



RUPTURES AND RESILIENCE: THE COMMONWEALTH GAMES - LEADING THE WAY TO A NEW FUTURE

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In memory of the late Honourable Kirsty Duncan, who held the Ministerial portfolios in the Government of Canada for Sport, for Science and for Peoples with Disabilities and whose life work championed making sport safe and making the world a better place.

1. This January, at the World Economic Forum 2026, Canadian Prime Minister, Mark Carney, described a rupture in world order^[2]. Describing a time of profound and unrelenting disruption, of broken systems, covered over by a pretense that all was well, he called on middle powers to act, to unite and lead the way to a new future:

“Collective investments in resilience are cheaper than everyone building their own fortresses. Shared standards reduce fragmentations. Complementarities are positive sum”. To solve global problems he argued, we need *“a dense web of connections across trade, investment, culture, on which we can draw for future challenges and opportunities”*, noting that *“middle powers must act together, because if we're not at the table, we're on the menu”* [2].

2. His speech went viral. Something changed at Davos. Since January, divisions have multiplied as the top global risk of geoeconomic confrontation dominates the world, magnifying the uncertainties and aggressive competitiveness of this new era. The 2026 Global Risks Report^[3] notes: *“As cooperative mechanisms crumble, with governments retreating from multilateral frameworks, stability is under siege. A contested multipolar landscape is emerging where confrontation is replacing collaboration, and trust – the currency of cooperation – is losing its value”*.

3. *One global event is currently happening that provides a microcosm of a different world order*. The 2026 Commonwealth Games, officially known as Glasgow 2026, are taking place in Glasgow, Scotland, from July 23 to August 2, 2026. The Commonwealth Secretariat, in partnership with Commonwealth Sport and the Scottish Government, convened the 12th Commonwealth Sports Ministers Meeting (12CSMM) on 22 July 2026 in Glasgow, Scotland, titled *‘Re-imagining the power of sport towards healthier, fairer and equitable Commonwealth communities.’*

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[2] <https://www.weforum.org/stories/forum-institutional/davos-2026-special-address-by-mark-carney-prime-minister-of-canada/>

[3] <https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-risks-report-2026/>

4. 3000 athletes from 74 nations are competing over 11 days; Glasgow will welcome an estimated 700,000 people—including visitors, athletes, officials, and volunteers[4]. More than 600 hours of live coverage will be available with the television audience typically reaching over 1 billion people worldwide[5].

5. With hosting defaults in the last two Games, and cautious future hosting offers, the delivery of the Commonwealth Games looked uncertain[6] - what enabled them to happen? Commitment to a vision, belief in a value, the unity of a place, the recognition that the conversation space created by the Games offers exponential hope, and the investment of a government believing that sport is more than a game.

6. The Opening Ceremony[7] celebrated sporting excellence – it was also billed as *"a love letter to Glasgow and the Commonwealth"* focusing on a shared future, with the King entreating *"As we share our love of sport and our planet, let us build a harmonious future for our families and each other"*. From the very beginning these Games are about so much more than the sporting extravaganza at its centre.

A new kind of Games. Rooted in Glasgow. Built for the Commonwealth

7. Why do the Glasgow 2026 Games offer the pathway to Mark Carney's vision?

8. **Message in a bottle:** Despite the brevity of the Games, and in addition to its' captivating sporting spectacle, the Commonwealth Games sits visibly at the heart of the Commonwealth of Nations[8] reflecting its pivotal importance in the broader mission to create a strong and resilient connected global community for its 56 independent countries. In the Games we have an established ecosystem that champions both competition and connection, inclusion and equality, adaptation and innovation.

9. Never has this message of community and shaping our common future been more important, or more difficult to prosecute through traditional political channels, than during turbulent eco-socio-political times. The Games has unique potential to carry this, and other, ambassadorial messages deep into the heart of the many small and middle powers of the Commonwealth of Nations, in all corners of the globe - and those communities have the ability to amplify this message.

10. Currently this process can seem more incidental than intentional – more can be achieved in a deliberate and self-sustaining way. Rather than relying on a free-floating message in a bottle, this paper will consider the ways in which sport can become more ambassadorial in ensuring the message is heard; and more strategic in activating a different type of ecosystem of integration, one that works with and for all. *"You cannot live within the lie of mutual benefit through integration"*, said Mark Carney, *"when integration becomes the source of your subordination."* We show that sport, and the sport exemplified in the Glasgow Games structure, context and purpose, shifts the paradigm of integration, from dependence to inter-dependence.

[4] <https://www.glasgowchamberofcommerce.com/news/news/2026/june/15/glasgow-businesses-urged-to-seize-commonwealth-games-opportunity-as-city-gears-up-for-2026/>

[5] <https://www.commonwealthsport.com/news/4530211/global-champions-headline-tnt-sports-live-coverage>

[6] <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-10-26/will-glasgow-2026-be-the-last-commonwealth-games/104518104>

[7] <https://www.bbc.com/sport/articles/cvg79z237yvo>

[8] 'Commonwealth of Nations' is used throughout this report, rather than 'The Commonwealth', to distinguish it clearly from its predecessor the 'British Commonwealth', recognising the decolonising commitment in this name change.

11. **Emblematic, diplomatic and axiomatic:** In conversations about striving for a better way, of overcoming obstacles to find new possibilities, of resilience in the face of adversity, sport is a vital beacon. Sporting encounters can carry challenging messages to places that would not usually hear them, and nudge trajectories for change in ways that have eluded official governance processes. In a new world order, sport can become a powerful axis in the struggle for peace – to secure a sustainable peaceful future, it will be vital to come together, not in war, not in conflict, not in peace talks on the edge of a warzone, but in peace and in a spirit of goodwill, collaboration and mutual appreciation, to lay the groundwork for a shared future and to keep revisiting and tending the foundations of peace[9].

12. **The engine room of peace and development:** Importantly, sporting mega events must not be another form of ‘sportswashing’ in this pivotal geopolitical moment, not a distraction or a diffusion of difficult issues, nor solely a symbol of hope. It is timely to re-position the Commonwealth Games as the engine-room of a much broader Commonwealth of Nations and a Wealth of Nations agenda.

The ‘Friendly Games’ – creating the conditions for change

13. Dubbed the ‘Friendly Games’ these Games provide an accessible living example of the possibilities for creating flourishing, connected and resilient communities[10].

14. They represent the type of coalitions spoken of by Mark Carney where walls are torn down to build *“a new order that encompasses our values, such as respect for human rights, sustainable development, solidarity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the various states”*.

15. They speak to co-operation in a contested world, unlocking new potential responsibly and at scale, investing in people, and building success responsibly – these themes discussed at the 2026 World Economic Forum underpin the direction of travel needed to reduce risk and improve livelihoods[11].

16. They shine a light on how to address complex and seemingly intractable, problems, through:

- **Connection:** More than 700,000 people will gather together – athletes and supporters from the 74 Commonwealth nations and territories, and spectators from across the world. The same will happen in India in 2030. For many this is a once in a lifetime, yet life-changing, pilgrimage. For sporting and non-sporting delegations, the Commonwealth Games are a vital, predictable, safe touchstone to connect. While simply bringing people together does not ensure productive conversation or commitment to shared action, it does lay the groundwork for activation or strengthening of important relationships and partnerships. It creates the middle ground for middle nations to deliver a middle pathway to a more just and inclusive world.

[9] Jarvie, G. (2023). Sport, Cultural Relations, and Peacebuilding. British Council. Available online: doi.org/10.57884/2MN4-7243-

[10] <https://www.commonwealthsport.com/commonwealth-sport/foundation/development-model>

[11] <https://www.weforum.org/stories/all/where-systems-are-straining-progress-is-still-possible-pathways-from-davos-2026/>

- **Inspiration, innovation and impact:** The language of resilience is the native language of sport, which lends itself to multilateral sociopolitical dialogue. The Commonwealth Games are forged around sporting stories of struggle and triumph. Athletes commit many years to preparing for the Games, often experiencing more failure than success, and overcoming many obstacles such as injury and de-selection along the way - yet still they continue. This tumultuous and courageous journey provides a source of inspiration and momentum, a common language for athletes, fans, spectators, communities and nations.
- **The Spirit and Values of Sport:** ‘The Friendly Games’ title does not mean there is a lack of competitiveness and striving for excellence – athletes continue to exceed Commonwealth Records, and World Records continue to be set at the Commonwealth Games. Rather, the fierce competition and striving for excellence, is undertaken in an arena that is shaped by a sense of community – providing an energised meeting point, in which athletes elevate each other and build mutual respect through shared struggle. There is value placed both on excellence and on the spirit of sport: Achievement through effort. Progress through connection. Community over individuality. Resilience through shared endeavour. Sport builds trust, networks, and habits of cooperation — exactly the infrastructure that makes communities and nations more capable of weathering adversity together, and of strengthening one another in good times.
- **Sports diplomacy:** Sports diplomacy is in the DNA of the Commonwealth Games. In equal measure, the Commonwealth Games is, by design, both a sporting event in which athletes strive for high performance and world records; and an active part of a global socio-political organisation, the Commonwealth of Nations, striving to build resilience amongst its community of nations and stability in the world more broadly. Sports diplomacy takes two forms: inspiration; and providing an accessible opportunity to shine a light, and engage action, on pivotal challenges for the Commonwealth community[12]. Leaders connect through shared values and shared experience - political delegations have an opportunity to powerfully experience the values of the Commonwealth of Nations in action; and to see the fruits of a multi-nation infrastructure for excellence. Meaningful dialogue happens between peoples and nations at all levels – *“city-to-city, club-to-club, people-to-people, federation-to-federation and through many other prominent non-state sporting, business and civil society actors”* [13]. Inspired by athletic achievement and the power of friendly yet ferocious competition, a sporting gathering is translated to action with social and political friendships and partnerships developed informally and through formal meetings and gatherings, in the spirit of goodwill and shared endeavour. Barriers are down, trust grows, robust conversations are had, shared plans are made, joint action is taken.
- **Embracing sport as social influencer:** An event, titled *"Building Resilient Futures: Unlocking the Power of Sport and Physical Activity for Youth Mental Health in the Commonwealth,"* was convened at a pivotal moment in global health policy, on the sidelines of the 2026 Inaugural Commonwealth Health Coordination Forum. Commonwealth Heads recognised the importance of sports for peace, inclusive and sustainable development, of sports policies and programmes that promote integrity, safety, and inclusion for all. They welcomed efforts to secure the future and enhance the impacts of the Games recognising the power of sport to bring communities together to celebrate common values and solve common challenges

[12] Jarvie, G. (2024). Sport, soft power and cultural relations. *J. of Global Sport Management*, 9(4), 670-687.

[13] Sport As a Platform for Diplomacy and Dialogue. White Paper. Consolidated Outcomes of the World Cup Diplomacy Summit 2026: A Global Dialogue United Nations Headquarters, New York · 4-5 June 2026

- **Athletes are global citizens supporting communities:** According to 813 athletes, their satisfaction at the previous Glasgow 2014 Games included, but exceeded, consideration of the sporting competition, encompassing the importance of social and cultural interactions and opportunities, which lie outside the athlete's actual competition event experience[14]. Living in the Games Village enabled athletes to interact, share experiences, exchange ideas, and build lifelong connections with competitors in other sports and even with rivals. This is a formative experience that shapes the lives of emerging high performance athletes and sporting organisations. It builds a culture of compassion, courage and connection. Many athletes spend time meeting with young fans or engaging in passion projects around the edges of the Games. There is a sense of community generated that lasts beyond the Games, encouraging athletes to become active in advocacy for wicked global problems entangled with their sports, such as climate change[15], creating a number of athlete-driven organisations addressing concerns such as emissions reductions[16], climate change impacts in alpine areas[17], and waterways clean-ups[18]. Athletes help us to understand that we can be local and global citizens, in sport, through sport, and beyond sport.
- **Athletes are ambassadors:** Not all sporting diplomats are government officials. The Commonwealth Games being uniquely situated within a values-driven collective of nations provides opportunities for athletes to more formally expand their horizons in advocacy and activism beyond sport. Involvement in the Athletes Commission[19] that seeks to address sport-related human rights issues provides opportunities to uphold and live the Commonwealth Sport values of humanity, equality and destiny. Athletes are also involved in international advocacy movements such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change[20] and Commonwealth advocacy movements such as the clean oceans campaign[21]. In both implicit and formal ways, athletes have opportunities to be seen as agents of change, advocates for integrity and ambassadors for respect, impartiality and non-discrimination.

[14] MacIntosh, E., & Parent, M. (2017). Athlete satisfaction with a major multi-sport event: The importance of social and cultural aspects. *International Journal of Event and Festival Management*, 8(2), 136-150.

[15] Nothen, G., Acaf, Y., O'Sullivan, B., Houlihan, G., Uzun, B., & Ross, W. (2025). Sport and climate change: research evidence and emerging concerns. *Movimento*, 31, e31040

[16] <https://newshub.medianet.com.au/2025/09/game-on-75-australian-athletes-call-for-75-emissions-cut/116423/>

[17] <https://protectourwinters.org.au>

[18] <https://www.ecoathletes.org/collegiate-cup-2026>

[19] Naidoo, U., & Grevemberg, D. (2022). The role of athlete commissions in addressing sport-related human rights abuses: a case study of the Commonwealth Games Federation Athletes Advisory Commission. *The International Sports Law Journal*, 22(2), 180-185.

[20] <https://unfccc.int/news/young-welsh-sports-star-to-champion-climate-action>

[21] <https://www.commonwealthsport.com/news/4157153/commonwealth-sport-supports-clean-oceans-plastics-campaign>

- **Providing a blueprint for community sport:** Grassroots and community sport, including Sport for Development and Peace (SDP), is an existing, accessible, pathway to providing lowest cost, highest impact, community development and systems change in even the farthest corners of the planet[22]. The Commonwealth Games provides an architecture and potentially an infrastructure legacy to support the engagement of communities through sport[23]. The Games culture of advancement through connection and shared commitment, of resilience and of strength in diversity, provides a road map for translating play into social purpose. The King's baton relay is a powerful example of this reach, passing through every nation and territory in the Commonwealth, celebrating sporting excellence whilst also raising awareness and activating the removal of 1 million pieces of plastic waste from waterways around the world[24].

In this multiplicity of ways, the Commonwealth Games helps us understand the necessary conditions for both flourishing and resilience, the processes that help us overcome challenges and the values and qualities that contribute to a culture of success.

Resilience - a shared story, modelled in sport, actioned in a new global order

17. The Commonwealth Games is an engine room for small and medium powers to come together for the celebration of possibility and capability, diversity and connection, and the collective appreciation of the story of resilience forged through adversity.

18. Sport is the global lingua franca. At a time when the existing world order has crumbled, the Games provide a ready-made engine room for *"building what we claim to believe in, rather than waiting for the old order to be restored. It means creating institutions and agreements that function as described. And it means reducing the leverage that enables coercion – that's building a strong domestic economy. It should be every government's immediate priority"* [25].

19. The Games provide a unique microcosm of how multilateralism works in practice with national pride and excellence through competition celebrated both as a national achievement and a common global good.

20. Nelson Mandela spoke of how *"Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire, .. to unite people in a way that little else does. It speaks to youth in a language they understand. Sport can create hope, where once there was only despair. It is more powerful than governments in breaking down racial barriers. It laughs in the face of all types of discrimination"* [26].

[22] Jarvie, G., Reid, C., Grant, L., Su, C., Walker, R., Ross, W., Sharples, B. and Xiong, M. (2026). Repurposing Sport for Commonwealth Resilience. Edinburgh: Academy of Sport, University of Edinburgh; Walker, R. (2026). Coaching for development: generating social impact through improved emotional wellbeing. Journal of sport for development.

[23] Banda, D., Whitley, M. A., & Al Khori, N. (2025). Leveraging global south sports mega events to advance sport for development and peace theory and practice. Sustainable Development, 33(1), 811-822.

[24] <https://www.commonwealthsport.com/news/4539826/glasgow-2026-kings-baton-relay-removes-one-million-pieces-of-plastic-from-waterways-across-the-world>

[25] <https://www.weforum.org/stories/forum-institutional/davos-2026-special-address-by-mark-carney-prime-minister-of-canada/>

[26] Laureus: Nelson Mandela Lifetime Achievement Award <https://youtu.be/GdopyAFP0DI?si=8TFVDPHGSh6SZp5W>

George Black, Chair of Glasgow 2026, spoke of action: *“When the future of these Games was uncertain, Glasgow didn't ask: 'Can we?' We asked: 'When do we get started?’”*[27]

21. A new world order has been brought into being, in part by the action of leaders. The world needs spaces that can hold the views of different stakeholders. The world needs spaces through which all its peoples' can connect to make sense of global challenges and move forward together. The Commonwealth Games in Glasgow has offered such a space for many of the world's nations and territories. Sport is a pillar of connectivity that can hold diverse stakeholders together as differences are negotiated, and solutions forged. The world urgently needs more spaces like this.

[27] Glasgow Chamber of Commerce, “Glasgow 2026 begins with spectacular Opening Ceremony,” 24 July 2026, <https://www.glasgowchamberofcommerce.com/news/news/2026/july/24/glasgow-2026-begins-with-spectacular-opening-ceremony/> (accessed 28 July 2026).

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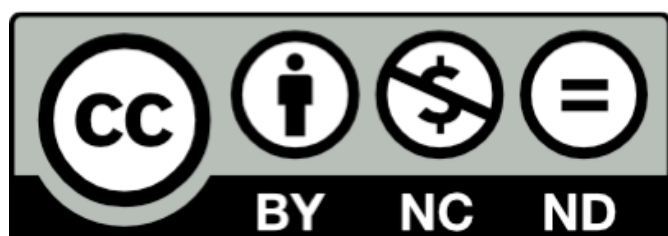
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