**The Commonwealth**

With the **death of Queen** Elizabeth II, the historic sovereign who held the English crown for over 70 years, her son Charles succeeded her to the throne, becoming **Charles III**, King of England and the **Commonwealth realms**. But what exactly is this international organization that includes countries from all continents?

**What is the Commonwealth**

The Commonwealth is an **international organization with voluntary participation** - which can therefore be abandoned at any time - to which most of the former British colonies belong. To put it simply, it is a kind of private club between nations with a strong historical (and economic) link with the United Kingdom and whose head is the **King** or **Queen of England**, therefore Charles III, after the death of Elizabeth II. The term - common wealth, "*common well-being*" was introduced in the 17th century to designate the British State after the revolution.

The *Commonwealth of Nations* currently comprises 56 very different countries (although the historical legacy of British culture includes many common traits) which, however, cooperate with each other to **promote human rights** (fight against poverty, efforts to protect health, etc.), **democracy**, **culture** and **freedom**.

**How is the Commonwealth organized?**

As already mentioned, at the top of the Commonwealth is the reigning sovereign of the United Kingdom, supported in his functions by a **Secretary General**. The decision-making body is the **Council of Heads of Government**, which meets once every two years and dictates the political lines and purposes of the organization. The executive body is the **Secretariat**, which is responsible for implementing the decisions of the Council.

There are then nine ministers from member countries (appointed on a rotating basis) who support the organisation's action.

**The history of the Commonwealth**

The first thing to remember to understand the Commonwealth is the colonial past of Great Britain.

In fact, until the Second World War, a good part of the world was dominated by the **British Empire**, the largest empire in history that came to govern over 50 territories - the colonies, which depended politically on London's decisions - and over 400 million subjects: to give an idea, gigantic nations like **Canada**, **Australia** or **India**, were once all English colonies, as was the United States of America, which however obtained independence well before other countries.

However, already during the nineteenth century, the colonies began to **demand ever greater** autonomy, starting a long **phase of transformation** that would end in the second half of the twentieth century. And this is where the *Commonwealth* comes into play.

In fact, between the 19th and 20th centuries, England gradually began to **grant more and more freedom to its dominions** (as the English colonies were called), with a sharp acceleration at the end of the First World War, a conflict in which the inhabitants of the colonies had given a strong contribution to the English cause. In 1926, therefore, with the so-called **Balfour Declaration** (named after the British Foreign Minister at the time), London recognized equal rights to all the countries of the Empire, a step that in 1931 would lead to the foundation of the Commonwealth, headed by the sovereign of the United Kingdom.

This organization, which also kept England and the English King (or Queen) in a dominant position, guaranteed great autonomy to the other member countries, but established a network of agreements and privileged trade between its members. In practice, it was as if Mother England had let her sons-colonies leave on the condition that they did not go too far away and continued to visit their family!

At the end of the Second World War, the new rules of international law definitively sanctioned the end of the colonies and **all the Commonwealth countries obtained full independence**, transforming the organisation into the *Commonwealth of Nations* (1949).

This does not mean, however, that the former colonies completely cut ties with the English monarchy, but rather continued to remain in the Commonwealth and to maintain privileged relations - especially of an economic nature - with London and the other member states.

In 2005 and 2009, two new members joined the organization, Mozambique and Rwanda, which do not even have an English colonial past.

**Which countries are members of the Commonwealth**

In addition to the United Kingdom, here are the countries that voluntarily join the Commonwealth. Some, like Pakistan, **left following** some political choices not shared by the other Member States (in the case cited, **Pakistan** left the organization in 1972 when the independence of Bangladesh was recognized), and then returned. Others, like **South Africa** at the time of racial segregation towards the black population (apartheid), were **expelled** and then readmitted.

Antigua e Barbuda – Australia – Bahamas – Bangladesh – Barbados – Belize – Botswana – Brunei – Camerun Canada – Cipro – Dominica - Fiji (sospese nel 2006 a seguito del colpo di stato) – Gambia – Ghana – Giamaica Grenada – Guyana – India Kenya – Kiribati – Lesotho – Malawi – Malaysia – Maldive – Malta – Maurizio Mozambico – Namibia – Nauru – Nigeria – Nuova Zelanda – Pakistan – Papua Nuova Guinea – Ruanda – Saint Kitts e Nevis – Saint Lucia – Saint Vincent e Grenadine – Isole Salomone – Samoa – Seychelles – Sierra Leone Singapore – Sri Lanka – Sudafrica – Swaziland – Tanzania – Tong – Trinidad e Tobago – Tuvalu – Uganda – Vanatu Zambia

Of these, 13 countries - including Canada and Australia - are called Commonwealth Realms, that is, countries in which the English sovereign is also recognized as their Head of State.