



The Commonwealth

Concluding Statement of the Meeting of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group, New York

25 September 2015

Statement by: Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group

The Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) held its forty-sixth meeting in New York, on 25 September 2015.

The meeting was chaired by Hon Bernard K. Membe, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the United Republic of Tanzania. It was also attended by Hon Ioannis Kasoulides, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Cyprus; Hon Carl Greenidge, Vice President and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Guyana; Hon Murray McCully, Minister of Foreign Affairs of New Zealand (Vice Chair); Hon Dr Samura Kamara, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Sierra Leone; Hon Mangala Samaraweera, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka; Hon George Milner Tozaka, Minister of Foreign Affairs and External Trade of Solomon Islands; and Ms Sujata Mehta, Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs of India.

Ministers reviewed the status of the implementation of CMAG's enhanced mandate, which was adopted by Commonwealth Heads of Government in 2011. The objective of the strengthened mandate is to enable CMAG to play a more proactive and constructive role with Commonwealth member states, in order to advance the Commonwealth's fundamental political values. The mandate includes consideration of eight circumstances that are listed in CMAG's mandate as indicators of serious or persistent violations of the Commonwealth's political values:

- the unilateral abrogation of a democratic constitution or serious threats to constitutional rule;
- the suspension or prevention of the lawful functioning of parliament or other key democratic institutions;
- the postponement of national elections without constitutional or other reasonable justification;
- the systematic denial of political space, such as through detention of political leaders or restriction of freedom of association, assembly or expression;
- a national electoral process that is seriously flawed;
- the abrogation of the rule of law or undermining of the independence of the judiciary;
- the systematic violation of human rights of the population, or of any communities or groups, by the member government concerned; and,



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- significant restrictions on the media or civil society that prevent them from playing their legitimate role.

Taking into account some recent political developments in Commonwealth countries, CMAG's discussions in this meeting focused in particular on two of the eight circumstances. These were 'the abrogation of the rule of law or undermining of the independence of the judiciary' and 'the systematic denial of political space, such as through detention of political leaders or restriction of freedom of association, assembly or expression'.

CMAG noted that curbs on judicial independence and the constriction of political space undermine the culture of democracy and weaken democratic institutions, and are contrary to the values in the Commonwealth Charter. CMAG Ministers encouraged the Commonwealth Secretary-General to continue to provide appropriate technical assistance to support member states and to encourage the application of Commonwealth good practice in these areas. Ministers also considered ways in which CMAG itself could be more engaged in a supportive manner with member states to help advance Commonwealth values.