



INDEPENDENT FORUM OF COMMONWEALTH ORGANISATIONS NEW CONSTITUTION, RENEWED COMMITTEE, REFRESHED RESOLVE

Defending Values, Advocating Transformation

The Independent Forum of Commonwealth Organisations entered a new phase of enhanced mutual support and advocacy in April, with strengthened governance and renewed determination.

IFCO aims to provide mutual support and opportunities for AOs and to protect and enhance the space for civil society in general and AOs in particular within the Commonwealth space.

NEW IFCO STEERING COMMITTEE - FIRST MEETING - 13 APRIL 2026



From left to right – Nicholas Watts, Rose Ann Cuschieri, Helen Jones, Sneha Aurora (Secretary), Judith Diment, Bishakha Mukherjee (Vice Chair), Pat Dale, #HE Karen-Mae Hill, David N Jones (Chair), Owen Tudor, Arif Zaman, Yinglen Butt, *Victoria Randall, June Samuels, *Clive Harridge (not present Stelios Foteinopoulos, Ann Keeling, Richard Rieser *Fariba Soetan) (*former committee) (Photo taken by Commonwealth Secretariat 13 April 2026 after AO briefing on CHOGM 2026 with #High Commissioner for Antigua & Barbuda and first committee meeting)

A new constitution was approved by ballot of all Accredited Organisations (AOs) with support from over 50 AOs, no votes against and less than 5 abstentions. David N Jones was elected unopposed as Chair and an election, open to all AOs, resulted in a refreshed Steering Committee (see page 2).

The first IFCO conference under the new structure on 27th April, open to all AOs, is expected to approve a new Code of Conduct, start the process of developing a strategic workplan and strengthen communications. The consultation on the collective CHOGM submission will reach its culmination with the approved document providing a basis for further discussions with member states and the Secretariat.

Newly elected Chair, David N Jones, commented: *'It is an honour and an awesome responsibility to be elected to work with Accredited Organisations and our Commonwealth partners in these dangerous and challenging times. I am confident that the new IFCO structure reflects a renewed determination to work together and with partners to promote the values and objectives in the Commonwealth Charter and the vision of the Strategic Plan. The Commonwealth is about peoples as well as governments. IFCO will play our part in building relationships and improving the lives of the peoples of the Commonwealth.'*



The members of the newly elected IFCO Steering Committee are:

David N Jones	Chair – Commonwealth Organisation for Social Work
Mukherjee, Bishakha	Interim Vice-Chair - The Commonwealth Association
Aurora, Sneh	Interim Secretary - Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI)
Butt, Yinglen	Commonwealth Nurses and Midwives Federation
Cuschieri, Rose Anne	Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration & Management
Dale, Pat	Soroptimist International
Diment, Judith	Rotary International
Foteinopoulos, Stylianos	The Commonwealth Equality Network
Jones, Helen	Commonwealth Consortium for Education (CCFE)
Keeling, Ann	CommonAge
Rieser, Richard	Commonwealth Disabled People’s Forum
Samuels, Jane	Commonwealth Human Ecology Council
Tudor, Owen	Commonwealth Trade Union Group
Watts, Nicholas	Commonwealth Association of Museums (CAM)
Zaman, Arif	Commonwealth Businesswomen’s Network (CBWN)

Following the election, the Honorary Officers are reaching out to the candidates who were not elected to explore other ways in which they can be active in IFCO. It is anticipated that there will be many opportunities for AO representatives to contribute to working groups.

FUTURE IFCO CONFERENCES

The conference on 27th April 2026 will be asked to approve the schedule of future meetings of the IFCO conference, which is open to all Accredited Organisations. All conferences will be hybrid (H) or online only (O). The proposed dates in 2026/7 are:

Monday 15th June (O) Monday 28th September (H) Monday 18th January (O)

The time of conference meetings will be varied aiming to include colleagues across all time zones.

CHOGM SUBMISSIONS



A working group has been drafting an IFCO submission which focuses specifically on enhancing the space for civil society in general and Accredited Organisations specifically within the Commonwealth space. This will be debated at the conference on 27th April and discussed with stakeholders and partners prior to submission to CHOGM through the appropriate channels.

Individual Accredited Organisations have previously been able to make submissions on issues relevant to them. The Secretariat will give guidance about this process. It seems advisable for Organisations to prepare submissions in anticipation as a matter of urgency.



COMMONWEALTH FOUNDATION: DEVELOPING THE 2026–2031 STRATEGIC PLAN



QR link to full article

The Foundation reports that the process of developing the 2026-2031 Strategic Plan has been rigorous, constructive and evidence-based, ensuring that the needs of civil society, creatives and governments across the Commonwealth were understood and that work was guided and grounded in the values of the Commonwealth Charter.

The final meeting of the Peer Review Committee in late April will consider approval of the new Strategy. Following this, the Director-General will present the new Strategic Plan to IFCO, outlining how the

Foundation aims to support the changing needs of civil society organisations in the Commonwealth over the next six years and seek feedback on partnership opportunities.

NEWS FROM ACCREDITED ORGANISATIONS



To mark **Earth Day 2026** on 22 April, CLA President Steven Thiru explores the global rise of SLAPPs—strategic lawsuits against public participation—and how they are increasingly being used to silence voices raising environmental concerns. He exposes the chilling effect these actions have on activists, journalists, and communities, and argues that confronting their misuse is vital to defending the rule of law, safeguarding human rights, and advancing climate justice. Read the full

piece to understand why this growing legal threat matters more than ever <https://www.commonwealthlawyers.com/cla/silenced-for-speaking-out-protecting-environmental-defenders-from-slapps-by-steven-thiru-president-commonwealth-lawyers-association/>



Commonwealth Security & Resilience Group (CWSRG) is hosting the **Second Commonwealth Maritime Domain Awareness Summit** in Vancouver, Canada in collaboration with Vice Admiral Topshee, and the Royal Canadian Navy on 3&4 June this year. The Summit will bring together leaders, experts and innovators in Maritime enforcement, security and administration. We would be delighted to welcome

Commonwealth organisations to join the discussions and share their perspectives on key priorities for supporting capability building and information sharing in the maritime domain. Contact freddie@cwsrg.org to learn more, for further information head to <https://www.cwsrg.org/mda2026>.



The Commonwealth Short Film Award is a new global initiative celebrating the very best in short filmmaking from across the Commonwealth. Hosted in London on 9-12 September, two months before CHOGM and spanning 56 member states, the Award will spotlight bold, original storytelling featured in the dedicated Commonwealth Short Film Showcase at the Cine International Film Festival (CIFF). From the Commonwealth Creative Industries Alliance (CCIA) of which the Commonwealth Businesswomen's Network (CBWN) is a founder partner.



Last week, Commonwealth Sport reached 100 days to go before the start of Glasgow 2026. With this milestone, preparations for the **Glasgow 2026 Commonwealth Games** are truly underway, with only 26,000 tickets remaining for Athletics and Para Athletics.

Glasgow announced that Britain's fastest woman in history, Dina Asher-Smith will be competing in the 200m. St Lucia's Julien Alfred will also be going for gold in the 100m, with the 2024 Olympic Champion and Birmingham 2022 silver medallist heading to Scotstoun Stadium. This announcement was closely followed by the reveal of Glasgow's volunteer's uniform. It was also announced that the volunteers will be known as 'Legends', a deep running theme throughout Glasgow 2026's road to the Games. See more [here](#).



Tuesday, 28 April is **International Workers' Memorial Day**, this year focusing on the impact of work-related stress. To tackle the epidemic of non-communicable diseases, the Commonwealth Trade Union Group is calling on Commonwealth governments to ratify and implement the two fundamental occupational safety and health conventions negotiated at the ILO, as well as a key convention

addressing gender-based violence at work – a key source of stress for women workers. Ten Commonwealth countries – including CHOGM2026 host Antigua and Barbuda - have ratified all three but 21, mostly small island developing states, or SIDS, have not ratified any. Details of those countries yet to ratify one or more of these important ILO conventions are set out in the CTUG statement at <https://www.ituc-csi.org/stressed-out-commonwealth-action>



Soroptimist International reflects on the opening of the **70th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women**, where Agreed Conclusions were ultimately adopted following a new negotiation process and significant last-minute procedural challenges. Drawing on long-standing engagement with the Commission, this blog provides a detailed account of how strong chairing and negotiated compromise prevented regression against women's and girls' rights at a critical moment. These reflections are relevant for IFCO members, offering practical insight into the dynamics of multilateral decision-making in UN and Commonwealth-related policy spaces. Follow this [link to the blog](#).

Contact IFCO

To contact IFCO use the IFCO secretariat email - ifco.cmw@gmail.com

Work is also continuing to upgrade the IFCO website to ensure topicality and relevance <https://ifco.online/>

IFCO relies on voluntary support and is grateful to CHRI for support with secretariat functions and elections. Huge thanks to staff and interns for their invaluable assistance. Offers of help with IFCO activities and administration would be very welcome.