PRESS RELEASE

19 November 2026

The Commonwealth | ACCREDITED ORGANISATION Commonwealth Organisation for Social Work | CAO 955

ADVANCING SOCIAL JUSTICE, EQUITY AND HUMAN DIGNITY

SOCIAL WORKERS AT THE

COMMONWEALTH HEADS OF GOVERNMENT MEETING IN ANTIGUA



The Commonwealth Organisation for Social Work (COSW) ensured that social work voices were heard in the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in St John's, Antigua and Barbuda on 1 – 4 November 2026.

CHOGM 2026 brought together Heads of Government, Ministers, and representatives from business, civil society, and youth organisations from the 56 member states. Many of the 103 Accredited Commonwealth Organisations were represented in person. COSW is an Accredited Organisation; the COSW General Secretary, David N Jones, is Chair of the Independent Forum of Commonwealth Organisations (IFCO).

The COSW delegation to CHOGM 2026 gave reactions in a short video and included (left to right above):

Sharon-Rose Gittens (COSW Advisory Committee member and Vice President of the Barbados Association of Social Workers): "a worthwhile CHOGM – a chance to be up close and personal with powerful people – for discussion as well as selfies".

Koren Norton (Social worker, Antigua and Barbuda) "exciting to learn about and see the things which COSW does. I will incorporate some of them here as we work with vulnerable populations".

David N Jones (COSW General Secretary and Chair of IFCO)

Anita Welch-Gittens (President, of the Barbados Association of Social Workers): "a wonderful time, many useful innovative ideas about youth and women".

Mary Bastien (COSW Advisory Committee member and social work manager from Trinidad and Tobago): "wonderful, worth the trip, excellent discussion about gender equity and partnerships, excellent to meet face-to-face".

COSW Engagement at CHOGM

In addition to participation in ministerial meetings, the COSW delegation provided a social work presence in the People's Forum (civil society) and the Women's Forum, ensuring that Caribbean and indigenous social work perspectives contributed to shaping dialogues. COSW was also present in CHOGM Side Events, including the Sports Summit, the Foreign Ministers Meeting and the launch of the Commonwealth Disability Inclusion Action Plan.

Supporting Civil Society

The COSW delegation linked up with other Accredited Organisations, helping to facilitate the first IFCO welcome reception, helping to launch a declaration on Wellbeing as a Pillar of Prosperity, and bringing a much-needed Caribbean social work perspective to key side events.

COSW General Secretary David N Jones welcomed the presence of Caribbean social workers at CHOGM. "In a world which seems to be turning its face away from the basic needs of ordinary people for health and educational opportunity, we reminded leaders and Commonwealth networks of the importance of social resilience as a basis for Commonwealth aspirations", David concluded before meeting social workers in Barbados and Trinidad.

CONTEXT

COSW is an organisation for citizens of the Commonwealth who are interested in supporting social work and social development. It is supported by social work associations in the Commonwealth. It aims to promote and support communication and collaboration between social workers and social work associations of Commonwealth countries, and to uphold and promote the code of ethics of the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW). This statement can be found on the COSW website: https://cosw.info/cosw-news.

The Commonwealth is a voluntary association of 56 independent and equal sovereign states, with a combined population is 2.7 billion, of which more than 60 per cent is aged 29 or under.

The Commonwealth spans the globe and includes both advanced economies and developing countries. Thirty-three members are small states, many of which are island nations.

The Commonwealth Secretariat supports member countries to build democratic and inclusive institutions, strengthen governance and promote justice and human rights. Our work helps to grow economies and boost trade, deliver national resilience, empower young people, and address threats such as climate change, debt and inequality.

Member countries are supported by a network of more than **100 intergovernmental, civil society, cultural and professional organisations**.

Commonwealth Heads of Government meet in a summit every two years alongside civil society representatives. As an Accredited Commonwealth Organisation, COSW can make submissions to CHOGM and send representatives to meetings, including observing the meeting of Foreign Ministers, attending the opening ceremony and reception and participating in the People's, Women's and Youth Forums. In the context of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (2015-2030), CHOGM reviews social policy, security and economic issues and the global situation.

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COSW SUBMISSION TO CHOGM

The COSW submission to the Heads of Government, which sits alongside the IFCO submission, highlights five key asks based on pan-Commonwealth consultations:

1 Recognise social resilience as central to the Commonwealth's strategic priorities
Education, health, social protection, disability inclusion and social cohesion are essential foundations of resilient societies. Governments should establish or adequately resource social protection systems and underpin them with legislation that reinforces citizens' rights to basic welfare.

2 Establish meaningful strategic partnerships with Accredited Organisations
COSW calls for structured partnerships with Commonwealth Accredited Organisations, including regular and early consultation, genuine engagement, transparency, inclusivity and shared responsibility. The expertise and community reach of civil society organisations should be recognised in shaping and implementing Commonwealth policy.

3 Endorse the Commonwealth Charter for Young Carers
Children and young people with caring responsibilities deserve recognition, support and opportunities to thrive. Formal endorsement of the Charter would demonstrate a commitment to protecting their childhood, emotional and physical development, educational achievement and future opportunities.

4 Exercise inclusive leadership to combat extremism, hate speech and division
Commonwealth leaders should model respect for human dignity, protect minorities and marginalised communities, and promote peaceful and inclusive societies. This includes addressing hate speech, minimising misinformation and disinformation, and protecting and resourcing civil society.

5 Develop innovative co-governance models that uphold First Generations' rights
COSW calls for meaningful engagement and power-sharing with Indigenous and First Generations peoples and communities, including stronger recognition of their rights and principles supporting co-governance within the Commonwealth Charter.

RESOURCES

COSW website www.cosw.info

COSW submission to CHOGM 2026 https://cosw.info/chogm-2026/

COSW CHOGM video on COSW YouTube Channel

Commonwealth Charter for Young Carers https://cosw.info/young-carers/

CHOGM 2026 website https://chogm26.gov.ag/

Commonwealth website https://thecommonwealth.org/

CHOGM 2026 communiqué https://thecommonwealth.org/CHOGM2026/news/chogm-2026-communique

Independent Forum of Commonwealth Organisations website www.ifco.online/

Independent Forum of Commonwealth Organisations submission to CHOGM 2026
https://ifco.online/wp-content/uploads/IFCO-Submission-to-CHOGM-2026.pdf

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