

Foreword

Achieving gender equality and women and girls' empowerment is one of the fundamental principles of the Commonwealth, and the Commonwealth is committed to promoting a rights-based approach in all areas of its work. The Commonwealth has a strong foundation of commitments, conventions and treaties on which to act towards greater gender equality, articulated in the 2013 Charter of the Commonwealth, which recognises that gender equality and women's empowerment are essential components of human development and basic human rights.

At the 2015 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Malta, leaders reaffirmed their conviction that gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls should continue to be mainstreamed into development. They also reaffirmed their commitment to prioritising the issue in line with the aspirations of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and within the work of the Commonwealth Secretariat.

In fulfilling the above mandate from the 2015 CHOGM, and in line with the

findings of the end-of-term independent evaluation of the Commonwealth's Plan of Action on Gender Equality 2005–2015 completed in early 2016, along with feedback from members throughout the process and together with the outcomes of the inaugural Commonwealth Women's Forum of 2015 in Malta, the annual consultations of Commonwealth National Women's Machineries in March 2016 in New York, and the July 2016 Women's Leaders' Summit in London, four thematic areas emerged as proposed priorities for the Commonwealth:

- 1 Women in leadership
- 2 Women's economic empowerment
- 3 Ending violence against women and girls
- 4 Gender and climate change

The Commonwealth Priorities for Gender Equality 2017–2020 and beyond were endorsed by Women's Affairs Ministers at their 11th meeting hosted by the Government of Samoa in September 2016. The document provides a template for action. The monitoring and evaluation strategies

of the document committed the Commonwealth to produce an annual report on the status of gender equality in Commonwealth member countries. This inaugural *Gender Equality Report* meets that commitment. It provides baseline information that can be used by Commonwealth member countries to monitor their performance in meeting the Commonwealth priorities for gender equality and the 2030 Agenda's Sustainable Development Goals.

The report assesses progress in each of the four thematic areas in the Commonwealth Priorities for Gender Equality 2017–2020 and outlines the challenges ahead for Commonwealth member countries in advancing gender equality and women and girls' empowerment in the Commonwealth. It further reflects our commitment to ensure that women and girls are regarded as equal partners with men and boys in shaping our common future.

**The Rt Hon Patricia Scotland QC
Secretary-General of the
Commonwealth**