

SECOND ANNUAL COSW POLICY FORUM ONLINE
21st October 2023
COMMONWEALTH CELEBRATES 'CRUCIAL ROLE OF SOCIAL WORKERS'



"COSW welcomes the statements of eminent Commonwealth officials who celebrated the key contribution of social workers. We help build resilience in individuals and communities and facilitate social healing at times of global crisis", said Sylvia Daisy Romanus, President of COSW after the second online Policy Forum on Saturday 21st October 2023.

"The Commonwealth Secretariat is proud of the contribution of social workers. We recognise their crucial role in communities.

We need to elevate this work, recognising the key role of social work in basic primary healthcare and in developing resilient and healthy communities."

Janneth Mghamba (Tanzania), Commonwealth Secretariat Health Adviser

"Social workers play a key role in fulfilling the United Nations charter objective 'to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom'. Social workers have an ever more needed healing mission to facilitate global social cohesion."

Matthew Neuhaus, former Director of Political Affairs, Commonwealth Secretariat

"Social workers have a key role in building trust and non-violence, resilience and thriving in the response to adversity and the management of conflicts."

Mario Gerada, Commonwealth Foundation Civil Society Advisory Governor, social worker

The COSW Policy Forum included two online parallel open meetings to enable people from all time zones to participate. Both had a similar programme with the same speakers.



Some of the Board members and participants in the Policy Forum

Eminent Commonwealth speakers discussed *'The contribution of the Commonwealth to Global Social Policy'* preceded by a brief annual report from COSW Board members highlighting a busy and influential year. The presentations were followed by an outline of the implementation timetable for the new COSW constitutional structure.

Matthew Neuhaus (Australia), a former Commonwealth Secretariat senior official, recently retired from the Australian diplomatic service, addressed the benefits of the Commonwealth's contribution to international peace and the well-being of peoples. He argued that, in the current dangerous political environment, bodies such as COSW help bring to the world's attention the value of health, sanitation, social cohesion and improved standards of life. 'In this time of crisis, the Commonwealth stands as an inspiration'.

Joachim Mumba (Zambia), IFSW President and COSW Board member, spoke of the benefits of co-operation and partnership with other bodies. He emphasised the importance of finding ways to work together to promote social justice, human rights and social development. He concluded by saying that 'caring for the environment cares for us'.

Janneth Mghamba (Tanzania), Commonwealth Secretariat Health Adviser, spoke passionately about working through partnerships and capacity building with countries to deliver universal health coverage. She stressed the importance of the SDG goals and argued that CHOGM is a valuable high level policy delivery body.

Mario Gerada (Malta), Commonwealth Foundation Civil Society Advisory Governor, is a social worker and community activist who played a key role in the People's Forum at the 2015 Malta CHOGM. He talked about preparations for the People's Forum at CHOGM 2024 in Samoa. He encouraged participants to examine resilience, capacity and contribution to civil society.

Oritsé Williams, Commonwealth Young Carer Champion, poet, performer and member of the JLS Band, contributed the first global broadcast of a new video with his song for young carers (see separate press release).

COSW activity mentioned in the annual report included such themes as young carers, physical & mental health, child care law reform, human rights, safeguarding & child protection, involvement of older people, youth work, social development and much more.

The Policy Forum also heard about the new COSW constitution, approved on 1st September 2023. The new structure increases participation of national representatives and others supporting social work across the Commonwealth. This creates exciting new opportunities and broadens the base of accountability.

"The Policy Forum highlighted the essential contribution of social workers to Commonwealth member states and communities and the key role of COSW as a civil society partner in the Commonwealth family", concluded Sylvia Daisy Romanus.

ENDS

NOTE FOR EDITORS: 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.

The COSW annual report will shortly be available on the COSW website: www.cosw.info.

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SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES

Sylvia Daisy Romanus has been President of the Commonwealth Organisation for Social Work since September 2020. Teaching is her passion. She is an Associate Professor at Madras Christian College in the Department of Social Work.

Matthew Neuhaus has served for many years in the Australian diplomatic service, including periods in Kenya, Papua New Guinea, Nigeria and Zimbabwe. He served Australia at the United Nations and in October 2002 was appointed Director of the Political Affairs Division of the Commonwealth Secretariat in London, helping to organise three CHOGMs – Nigeria (2003), Malta (2005), Uganda (2007). He also oversaw Commonwealth democracy and election work, and was involved in conflict resolution in Pakistan, Fiji, Kenya, Guyana, Maldives and Tanzania/Zanzibar. He recently retired following a period as Ambassador to the Netherlands. Matthew will share his wide experience of and academic research on social policy in the Commonwealth.

Joachim Mumba is the IFSW President (2022-2026) and has been Secretary General of the Social Workers' Association of Zambia since 2005. He is also a COSW Board Member. He was instrumental in successfully negotiating the Social Workers' Association of Zambia Act, which was signed into law by the President in 2022. Joachim has been involved in a study landscaping the social welfare workforce and the extent to which social work is being recognized as a profession in Africa. This exercise was done in partnership with UNICEF Eastern and Southern Africa (ESARO) and the Global Social Service Workforce Alliance (GSSWA). He describes himself as an Ubuntu social work practitioner. Joachim will comment on the common objectives of IFSW and COSW.

Dr Janneth Mghamba is the Health Advisor for the Commonwealth Secretariat and former assistant director for the epidemiology and disease control section of Tanzania's Ministry of Health. Her current area of focus is on assisting Commonwealth countries to achieve Universal Health Coverage (UHC) goals by addressing inequity and disparities; building their digital platforms to strengthen health outcomes; addressing Global Health Security; NCD and Cervical cancers and the major ATM diseases. Janneth works alongside Advisers on education and youth services and will share an overview of current Commonwealth social policy activity.

Mario Gerada is a social worker based in Malta, a senior manager in the Migrants Commission of the Catholic Archdiocese of Malta and a Civil Society Advisory Governor of the Commonwealth Foundation. He has extensive experience of front-line human rights work with a special focus on migration. He has personal experience of the importance of constructive engagement between government and civil society, gained through his leadership within a national civil society organisation. He played a key role in the 2015 CHOGM People's Forum in Malta. Mario will talk about the experience of CHOGM 2015, the Commonwealth Foundation's critical dialogue programme and plans for CHOGM 2024.

David N Jones is the COSW Main Representative to the Commonwealth Institutions, a qualified social worker now retired and a former President of the International Federation of Social Workers.

25 October 2023