

**Commonwealth Future Luncheon  
Millennium Hotel London Knightsbridge  
Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> March**

**Launch of “2020 Vision: Eyecare Education Through Reading” by Chairman of  
Commonwealth Future, Dr Zimar Sivardeen**

My Lords, Your Excellencies, distinguished guests and ladies and gentleman... good afternoon and welcome.

Thank you for attending the launch of 2020 Vision: 'optometry and correctable Vision'.

It's a privilege to have been invited by the Executive Committee to represent Commonwealth Future.

It's wonderful to see such a diverse group of people in the room today; Lords, national representatives of governments, armed forces and members of non-government organisations, all here to take part in our dialogue to prepare for the challenge of shaping a better world for the next generation.

The Commonwealth began as a small family of 8 states who signed the London Declaration, back in 1949. The Commonwealth has now grown to 54 member states, which is more than a quarter of UN member states.

The ties that bind us are deep-rooted and stretch back many years. The special strength of the Commonwealth lies in the combination of diversity and shared inheritance in culture... and the rule of law; all bound together by a shared history and tradition, and by mutual respect for all the states.

Commonwealth Future wants to play an active role in the Commonwealth, by working with all its member states, to ensure that the Commonwealth can realise its full potential.

Today, we hope to create a platform where we can acquire and share knowledge, engage in dialogue with respected friends, and foster networks for the progressive development of optometry and correctable vision.

Awareness and education is what brings us all here today. Awareness inspires action. Education empowers us to make the right choices, to share our vision about eye health across the entire Commonwealth.

Vision deserves T.L.C. from us all. At least 50% of all sight loss is eminently preventable... with early detection. Poor vision can have a negative impact on our well-being, and make us feel isolated. However corrective vision aids and other optometry services are now extremely well advanced, having evolved over the years.

Whether rich or poor, male or female, young or old, and completely irrespective of background, ethnicity or nationality, the Internet - and the Digital revolution - respects

no man-made, artificial or geographical boundaries. It is everywhere, and will therefore become more and more so... in all aspects of our lives.

Currently, a key way we interact with the digital world is by eyesight...it is therefore essential that we all play a key part of the digital world, both locally and globally.

We urge that every citizen of the Commonwealth, in every member country, and in every sector, to have access to high-quality eye-care and intervention by eye care specialists.

To achieve this, we need to work together with our collective resources. We can now deliver more quickly... and make much better use of optometric expertise worldwide, by bringing sufficient human and educational resources to the field.

So today, we're here to champion that most wonderful sense – the sense of vision. Good vision enables us all to learn, to fulfil our passions, and to fulfil our potential. Together, these things go hand-in-hand, and will help to create an equal society for us all.

Vision is a driving force for the type of world we want for the next generation... and beyond. A Commonwealth Future hopes to be active in tackling what we feel is one of the greatest and most crucial issues of our time.

We will be organising a series of activities promoting the importance of eye care education through reading. Led by Commonwealth Future, this emphasises that a key route to create a fair and prosperous society is to improve one's sight in order to read, work, to be educated.

Our focus this year is eye care education through reading in Ghana and Jamaica.

We are pleased that our executive committee have already identified local partners who are engaged with young people - Knutsford University College, Accra in Ghana and Kingston & St Andrew Football Association in Jamaica.

Our next event, "Eyecare education through reading" will be held next month at the Attlee and Reid Room, House of Lords.

The time to act is now. We would be grateful for your on-going support to do this.

THANK YOU.