

## Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group concluding statement

16 April 2012



London, 16 April 2012

1. The Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) held its thirty-seventh meeting in London on 16 April 2012. This was the Group's first regular meeting following its reconstitution by Commonwealth Heads of Government at their Meeting in Perth in October 2011.
2. The meeting was attended by Senator the Hon Bob Carr, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Australia; Hon Dr Dipu Moni, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh; Hon John Baird, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Canada; Hon AJ Nicholson, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Jamaica; Hon Bernard K Membe, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Tanzania; Hon Dr Surujrattan Rambachan, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Communications of Trinidad and Tobago; Hon Alfred Carlot, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Vanuatu; and Hon Eburn Jusu, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Sierra Leone.
3. CMAG unanimously elected Hon Dr Surujrattan Rambachan, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Trinidad and Tobago as its Chair; and Hon Bob Carr, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Australia as its Vice-Chair.
4. CMAG discussed modalities for advancing the strengthened mandate of the Group approved by Heads of Government in Perth in October 2011. The Group also explored 'relevant options' relating to the proposal made by the Eminent Persons' Group for a Commonwealth Commissioner for Democracy, the Rule of Law and Human Rights, as requested by Heads in Perth. The outcomes of CMAG's consideration of that matter will be reported to Commonwealth Foreign Ministers at their annual meeting in New York in September 2012.
5. The Group reviewed developments in relation to the two countries on its agenda, Fiji and Maldives.

### Fiji

6. CMAG received an update from the Secretary-General on recent developments in Fiji and the Secretariat's engagement with the country. CMAG also received a written submission from the Government of Fiji.
7. CMAG expressed its concern for the people of Fiji following recent devastating floods, and encouraged all necessary support to be provided for the relief and recovery of affected communities.

8. The Group reiterated its desire to see Fiji reinstated as a full member of the Commonwealth family, through the restoration of democracy, the rule of law and human rights, in accordance with the fundamental political values of the Commonwealth.

9. In this regard CMAG welcomed the recent announcement by the Government of Fiji of a constitutional consultation process that would lead to elections by September 2014. CMAG further noted the undertaking made by the Government of Fiji that this process will be inclusive, transparent, and conducted with integrity and honesty. Ministers noted that the Commonwealth will be looking forward to seeing progress in the implementation of these commitments.

10. The Group reaffirmed the Commonwealth's readiness to provide technical assistance for constitutional consultations and election preparations, and other appropriate support, and requested the Secretary-General to remain engaged with Fiji in that regard.

11. CMAG welcomed the lifting of the Public Emergency Regulation as a necessary step in the improvement of the human rights situation, and one which CMAG had urged Fiji to take. The Group expressed its concern, however, that restrictions on human rights remain in place under the Public Order Amendment Decree and other decrees. CMAG urged the Government of Fiji to restore full respect for human rights, including freedoms of expression and assembly, and access to justice, noting that these values were not only fundamental to the Commonwealth and essential in their own right, but also indispensable in order to create the environment necessary for credible constitutional consultations and elections.

12. CMAG expressed its support for the Commonwealth's continued engagement with the Government of Fiji and other stakeholders. In that context, Ministers welcomed the talks with all principal stakeholders in Fiji held during the visit of Commonwealth Deputy Secretary-General Masire-Mwamba to Fiji in March 2012, and encouraged the further strengthening of such high-level interaction.

13. The Group noted the ongoing contribution of other regional and international partners in encouraging and supporting the restoration of democracy in Fiji, including the United Nations, the Pacific Islands Forum and the Melanesian Spearhead Group. CMAG reiterated the Commonwealth's commitment to working in co-operation and consultation with other international partners in relation to the Fiji situation.

#### **Maldives**

14. CMAG received updates from the Secretary-General and from his Special Envoy, Rt Hon Sir Donald McKinnon, regarding recent developments in Maldives and the Commonwealth's engagement. The Group expressed its support for Sir Donald's ongoing interaction with Maldives.

15. CMAG also heard presentations from the Attorney-General of Maldives, Hon Aishath Azima Shakoore, and a representative of former President Nasheed, Dr Farahanaz Faizal.

16. CMAG noted with deep regret that there had been little progress towards a political understanding in Maldives since it last met by teleconference on 15 March 2012.

17. CMAG called for political party talks to be held without interruption and with the participation of senior representatives of the parties. It urged that these talks cover all issues that divide the stakeholders in Maldives.

18. CMAG reiterated its belief that early elections should be called by the end of 2012.

19. The Group was of the view that the Commission of National Inquiry, established to assess the events leading to the transfer of power on 7 February 2012, is not independent or impartial, and has failed to gain sufficient support in Maldives. Ministers urged the Government to review immediately the composition and terms of reference of the Commission to make it genuinely independent, credible and impartial. CMAG reiterated the Commonwealth's offer to provide assistance in this regard.

20. CMAG agreed that, should the composition and terms of reference of the Commission not be amended within four weeks in a manner that is generally acceptable and enhances its credibility, CMAG would be compelled to consider further and stronger measures.

21. CMAG reaffirmed its support for Commonwealth assistance to strengthen democratic processes, institutions and culture in Maldives. In this context, it expressed support for the Commonwealth Secretariat's technical assistance for strengthening for the long term the capacity of the judicial sector, as agreed with the authorities in Maldives. It also welcomed the Secretary-General's offer to provide elections-related assistance. The Group further called for the capacity of the Majlis to be strengthened. It welcomed continued collaboration between the Commonwealth and other international partners, including the United Nations and the Inter-Parliamentary Union, in the consideration of further assistance for Maldives.