

# A Partnership with Commonwealth Accredited Organisations

Independent Forum of Commonwealth Organisations  
The IFCO submission to CHOGM – Antigua & Barbuda 2026



On behalf of Accredited Organisations, the Independent Forum of Commonwealth Organisations submits the following for integration into the CHOGM 2026 Communiqué, noting the Strategic Plan's commitment to partnerships and supporting the Commonwealth intention to move from declarations to implementation:

Recognising the value, expertise and community reach of civil society and Accredited Organisations as the third pillar of the Commonwealth family, able to promote the Commonwealth and its values to the peoples of the Commonwealth, the Commonwealth commits to establish a meaningful, structured, strategic partnership with Accredited Organisations based on regular, early consultation and genuine engagement, transparency, inclusivity, shared responsibility and mutual exchange.



# A Partnership with Commonwealth Accredited Organisations

## Independent Forum of Commonwealth Organisations

### The IFCO submission to CHOGM – Antigua & Barbuda 2026

1. Accredited Organisations constitute a foundational pillar of the Commonwealth ecosystem, reflecting and upholding the principles enshrined in the Commonwealth Charter.<sup>1</sup> A vital conduit between governments and the 2.7 billion citizens of the People’s Commonwealth, they play a longstanding and indispensable role in promoting democratic governance, sustainable development, economic prosperity and healthy, well educated, and inclusive societies.
2. As trusted partners, Accredited Organisations play a pivotal and well-established role in translating Commonwealth commitments into action. Drawing on their expertise and close engagement with communities, Accredited Organisations help ensure that policies are informed by all citizens, implemented effectively and remain inclusive and responsive to lived realities.
3. Realising the full potential of this partnership requires renewed political commitment and the structured integration of Accredited Organisations and civil society into Commonwealth processes. This is particularly urgent at a time when civic space is shrinking and democratic values are under increasing strain.
4. At this critical moment, a more purposeful and sustained partnership between Accredited Organisations, the Commonwealth Secretariat, and member states is not optional – it is essential. This submission, prepared in consultation with Accredited Organisations<sup>2</sup>, is intended to strengthen the Commonwealth family, deepen cooperation, and reinforce the partnership between Commonwealth civil society, the Secretariat and member states.

#### Context

5. The Independent Forum of Commonwealth Organisations (IFCO) exists to enable cooperation, dialogue, and collective action among Commonwealth Accredited Organisations and to facilitate the effective contribution of organised civil society to the promotion of Commonwealth values and objectives.<sup>3</sup> In the lead-up to the 2026 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Antigua and Barbuda, IFCO looks forward to continued implementation of commitments emerging from the 2024 CHOGM Communiqué, and constructive engagement in advancing our shared priorities, moving – as the Secretary General has said – from declarations to co-ordinated action.
6. We live in a rapidly evolving global context – what has been called a world in turmoil. The Commonwealth, like all multilateral systems, is navigating increasing geopolitical fragmentation, rising polarisation, and growing pressure on democratic institutions. Across many member states, civic space is shrinking, with civil society actors, journalists and human rights defenders facing heightened legal, political, and financial constraints. The world is at risk of failing to meet the 2030 Sustainable

---

<sup>1</sup> Section 16 of the Commonwealth Charter states that “we recognise the important role that civil society plays in our communities and countries as partners in promoting and supporting Commonwealth values and principles, including the freedom of association and peaceful assembly, and in achieving development goals.” [Commonwealth Charter | Commonwealth](#)

<sup>2</sup> The IFCO constitution states that “Every Commonwealth Accredited Organisation is welcome, by virtue of accreditation to the Commonwealth, to participate fully in IFCO activities and processes, consistent with IFCO’s status as an open, participatory network.” [2026 IFCO Constitution](#)

<sup>3</sup> IFCO Constitution preamble [2026 IFCO Constitution](#)

Development Goals (SDGs) and failing to tackle the escalating climate crisis, armed conflict, the weaponisation of supply chains and severe economic conditions. These pressures will make it difficult to promote trade and investment and tackle debt relief and the climate emergency. A rules-based international order is not optional. It is essential to protect all citizens, and civil society has been central to the development of these norms and the institutions that uphold them. Accredited Organisations remain a driving force in strengthening accountability and shaping multilateral systems, including the Commonwealth.

7. And yet, at a time described by the Foreign Minister of Antigua and Barbuda as ‘a moment of opportunity’, the Commonwealth could play a major role in creating the coalition of middle powers and smaller states advocated by Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney, forging a collaborative ‘third path’ based on strategic economic autonomy and Commonwealth values and respect for human rights, against external pressures and transactional diplomacy. The Commonwealth’s history of mutual support, peaceful co-existence and consensus-driven diplomacy has consistently bridged divides between the Global North and South, uniting G20 economies with Small Island Developing States (SIDS). For this approach to move forward, Commonwealth governments and civil society need to unite in a common cause, necessitating a more open involvement of Accredited Organisations both with Governments and the Secretariat.

### **The contribution Accredited Organisations make to the Commonwealth’s objectives**

8. The Commonwealth [strategic plan for 2025-2030](#) sets out three pillars – democratic, economic and climate resilience – supported by the cross-cutting themes of gender and youth. We have stressed that social resilience – especially education and health and more fair and equal treatment of citizens regardless of age, gender, poverty, disability or other characteristics – should be a part of those strategic objectives. The strategic plan implies a partnership approach<sup>4</sup> and we believe that without respect for and engagement of a strong and active civil society, the Commonwealth is unlikely to achieve the objectives that have been set, or tackle the growing disengagement of the peoples of the Commonwealth from the institution itself. This section sets out what Accredited Organisations have to offer using recent examples and the prospect of future developments.

### **Promoting democratic resilience**

9. Recent meetings of Foreign and Law Ministers have focused attention on the need to promote adherence to democracy, good governance and the rule of law, including through the role of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group in protecting and promoting Commonwealth values, and addressing the threat posed to democracy and human rights by the weaponisation of generative AI. Civil society and Accredited Organisations have a central role to play in strengthening democratic resilience by promoting accountable governance and upholding, protecting, and advancing human rights, consistent with the Commonwealth Charter. Drawing on frameworks such as the Commonwealth Latimer House Principles and the Commonwealth Principles on Freedom of Expression<sup>5</sup> which Accredited Organisations helped develop. We support parliaments, judiciaries and other governance institutions through training, capacity building and technical assistance, best practice and good governance. Our past contributions have included participation in Secretariat working groups and the development of model laws, and early warning at national level about breaches of the rule of law, democratic integrity and human rights. In addition, Accredited Organisations strengthen democracies by advancing civic education, youth engagement, worker protections and the rights of the disabled, LGBTQI communities and women. We

---

<sup>4</sup> “Embedding a culture of transparency will facilitate stronger and more trusted partnerships within the Commonwealth ecosystem” Commonwealth Strategic Plan 2025-2030, page 5 [Strategic Plan 2025–2030 | Commonwealth](#)

<sup>5</sup> In full, the Commonwealth Principles on Freedom of Expression and the Role of the Media in Good Governance [Commonwealth-Principles-on-Freedom-of-Expression-and-the-Role-of-the-Media-in.pdf](#)

support smaller and more vulnerable states, foster regional cooperation, and embed Commonwealth Charter values in line with the framework outlined in the recent Commonwealth Law Ministers' Nadi Declaration on Democratic Resilience and Participation.

### **Promoting economic resilience**

10. The CHOGM 2026 theme – Accelerating Partnerships and Investment for a Prosperous Commonwealth speaks directly to civil society as an economic asset. Genuine prosperity – that is inclusive, sustainable, and shared – cannot be delivered by governments and markets alone. It requires active partnership with civil society to connect macro-level investment to community-level reality, and ensure marginalised populations share in the dividends of growth. Accredited Organisations are the vital link between high-level policy and inclusive prosperity for 2.7 billion people. Accredited Organisations also include representatives of business and technical professions required to ensure the Commonwealth's economic objectives can be realised in practice. In 2023, Accredited Organisations secured targeted support for women-owned businesses, and their expertise catalysed the Commonwealth Investment Network (CIN) to unlock capital for those unable to access it. In future, we will work to enhance the "Commonwealth Advantage" by aligning it with Commonwealth values such as democracy, rule of law and good governance to ensure it drives inclusive growth. By uniting through the Commonwealth Artificial Intelligence Consortium and adopting a differentiated two-track strategy, Accredited Organisations can close the growing AI gap, unlocking shared prosperity, inclusive innovation, and lasting digital sovereignty throughout our Commonwealth.

### **Promoting climate resilience**

11. Climate change remains an immediate existential threat for many Commonwealth Small and Island Developing States. For more than half a century, Accredited Organisations have brought together scientists, ecologists, indigenous peoples, educationalists, lawyers and other expert communities, contributing to raising awareness of human ecology. Accredited Organisations have provided scientific expertise, community level evidence, educational outreach and policy guidance that have helped develop – and are essential to the grassroots implementation of – Commonwealth frameworks such as the Blue Charter, Apia Ocean Declaration, Living Lands Charter, and the Kigali Declaration on Sustainable Urbanisation. The 2025 ICJ advisory opinion (clarifying states' legal obligations to prevent harm to the climate and to protect future generations from climate change) resulted from a combination of civil society and government action. The climate and adaptation work of Accredited Organisations is creating concrete climate and resilience projects and could help ensure climate finance reaches at-risk communities, while also protecting a credible 'just transition' that safeguards workers' jobs, safety, health and wellbeing. Accredited Organisations have a vital role to play in enabling the kind of multilateral collaboration needed to prevent climate disaster, mitigate the imminent threats from climate change and ensure solutions serve the diverse needs of all nations, regions and communities.

### **Promoting social resilience**

12. The social resilience of communities is central to successful economies, the maintenance of democracy and human rights as well as enabling collective action on climate sustainability – a 'fourth pillar' complementing democratic, economic and climate resilience. A future-facing Commonwealth must ensure that the marginalised and those in vulnerable situations are not left behind. Social resilience is underpinned by quality and accessible education, universal health coverage and social protection. Education fosters critical thinking, social tolerance, climate conscience, innovation and civic engagement.

Healthcare services ensure that people are healthy, happy and economically productive. Social protection ensures that basic needs associated with housing, food security and social order are maintained and help to prevent entrenched poverty resulting from disability, age or family breakdown. Accredited Organisations, especially those in the spheres of education, health and equality, collectively bring expertise and focus to these areas. They provide Governments with early warning systems and the opportunity to formulate appropriate strategies and monitoring mechanisms, such as the development of the Disability Inclusion Action Plan. And by advocating for inclusive social policies, Accredited Organisations build the robust human capital and social cohesion that are recognised as drivers of long-term productivity. The communiqué must reassert the importance of social development to the peoples of the Commonwealth and the contribution of Accredited Organisations.

### **Tackling disengagement**

13. A persistent challenge for the Commonwealth is the growing perception among many citizens, particularly the young, that the organisation operates primarily at a governmental or diplomatic level. Civil society and Accredited Organisations can play an essential role in bridging this gap by translating Commonwealth values and initiatives into tangible programmes and opportunities that engage communities directly. We have significant reach into communities that governments do not have. Through educational initiatives, youth leadership programmes (such as in the Commonwealth Year of Youth), professional networks, and public dialogue, Accredited Organisations can help strengthen awareness of the Commonwealth's relevance and reinforce a sense of shared identity among its peoples. By acting as visible and active partners in implementing Commonwealth initiatives like Commonwealth Day, by sharing stories about successful Commonwealth partnerships with civil society and Accredited Organisations, and by bolstering Commonwealth sporting and cultural activities, we can help reconnect the Commonwealth with the everyday lives of its citizens.

### **Creating a strategic partnership: enabling and empowering Accredited Organisations**

14. Tackling the polycrisis that threatens democratic, economic, climate and social resilience, and challenges all multilateral institutions, including the Commonwealth, requires the engagement of every element of the Commonwealth family.
15. Commonwealth institutions and governments cannot engage their citizens and create an inclusive, resilient, successful community without a new approach to civil society and Accredited Organisations.
16. As past reports and submissions – from the Eminent Persons Group that drafted the Commonwealth Charter<sup>6</sup> through the High Level Group on the Governance Arrangements of the Commonwealth Secretariat<sup>7</sup> to IFCO's own submission to CHOGM2024<sup>8</sup> – and more recently several speeches by leading Commonwealth figures have made clear, the Commonwealth needs a partnership between governments, institutions and Accredited Organisations.
17. On behalf of Accredited Organisations, the Independent Forum of Commonwealth Organisations submits the following for integration into the CHOGM 2026 Communiqué, noting the Strategic Plan's commitment to partnerships and supporting the Commonwealth intention to move from declarations to implementation:

---

<sup>6</sup> A Commonwealth of the People: Time for Urgent Reform. Report of the Eminent Persons Group to Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, Perth, October 2011 <https://commonwealthfoundation.com/resource/a-commonwealth-of-the-people-time-for-urgent-reform/>

<sup>7</sup> Commonwealth High Level Group Review of Governance Arrangements and the Commonwealth Secretariat, Second Report, December 2018 [HLG\\_Second\\_Report.pdf](#)

<sup>8</sup> IFCO submission to Samoa2024 [ifco\\_submission\\_to\\_chogm\\_cow\\_2024\\_amended.pdf](#)

Recognising the value, expertise and community reach of civil society and Accredited Organisations as the third pillar of the Commonwealth family, able to promote the Commonwealth and its values to the peoples of the Commonwealth, the Commonwealth commits to establish a meaningful, structured, strategic partnership with Accredited Organisations based on regular, early consultation and genuine engagement, transparency, inclusivity, shared responsibility and mutual exchange.

18. This structured approach should include engagement in the development of strategic plans and work programmes, contributions to Ministerial meetings, and engagement with the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group, where Accredited Organisations can be an early warning system for infringements of the Commonwealth Charter.
19. The alternative is a Commonwealth of governments, not peoples, and continuing disengagement of younger generations.

This document should be cited as: Independent Forum of Commonwealth Organisations (2026) *A Partnership with Commonwealth Accredited Organisations, the IFCO submission to CHOGM 2026*. London, IFCO [www.ifco.online/submissions-to-CHOGM](http://www.ifco.online/submissions-to-CHOGM). You can email us at [ifco.cmw@gmail.com](mailto:ifco.cmw@gmail.com)



## A Partnership with Commonwealth Accredited Organisations

Independent Forum of Commonwealth Organisations

The IFCO submission to CHOGM – Antigua & Barbuda 2026

The IFCO submission to CHOGM – Antigua & Barbuda 2026 © May 2026 by IFCO is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

