



CHOGM 2026 STATEMENT

Introduction

The Commonwealth Organisation for Social Work is a Commonwealth Accredited Organisation with responsibility for strengthening the voice, capacity, and influence of social workers across the Commonwealth so that social justice, equity, and human dignity are advanced locally and globally. COSW has active members from 15 countries in the Commonwealth with representatives from each of the geographic regions forming the COSW Council.

Social workers play a critical role in ensuring that human rights are upheld and that basic living standards are achieved through equitable healthcare, access to quality education, social protections and economic inclusion. These are foundational to the future success of the Commonwealth.

CHOGM 2026

As we approach the CHOGM 2026, COSW strongly recommends:

1. That the Commonwealth formally **recognise the centrality of Social Resilience in achieving the objectives of the latest Commonwealth Strategic Plan.**

Beyond the existing Commonwealth Strategic Priorities of democratic, economic, and environmental resilience¹, COSW argues that education, health, social protection, disability inclusion, and social cohesion are essential foundations of prosperous and resilient societies and should be explicitly prioritised in Commonwealth policy and action.

We therefore call on the Commonwealth to reassert the importance of social development to the peoples of the Commonwealth as well as the contribution of Accredited Organisations. We also urge governments to develop social protection systems where they don't exist, and where they do, governments should adequately resource them and underpin them with legislation which reinforce citizens' rights to basic welfare.

For example, civil society organisations play a critical role in promoting democracy, good governance, rule of law, freedom of expression, and the protection of vulnerable groups, while also providing early warnings about threats to democratic integrity and human rights. Civil society has also advanced economic resilience through support for women-owned businesses, inclusive education, socially responsible investment initiatives, sharing professional expertise, and focussed efforts to reduce the digital and AI divide across Commonwealth countries. Furthermore, civil society plays an important role in climate adaptation, environmental protection, climate finance, and implementation of Commonwealth

¹ <https://thecommonwealth.org/strategic-plan-2025>

initiatives such as the Blue Charter² and Living Lands³ Charter, particularly for Small Island Developing States.

2. That the Commonwealth establish **a meaningful, structured, strategic partnership** with Accredited Organisations based on **regular, early consultation and genuine engagement, transparency, inclusivity, shared responsibility and mutual exchange**.

'As a Commonwealth Accredited Organisation and an active participant in the Independent Forum of Commonwealth Organisations (IFCO)', we support the IFCO statement calling on the Commonwealth to recognise the value, expertise and community reach of civil society and Accredited Organisations and their ability to promote the Commonwealth and its values to the peoples of the Commonwealth.

3. Endorse the **Commonwealth Charter for Young Carers**

We call on Commonwealth States to formally endorse the Charter for Young Carers, which has been guided by young carers in several Commonwealth countries and developed by COSW⁴. Young carers in every country look after someone in their family who has an illness or a disability or other condition. Sometimes they look after the whole family. Young carers are children and young people first and should be free to develop emotionally and physically and to take full advantage of opportunities for educational achievement and life success. They miss out on the normal experience of childhood but they also learn adult coping skills and resilience. The Charter identifies ten 'asks' which would improve their lives. The Charter has been formally acknowledged by Health and Youth Ministers. These young people ask the Heads of Government to recognise the reality of their difficult lives, to endorse the Charter and to signal hope for young people with caring responsibilities.

4. Leverage Commonwealth Values to **Provide Inclusive Leadership to Combat Extremism** at Local and Global Levels

The Commonwealth Charter expresses a commitment to the development of free and democratic societies and the promotion of peace and prosperity to improve the lives of all the people of the Commonwealth⁵. Furthermore, it states: "We emphasise the need to promote tolerance, respect, understanding, moderation and religious freedom which are essential to the development of free and democratic societies, and recall that respect for the dignity of all human beings is critical to promoting peace and prosperity."

COSW expresses deep concern about the global rise in extremism and hate speech and increased rates of violence in our communities. COSW urges the

² <https://thecommonwealth.org/bluecharter>

³ <https://thecommonwealth.org/our-work/living-lands-charter>

⁴ <https://cosw.info/young-cares/>

⁵ <https://thecommonwealth.org/charter>

Commonwealth to assiduously enforce the democratic right to free-speech while also ensuring that this does not lead to expressions of hate against minorities and already marginalised communities. Now is the time for Commonwealth States to show Global and National leadership through inclusive language that models respect for human dignity and creates spaces for the safe and respectful context of ideas. Social Workers are concerned that divisive politics and the demonising of already marginalised groups, such as migrants and youth, is counterproductive to the vision of peaceful societies. This includes protecting the role and resourcing of civil society and taking action to minimise mis and disinformation in our communities.

5. Develop Innovative Co-Governance Models that uphold First Generations' Rights

As a product of colonial rule, the Commonwealth must move beyond a rhetoric of collaboration with Indigenous people in the protection of the environment towards a more holistic and innovative co-governance model. Many indigenous communities throughout the Commonwealth remain without formal treaty or other legislative protection and face health and social outcomes below that of the general population.

We therefore call on the Commonwealth to create spaces for structured engagement and power sharing with indigenous and first generations peoples and communities including adding principles to support this to the existing Commonwealth Charter.

Conclusion

In summary, the Commonwealth Organisation for Social Work urges Commonwealth leaders to take bold and meaningful steps at CHOGM 2026. By elevating social resilience as a core pillar, formally recognising Accredited Organisations as strategic partners, and prioritising inclusive leadership and co-governance with First Generations peoples, the Commonwealth can ensure its policies and actions genuinely reflect the aspirations and rights of all its communities. We call on all member states to implement these recommendations, ensuring that the Commonwealth is not just a platform for governments, but a force for social justice, equity, and human dignity for every person across the Commonwealth.