

**Concluding Statement of the Fifty-Sixth Meeting of the  
Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG)**

Virtual Meeting

31 March 2020

1. The Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) held its fifty-sixth meeting by video conference on 31 March 2020. The meeting was chaired by Ambassador Raychelle Omamo SC, EGH, Cabinet Secretary for Foreign Affairs of Kenya. Ministers and Representatives of Australia, Barbados, Belize, Ghana, Malaysia, Namibia and the United Kingdom also participated in the video conference.
2. Ministers expressed concern about the disruptive and devastating impact of the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on economic, social and political life. Ministers welcomed emerging research seeking to tackle the disease and issued an urgent call for Commonwealth solidarity to collectively address the pandemic. In this regard, Ministers encouraged the Secretary-General to support the mobilisation of resources to assist member states, particularly small and vulnerable Commonwealth countries; and those affected by climate change and other challenges. Ministers encouraged the Secretary-General to continue using innovative ways, including through the recent online launch of the Commonwealth Coronavirus Tracker, to support member countries in adhering to fundamental Commonwealth values during the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. The Group received a briefing from the Secretary-General on her Good Offices engagements in support of member governments' efforts to strengthen their human rights, rule of law and democratic processes. The Group reaffirmed that the Secretary-General's Good Offices complements CMAG's pursuit of its 2011 enhanced mandate. The Group commended the Secretariat's ongoing democracy work through the deployment of Commonwealth Observer Groups,

including post-election follow-up work and technical support to implement electoral reforms which improve national democratic processes.

4. Ministers reaffirmed their unwavering commitment to advancing and supporting the fundamental political values and principles in the Commonwealth Charter. The Group's mandate is to assess the nature of threats and infringements of these values, work proactively and constructively with member governments to address these challenges, and recommend measures for collective Commonwealth action aimed at addressing these issues.
5. Cognisant of their mandate wherein CMAG sets its own agenda, Ministers decided to discuss developments in Guyana as a formal agenda item.

## **Guyana**

6. The Group commended the Good Offices efforts of the Commonwealth Secretary-General in Guyana, including the deployment of two Senior Electoral Advisers to support the Guyana Elections Commission towards the holding of credible, transparent and inclusive General and Regional Elections on 2 March 2020. In this connection, Ministers agreed that the valuable work of the two Senior Electoral Advisers deserved special commendation.
7. Ministers recalled that in 2018 Commonwealth Heads of Government recognised the valuable role of Commonwealth Elections Observation in supporting member countries to improve democratic processes and institutions. In this connection, Ministers noted the 18 March 2020 and other statements of the Commonwealth Observer Group, and the statements of other international and domestic observer groups.
8. Further, Ministers took note of the 17 March statement of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Chairperson, Prime Minister of Barbados, Hon. Mia Mottley QC; statements of respective Commonwealth and other Governments; as well as statements from other international organisations.

9. Ministers expressed grave concern that the credible and transparent counting and tabulation of every vote in Region 4 has been persistently frustrated, with a declaration by the Returning Officer having been ruled to be unlawful by the Acting Chief Justice.
  
10. Ministers noted and commended CARICOM's efforts, at the invitation of President Granger and the agreement of the Leader of the Opposition, to support the transparent and credible counting of ballots under the authority of the Guyana Elections Commission. Ministers further noted with deep regret that the CARICOM High-Level Initiative in the interest of peace and the preservation of democratic values was halted. Ministers encouraged CARICOM to remain seized of the situation in Guyana and committed Commonwealth support to these endeavours.
  
11. Ministers recalled that the constitution of Guyana clearly states that sovereignty belongs to the people of Guyana. In this regard, Ministers noted and welcomed the public undertaking of the Chairperson of the Guyana Elections Commission, Justice Claudette Singh (Ret'd), that the votes would be recounted. Ministers called upon the Guyana Elections Commission to immediately fulfil its constitutional mandate and ensure the sovereign right of the people of Guyana to duly elect their Government is respected through a transparent and credible counting and tabulation process.
  
12. Ministers noted that Guyana's judiciary continues to be seized with protracted litigation on issues of national importance. From the passing of the 21 December 2018 no confidence motion which triggered the constitutional requirement for a General Election; to the conduct of the Region 4 Returning Officer in the 2 March election; and the issue of a recount in Region 4. In this regard, Ministers reaffirmed the Commonwealth principle that an independent, effective and competent legal system is integral to upholding the rule of law, engendering public confidence and dispensing justice.
  
13. Ministers strongly iterated that any Government which is sworn in without a credible and fully transparent vote count and tabulation process would lack legitimacy.

14. Ministers affirmed the Commonwealth's readiness, along with its partners, to provide assistance to ensuring a credible and transparent conclusion to the electoral process in accordance with the will of the people as expressed on 2 March.
15. Ministers also encouraged the Secretary-General to remain engaged with Guyana through her Good Offices and to keep CMAG informed of developments in the country.
16. Ministers agreed to keep Guyana on the formal agenda, and, where necessary, to convene an extraordinary meeting to discuss the situation and explore appropriate options.

### **Lesotho**

17. Ministers expressed grave concern about Lesotho's frequent cycles of political instability. They noted the current criminal allegations against Prime Minister Thabane and related legal processes. They urged the Government of Lesotho and its institutions to fully comply with the letter and spirit of their Constitution and to collectively mobilise all efforts to ensure necessary reforms and political stability. Cognisant of the role SADC continues to play in stabilising the political situation in Lesotho, Ministers encouraged the Secretary General to remain seized with Lesotho and update CMAG at its next meeting.

### **Membership**

18. CMAG received an update from the Secretary-General on the ongoing membership processes.

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