwealth. We were not being pushed by the Commonwealth into a policy that we were not inclined to follow in any event. If you look at the key players: Douglas Hurd, later Malcolm Rifkind, they are fully paid up liberal thinkers. They would have loathed apartheid as much as anyone and had done so for a long time. Your question is capable of a number of interpretations. If the thought is, were we pushed by the Commonwealth into our policy of trying to urge the South Africans to do a deal? No, we were not. It was our own inclination as well. Did we have disputes with the Commonwealth over it? I don't recall any.

**SO:** I just wondered about the pace with which sanctions were removed. When I spoke to Joe Clark and also to Gareth Evans, they implied there was a tension between the British government with the Canadians and the Australians who were talking to the ANC and saying, “Let us know when you feel that there has been sufficient advance in the negotiations with the National Party for us to remove sanctions.” Whereas they presented British policy as being much more enthusiastic in lifting sanctions as soon as possible to reward “good behaviour”.

JM: It’s all in perception, isn’t it?

**SO:** Indeed.

JM: It’s all in perception.

**SO:** In terms of the Commonwealth now, to what extent do you still regard it as a relevant multilateral association in today’s world? And if so, in what ways?

JM: Well, it’s less of an association than it could be. It’s certainly a relevant multi-nation organisation. To the extent to which it is multilateral, it doesn’t have a coordinated policy by and large. It doesn’t coordinate in the same way as, say, ASEAN or the European Union, and is not a power bloc. But in terms of what it is, and what it can be: it can be a very effective conscience rather than a power bloc. It has its own values and its own weaknesses. The Commonwealth never threatens anyone. It can be harsh on its own misbehaving members, but it never collectively threatens one who is not a member. So it’s different from some of the other organisations.

The African problem in the next 40 years is going to be worldwide. Where else do people go with a surplus of world capital? The obvious place to go is Africa; that’s where the population is going to grow. That’s where we don’t just need investment, we need whole new cities. We need everything you can conceivably imagine. We need a new water system from North Africa right down to Uganda because the Nile can no longer cope. It’s expenditure beyond the dreams of anything we have seen before. And it isn’t going to be done without international collaboration.



Now, here Africa faces a very real difficulty. All the immediate post war institutions - the IMF and the United Nations - are grotesquely out-of-date and pretty inefficient. Until such time as we reform the Permanent Five of the United Nations and make it a Permanent 10 or a Permanent 12, bringing in Japan, China, South Africa and ....

**SO: ....India.**

JM: India above all. India above all, you're quite right, and Brazil. Until that happens, and we remove the single nation veto on action, the United Nations is not going to be seen as the organisation it was hoped it would be in the years after the war. And we need a United Nations that can function with real worldwide authority, and international financial institutions that will work with it, if we're going to solve the problems that are going to arise in Africa.

**SO: Sir, you have made repeated reference to 'a colonial hangover' influencing Commonwealth spoken assumptions as well as their unspoken ones. In view of this, can Britain ever escape that imperial hangover?**

JM: Yes, of course she can, but she has to be proactive. She has to be proactive and she has to argue for the Commonwealth – and not just when there's a crisis. We are at this moment being told to "Go global", which is one of the more absurd slogans we have had. But one part of being global is not just to promote British domestic short-term interests. It must be also in the interests of looking at the long-term and promoting the interests of our friends in the world – among whom can be the Commonwealth, providing we are seen to be proactive supporters and not, in their eyes, simply paying lip service while not actually doing much.

A few positive actions from Britain would revolutionise their position, particularly as every year we move further away from the colonial era. And every year in Africa they are seeing the price they are paying for things like Chinese investment. We are moving into an era where we could revolutionise the Commonwealth. But we can't do it without working with other nations and the resources to sweeten the demands that we make. And by that, I don't just mean Canada, Australia and New Zealand. We need South Africa or Nigeria to become an economic success, and work with them *inside* the Commonwealth to make the changes the Commonwealth needs.

**SO: There have been critics who have said that the Queen has been as the invisible glue of the Commonwealth, and that the Heads of Government Meeting in April had a distinctly royal tinge, with the highly visible role of the royal family, the announcement of Prince Harry as the Youth Ambassador, culminating in the announcement of Prince Charles as the Queen’s successor as ceremonial head. There is an argument that there has been a fusion in people’s minds of the undemocratic institution of the British monarchy with the modern Commonwealth –and ironically, the monarchy has come to the rescue of the modern Commonwealth. Do you think this is problematic, or that it creates a false impression of this multinational institution?**

JM: No, I don’t actually. I can see who might make that sort of argument. But I don’t think the Commonwealth sees The Queen in that way at all. The Queen’s relationship with the Commonwealth is intensely personal. You only have to see the Commonwealth heads of government – and particularly the African Commonwealth heads of government – with The Queen to see that that is not the way they think of her, nor of the institution of monarchy itself.

I will give you a practical illustration. I was in Zambia a few years ago, and went to the nearby village to meet the “headman”. Now, the “headman” turned out to be a headwoman, a rather graceful elderly lady, who had her own “man of affairs” to introduce us. We went in to see her; she stood up, shook hands and said, “My name is Elizabeth, just like *our* Queen.” And that was quite literally in a mud hut village in the middle of nowhere.

It was astonishing, the personal connection that she felt to The Queen. So the royal family may be undemocratic to some, but the affection that is felt for this particular Monarch, is quite extraordinary.

**SO: Thank you very much. So my last question, what about the future of the Commonwealth? Do you see it being wound up because of its problematic aspects? Or that it will simply dwindle, as its values, visibility and relevance continue to be eroded?**

JM: I don’t see it being wound up. And I think, slowly, its values will improve. But if it is to make a dramatic change, two or three nations have to give it a much greater priority and start pushing for that change, and helping that change. It’s no good just saying

to people, “You must change and do things” if they don’t have the resources or the capacity to do it. And the UK is the obvious Commonwealth nation that is likely to be in a position to help, providing we get our own economics right. If we don’t get our own economics right, we will stay locked behind our borders, which is my fear with the BREXIT negotiations at the moment: that we will become more inward looking, not more outward looking. I think Britain and a number of other big nations [need to do this]. It can’t, to be frank, just be the old white Commonwealth. That won’t wash.

**SO: So this core group must include India, and Malaysia?**

JM: Yes, ideally it would – especially India.

**SO: Indeed.**

JM: But I wouldn’t look only to India. I would look to the two potential African giants, South Africa and Nigeria. I mean the change from Jacob Zuma to Cyril Ramaphosa is extremely positive. There’s real hope there. I just wish we were in a position where we had more resources and we could actually help more. But there are other things we can do that don’t necessarily involve money.

So I don’t think the Commonwealth will collapse. I think there is too much glue holding it together. It could become sclerotic. That is certainly possible. It could improve slowly, which I think it will do, and that may – in the short-term – be the most probable outcome. Or it could be made much more dynamic, providing there was a will and a means to help it become so.

**SO: Sir, thank you very much indeed.**

JM: My pleasure.