

CMAG Frequently Asked Questions

How are CMAG's members chosen?

The members of CMAG are appointed by Leaders at each Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, following consultations carried out by the Secretary-General, with countries generally serving two terms. Heads of Government ensure regional balance, continuity and institutional memory by staggering the rotation of CMAG members.

When does CMAG meet?

CMAG meets twice yearly, generally in March and September, at regular meetings convened by the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, as well as on the eve of CHOGM. The March meeting usually takes place in London and the September one in New York, in the wings of the Commonwealth Foreign Affairs Ministers Meeting. On occasion, the Commonwealth Secretary-General will also convene an extraordinary meeting of CMAG, as necessitated by events.

What does CMAG discuss during its meetings?

CMAG Ministers discuss developments pertaining to the adherence of Commonwealth fundamental political values across the Commonwealth. This may include developments relating to the eight non-exhaustive circumstances set out in the enhanced CMAG mandate, which are:

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

How does a country get onto CMAG's agenda?

The Secretary-General keeps CMAG informed of countries where there are concerns relating to one or more of the eight indicators set out above, including the SG's own 'good offices' efforts in those countries. CMAG determines its own agenda, based on the SG's recommendations or on those made by its members.

It can choose to place a country on its formal agenda or discuss it under 'Other Matters of Interest', depending on the severity of the challenge to fundamental political values and the extent to which good offices have been attempted and have been effective. Any outcome statements of CMAG meetings usually refer only to countries on its formal agenda.

What does suspension mean?

Suspension from the Councils of the Commonwealth entails the exclusion of a government from all Commonwealth intergovernmental meetings and events, including ministerial meetings and CHOGM, as well as a halt to new Commonwealth technical assistance other than that directed towards the restoration of democracy.

Full suspension entails, in addition to the measures set out above, the removal of all emblematic representation of the country concerned from the Commonwealth Secretariat, at Commonwealth meetings and all other official Commonwealth events, and the exclusion of the country from all Commonwealth events including sport and cultural activities.

Has a Commonwealth country ever been expelled by CMAG?

No, CMAG has never recommended that a Commonwealth country be expelled.