

**ADVANCING SOCIAL JUSTICE, EQUITY AND HUMAN DIGNITY
CARIBBEAN SOCIAL WORKERS REPRESENTING
SOCIAL WORK AT COMMONWEALTH MEETING IN ANTIGUA**



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

"The COSW delegation will ensure that the social work voice has its rightful place in this global arena and is heard and influential", said Dr. K. S. Ramesh, COSW President. "COSW is deeply grateful to our representatives from the Caribbean region and those from across the Commonwealth who have contributed to our formal submission".

CHOGM 2026 brings together Heads of Government, Ministers, and representatives from business, civil society, and youth organisations from the 56 member states of the Commonwealth. Many of the 103 Accredited Commonwealth Organisations will also be represented alongside representatives from civil society, women's groups and young people. COSW is an Accredited Organisation; the COSW General Secretary is Chair of the Independent Forum of Commonwealth Organisations (IFCO).

The COSW delegation to CHOGM 2026 and the Commonwealth Peoples Forum (CPF) includes:

Sharon-Rose Gittens (COSW Advisory Committee member and Vice President of the Barbados Association of Social Workers)

Mary Bastien (COSW Advisory Committee member and social work manager from Trinidad and Tobago)

Anita Welch-Gittens (President, of the Barbados Association of Social Workers)

Koren Norton (Social worker, Antigua and Barbuda)

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

The COSW delegation will aim to ensure that the voice and experience of social workers is recognised in the Commonwealth deliberations. The COSW submission to the Heads of Government, which sits alongside the IFCO submission, highlights five key asks based on pan-Commonwealth consultations:

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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.

COSW Engagement at CHOGM

In addition to participation in ministerial meetings, the COSW delegation will actively support and participate in the People's Forum (civil society), the Women's Forum and the Youth Forum. These spaces are vital for ensuring that Caribbean and indigenous social work perspectives contribute to shaping solutions for the future of people throughout the Commonwealth. COSW will represent social work in CHOGM Side Events, the Commonwealth Foreign Ministers Meeting and other high-level meetings.

Supporting Civil Society

The COSW delegation will link up with other civil society organisations with shared aspirations supporting events focused on protecting civil society space, health and wellbeing, dementia and ageing, climate change, young people, and building healthy cities and communities, bringing a much-needed Caribbean social work perspective to key side events

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>.

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.

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.

COSW website www.cosw.info

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

Commonwealth website <https://thecommonwealth.org/>

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

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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