



COMMONWEALTH

NEWS RELEASE

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30TH MEETING OF THE COMMONWEALTH MINISTERIAL ACTION GROUP ON THE HARARE DECLARATION (CMAG) NEW YORK, 27 SEPTEMBER 2008

CONCLUDING STATEMENT

1. The Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group on the Harare Declaration (CMAG) had its thirtieth meeting in New York on 27 September 2008. The Meeting was chaired by Hon Rais Yatim, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Malaysia, and was also attended by Hon Akwasi Osei Adjei, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ghana; Hon Phil Goff, Minister of Trade and Defence of New Zealand, Hon Sam Abal, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Papua New Guinea; Hon Rohitha Bogollagama, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka; Hon Stephenson King, Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Saint Lucia; Hon Sam Kutesa, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Uganda; Hon David Miliband, Secretary of State of the United Kingdom; and Ambassador Veiccoh Nnghiwete, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Namibia.

2. The Group received an update from the Secretary-General on the Commonwealth Secretariat's engagement with Fiji and developments in that country since it was last discussed by the Group in London, on 12 May 2008.

3. CMAG expressed serious concern at the lack of progress towards elections by March 2009 as pledged to the region, the international community and the people of Fiji by the Interim Government. It expressed disappointment with the statement of the Interim Prime Minister to the UN General Assembly on 26 September 2008, that he would not be able to meet this deadline.

4. The Group strongly reaffirmed the importance of the March 2009 deadline for elections and urged the Interim Government to adhere to this deadline.

5. CMAG underlined the centrality and importance of the Commonwealth's fundamental values as set out in the Harare principles, particularly with regard to constitutional democracy.

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**Fiji Islands was suspended from the councils of the Commonwealth in December 2006.*

***Nauru is a member in arrears.*

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6. CMAG reaffirmed its strong support for continued regional and international efforts to achieve the restoration of constitutional civilian democracy. It noted in particular the Communiqué on Fiji issued by Pacific Islands Forum leaders on 21 August 2008, following their Summit in Niue and expressed its full support for the statement.

7. The Group noted the Interim Government's decision to re-engage with the Pacific Islands Forum Joint Working Group and the Forum Ministerial Contact Group. In particular, CMAG welcomed the agreement of the Fiji Interim Government to a visit by the Forum Ministerial Contact Group before the end of 2008. They recognised that this visit could provide an important opportunity for constructive engagement aimed at progressing a return to democracy. They agreed that the Commonwealth Secretariat should work closely with the MCG in this regard.

8. CMAG reaffirmed that the engagement of the Commonwealth in Fiji should continue to be based on encouraging a comprehensive political dialogue that is broad-based and involves all major stakeholders of Fiji. This will ensure an outcome that is sustainable and acceptable to all the people of Fiji, in addressing the coup culture and restoring civilian and constitutional democracy in the country. It affirmed that any changes that may come about through this dialogue must have due legitimacy and be implemented within the framework of Fiji's existing Constitution.

9. The Group encouraged the Secretary-General to continue his engagement with the Interim Government. It appreciated the efforts by Sir Paul Reeves, the Secretary-General's Special Representative, to promote a broad-based political dialogue. It called on the Interim Government to continue to support this engagement. CMAG also welcomed the Commonwealth's ongoing engagement with the Pacific Islands Forum, the United Nations, the European Union and the wider international community in working together with one purpose to assist Fiji in achieving an early return to democratic civilian rule.

10. The Group recalled that by December 2008 Fiji will have reached the two year deadline envisaged in the Millbrook Plan of Action for restoration of democratic government. In keeping also with the election deadline of March 2009, it accordingly decided to meet again in early 2009 to review progress. It would then consider further measures, if necessary, consistent with the actions set out in the Millbrook Plan.