



April 2018

Dear Heads of Government

Fairtrade and the Commonwealth

With a week to go until the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in the United Kingdom, we write as representatives from the Fairtrade movement, active in 29 countries across the Commonwealth membership. There are one million Fairtrade smallholder farmers and agricultural workers living and working in Commonwealth countries, as well as large consumer markets for Fairtrade goods in the UK, Canada, Australia & New Zealand.

We are delighted to hear of the Summit's theme, *'Towards our Common Future'* and the key themes of *prosperity, fairness, sustainability and security*. As with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), these themes are inseparable from one another; it is our firm conviction that any discussion on trade and prosperity must be infused with a conversation about fairness and sustainability. Sadly, increased trade and growth does not necessarily lead to better incomes, reduced poverty and improved human rights. Too many people are paid exploitative wages, and modern slavery and child labour remain real risks in global supply chains.

The situation is critical for women and young people. Often denied the right to own assets and access finance, women often occupy the lowest paid jobs, whilst also attending to unpaid caring responsibilities. Young people, seeing no future for themselves in low-paid agricultural jobs, are migrating from rural areas – the average age of a cocoa farmer in Ghana is now 55 years old.

Fairtrade, and other ethical trade initiatives, can make all the difference. Independent research finds that producers selling significant amounts of Fairtrade goods can see better incomes, social benefits such as health, education, and housing, and improved labour conditions where exploitative practices were flourishing.¹

We urge you and other Heads of Government to support a new agenda for *fair trade for development*, in support of the Commonwealth's shared vision of a Common Future. We ask you to use your unique position to improve

¹ *The impact of Fairtrade: a review of research evidence 2009-2015*, Darko, Lynch & Smith, Overseas Development Institute, 2017, <https://www.odi.org/publications/10891-impact-fairtrade-review-research-evidence-2009-2015>

the lives of farmers and workers across the Commonwealth with priority given, as set out in the [recent Fairtrade report](#), to the following 5 issues:

1. Promote women's economic empowerment

Commonwealth leaders could identify areas for action and financial support, in line with the recommendations of the UN High Level Panel report on Women's Economic Empowerment. Action is needed to build the leadership skills of women and girls, to address laws and practices that restrict land and asset ownership, and access to finance, and to challenge discrimination and harassment in the workplace. As the Fairtrade movement we are encouraged by the leadership taken by some Commonwealth members in directly addressing the empowerment of women and girls such as Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy.

2. Combating modern slavery

Commonwealth leaders can bring forward appropriate laws and policy initiatives to combat modern slavery and other human rights abuses in supply chains. As a Fairtrade movement, we are encouraged by new legislation being brought forward in Australia, as well as the UK's Modern Slavery Act.

3. Delivering living incomes and living wages

Everyone has the right to a fair, living income. Commonwealth governments can make a shared commitment to living incomes and living wages as a policy objective and uphold the ILO Core Conventions as minimum requirements.

4. Adopt trade policies consistent with the SDGs

Targets on trade policy are included throughout the Sustainable Development Goals. Commonwealth leaders can deliver these by adopting trade policy consistent with the SDGs, and report against them. We are also urging governments to develop trade agreements and policies in a transparent and participatory way, in a manner consistent with the SDGs.

5. Investing in producers and standards

Commonwealth leaders can back initiatives like Fairtrade, which offer a better deal for farmers and workers. Governments can use policy incentives to encourage fair and sustainable trade - for example, including Fairtrade produce in export strategies, demanding high ethical standards in government procurement and business behaviour, and investing in strengthening ethical trade capacity through ODA and national spending.

Fairtrade is making a real difference in the lives of some of the world's poorest people, but much more remains to be done. The Commonwealth can lead the way in unlocking the power of trade to end poverty and human rights abuses.

We hope that this report is a useful contribution as you prepare for CHOGM, and look forward to seeing our concerns reflected in the Summit content and communiqués, as well as we hope, in the coffee and tea that you will be drinking at the Summit!

Yours sincerely

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