

# CONFERÊNCIA JOSÉ MEDEIROS FERREIRA

Curso de Doutoramento em História - NOVA FCSH

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## SUE ONSLOW

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### The Monarchy and the Commonwealth

29 Setembro 2023 — 18h

NOVA FCSH | Torre B | Auditório B2

The United Kingdom is unusual in having an 'international monarch'. Unlike his European counter-parts, the King is head of state of 14 other countries across the globe, known as Commonwealth Realms. The British monarch is also ceremonial head of the international organisation, the Commonwealth. (The overwhelming majority of these countries are former colonial dependencies of the UK.)

These institutional relationships are facing multiple pressures – these include the rise of republicanism; demands for reparations, heightened by monarchy's past role in the political economy of slavery; and the evident paradox of a modern international organisation having the latest incumbent of a 1000-year-old hereditary institution as its ceremonial head. Despite its progressive past, the Commonwealth continues to be labelled 'Empire 2.0, but with better PR.' and struggles for perceived relevance.

Looking at the relationship between monarch and Commonwealth gives us a lens into the evolution of a unique post-colonial multilateral association, and contemporary dilemmas confronting modern British foreign policy. Whereas the Queen was a very long-lived royal diplomat who championed the Commonwealth in public and in private, the King has fewer options and time is not on his side. His decision to support publicly human rights and values across the Commonwealth is placing him at odds with member governments who see the organisation as simply conferring legitimacy, the opportunity to improve trade relations. The King's known advocacy on issues around climate change also contrasts with the policies of the 'big emitters' in the Commonwealth, such as India. Is monarchy key to the survival of the Commonwealth, or increasingly 'the kiss of death'? What does all this mean for British foreign policy which has repeatedly stressed the salience of the Commonwealth since BREXIT?

Professor **Sue Onslow** is IHC's 2023 Visiting Scholar.

She lectured and taught at the London School of Economics (1994-2012) and in the Department of War Studies, King's College London. From 2012 – 2023 she worked at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, in the School of Advanced Study, University of London, where she worked as Deputy Director (2015-2020), then Director (2022-23). She was the lead interviewer on a major oral history project, 'An Oral History of the Modern Commonwealth' (1965-2012). Her publications include Co-editor (with Anna-Mart Van Wyk): *Southern Africa in the Cold War post-1974* (Cold War International History Project, Woodrow Wilson Center, 2013). *Robert Mugabe* (with Martin Plaut) (Ohio University Press, 2018); and ed. (with Lori Maguire) *Consuls in the Cold War* (Brill Publishers, 2023). She is a frequent media commentator on the Commonwealth, and Zimbabwe. She is preparing a monograph *The Commonwealth in the Cold War Era* (Hurst Publishers).