

Concluding Statement of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG)

20 April 2016

1. The Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) held its forty-eighth meeting at Marlborough House in London on 20 April 2016.
2. The meeting was chaired by Hon Ioannis Kasoulides, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Cyprus, and was attended by Hon Carl B. Greenidge, Vice-President and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Guyana; Amb Dr Amina Mohamed, Cabinet Secretary for Foreign Affairs and International Trade of Kenya; Hon Dr George Vella, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Malta; Hon Murray McCully, Minister of Foreign Affairs of New Zealand; Hon Sartaj Aziz, Adviser to the Prime Minister on Foreign Affairs of Pakistan; Hon George Milner Tozaka, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Solomon Islands; Hon Maureen Magreth Hinda, Deputy Minister of International Relations and Cooperation of Namibia; and, Dr Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, Foreign Secretary of India.
3. Ministers welcomed the new Commonwealth Secretary-General, the Rt Hon Patricia Scotland QC, to her post. They looked forward to working with the Secretary-General to advance the Commonwealth's fundamental political values in member states in a constructive, supportive and proactive way. In particular, Ministers welcomed the Secretary-General's intention to create practical toolkits to advance Commonwealth political values, and to support CMAG in building its capacity to engage constructively with member states.

Maldives

4. Ministers reviewed developments in Maldives since their last meeting in February 2016, and recalled the six priority areas in which they had urged meaningful action be taken. With respect to each of these areas, they noted the following:
 - i) Progress on political dialogue, initially by representatives of political parties, appears unfortunately to have been limited to date. Ministers therefore hoped that the very recent attempt at proximity talks facilitated by the United Nations would bring the Government and opposition representatives closer to purposeful and forward-looking dialogue in the coming months.

Ministers reaffirmed the importance which they attached to all political parties participating constructively in the formation of a clear roadmap and specified timeframe for progress, and to seeing evidence of concrete steps taken and progress achieved by all to address specific issues on a political dialogue agenda.
 - ii) CMAG underscored the continued importance of the Government facilitating the prompt release from detention of political leaders in order to help restore confidence in the overall political environment in Maldives, including in the fundamental freedoms of association, assembly and speech. In this context,

Ministers noted with disappointment that the Government had, in recent days, revoked the medical leave granted to some senior political figures.

- iii) Recalling their recommendation for practical confidence-building measures to promote freedom and space for civil society, Ministers expressed their concern that there was little or no evidence of substantive progress achieved in the areas of concern raised. In this context, Ministers noted the recent introduction in the People's Majlis (Parliament) of a broad-ranging Defamation Bill seeking to recriminalise defamation and statements against national security. Ministers highlighted the importance of Government leadership in advancing a legislative framework reflecting the commitment of Maldives to the Commonwealth Charter and to the required inclusive political dialogue, in particular by the Government addressing legislation concerning free and open public debate as well as anti-terrorism.
 - iv) In this regard, Ministers expressed serious concern that anti-terrorism legislation continued to be misused in a politicised manner, including against public officials. They urged the Government to take urgent steps to address this and the ongoing concerns regarding due process in judicial cases.
 - v) CMAG reiterated the importance of timely action by the Government to strengthen the separation of powers and independence of the judiciary, in accordance with previous Commonwealth recommendations. They noted that some progress had been made with the passage in the People's Majlis of the Criminal Procedure Bill - and the assurance given by the Government that this represented some progress - and urged that other substantive measures be undertaken.
 - vi) Ministers welcomed recent discussions between the Government of Maldives and the Commonwealth Secretariat on technical assistance. They encouraged the Government and the Secretariat to commence speedy implementation of agreed plans. Ministers underlined the Commonwealth's commitment to the closest possible consultation and cooperation with all other international partners working with Maldives.
5. CMAG underlined its expectation of clear, measureable progress on the six priority areas identified above, prior to its next scheduled meeting in September 2016, when the Group will assess progress, take stock, and take decisions accordingly.
 6. CMAG welcomed the commitment of the Secretary-General to appoint a high-level Special Envoy to Maldives to support a sustainable political dialogue process leading to a stronger climate of pluralism and inclusive elections in 2018, and to encourage the strengthening of democratic institutions and culture in Maldives.

Other Matters

7. As in the past, CMAG also considered a number of other country situations. Ministers expressed concern that flawed electoral processes and elections undermine the inalienable right of individuals to participate in democratic processes, as set out in the Commonwealth Charter. They emphasised the important role of civil society, and stressed the need for freedoms of expression, association and peaceful assembly to be safeguarded by member states. They also expressed concern about situations in member states where established processes governing the appointment, tenure and dismissal of members of the judiciary were being changed in ways that would place the separation of powers in those member states at risk.
