

Extraordinary Meeting of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group

Concluding Statement

24 February 2016

1 The Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) held an extraordinary meeting on Wednesday 24 February 2016 in the Commonwealth Secretariat's headquarters, at Marlborough House in London. The Group met in order to discuss the outcomes of a visit by a CMAG mission to Maldives from 6 to 8 February 2016 which comprised Hon Carl B. Greenidge, Vice-President and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Guyana and Vice-Chair of CMAG; Ambassador Dr Amina Mohamed, Cabinet Secretary for Foreign Affairs and International Trade of Kenya; and Dr Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, Foreign Secretary of India.

2 The extraordinary 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; Hon Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of International Relations and Cooperation of Namibia; Hon Dr George Vella, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Malta; Dr Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, Foreign Secretary of India; H.E. Lazarus Amayo, High Commissioner of Kenya to the United Kingdom; H.E. Rt Hon Sir Lockwood Smith, High Commissioner of New Zealand to the United Kingdom; H.E. Syed Ibne Abbas, High Commissioner of Pakistan to the United Kingdom; and H.E. Moses Kouni Mose, High Commissioner of Solomon Islands to the United Kingdom.

3 The Group expressed its appreciation for the participation during part of its extraordinary meeting of Hon Dunya Maumoon, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Maldives, and Hon Mohamed Anil, Attorney General of Maldives.

4 Ministers recalled that the purpose of the CMAG mission that visited Maldives was to reach out to the Government and people of the country in a positive way, by developing a first-hand understanding of the situation on the ground and by considering how the Commonwealth could continue to assist in advancing Commonwealth values and principles, particularly in building stronger democratic institutions and culture, in accordance with the national development priorities of Maldives.

5 Ministers welcomed the commitment given to CMAG by the Government of Maldives to an inclusive national political dialogue. Ministers also welcomed the openness expressed by the Government to work with the Commonwealth and other partners in addressing its national development challenges, including the invitation to appoint a high level Special Envoy of the Commonwealth Secretary-General and the request to the Commonwealth to assist a review of the Constitution of Maldives in order to strengthen the separation of powers. Ministers expressed satisfaction that former President Mohamed Nasheed had been enabled to travel abroad for medical treatment.

6 Ministers also expressed their continuing concern regarding political space available to the opposition, including both the detention or custody in the country and absence abroad from the country of political leaders; the separation of powers and independence of the judiciary; and, the independence and lawful functioning of democratic institutions. Ministers observed that serious and persistent concerns in these areas continued to have a negative impact on democratic institutions in Maldives and on the people of Maldives which they serve.

7 Ministers recalled that the Commonwealth had worked in partnership with Maldives over many years in the past to achieve constitutional change and a transition to a multiparty democratic state. Ministers recognised that the consolidation of these important gains and entrenching of a culture of democracy in Maldives would continue to require a structured longer term programme of action, which must continue to be led by the Government with democratic will and to which all concerned parties should contribute.

8 To these ends, Ministers underlined the importance of the following occurring as matters of priority and with urgency:

- i. An inclusive, purposeful, time-bound and forward-looking political dialogue, initiated by the Government and with the constructive participation initially of representatives of all political parties, aimed at achieving deeper and enduring understanding between government and opposition parties of their respective roles and responsibilities, a shared sense of national priorities, and overall a stronger climate of political pluralism in Maldives;
- ii. Steps to be taken by the Government to enable the release of political leaders under detention or custody and the return of those from outside the country, so that all political leaders can contribute to political life in Maldives, including the political dialogue and the 2018 elections, pursuant to the Commonwealth Charter and the inalienable right of the people of Maldives to choose their political representatives;
- iii. Steps to be taken to prevent the ongoing use of anti-terrorism or other legislation to stifle national political debate, and to address concerns raised regarding due process in judicial cases involving political figures;
- iv. Renewed consideration and swift ensuing action to implement the recommendations made earlier by the Commonwealth on the separation of powers and independence of the judiciary in Maldives;
- v. Consideration by all concerned of practical confidence-building measures that promote freedom and space for civil society; and,
- vi. The Commonwealth Secretariat to continue to offer all possible support to Maldives to implement its plans to address its human capacity and other technical assistance needs, particularly in order to advance the legislation and other elements of the legal framework required to give full effect to the letter and spirit of the constitution of Maldives and the independence of its institutions.

9 Ministers underlined that progress should be achieved in all these areas especially the political dialogue and other progress to ensure inclusive, free and fair elections in 2018 that carry the confidence of all citizens and express their will in shaping the society in which they live, as reflected in the Commonwealth Charter.

10 Ministers also underlined the importance of Commonwealth assistance being provided in alignment with the development priorities of Maldives, and in a coordinated fashion with the Government of Maldives and other international partners.

11 Ministers concluded that constructive consideration of the situation in Maldives should continue by CMAG in reflection of the Group's commitment on behalf of Commonwealth Heads of Government to support Maldives in a positive, forward-looking and consultative spirit. Ministers also concluded that the Commonwealth's continuing efforts to support Maldives in advancing the Commonwealth's political values and principles would be reviewed at the Group's next scheduled meeting in April 2016, with particular attention at that time to progress on an inclusive political dialogue and on the provision by the Secretariat of technical assistance.