



'Silence is not an option' declares Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group

26 October 2010



The [Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group \(EPG\)](#), today, indicated in an interim statement that it will be calling for the Commonwealth to speak publicly as required and to act with greater authority on serious or persistent violations of Commonwealth values, including democracy, the rule of law and human rights.

They will also be calling on leaders to endorse measures to strengthen the role and functions of the Secretary-General and the [Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group \(CMAG\)](#). They pointed out that there is no contradiction between appropriate public pronouncements and quiet 'behind-the-scenes' diplomacy.

"We want the Commonwealth to continue to be a powerful voice with moral authority, speaking out on major issues, but it needs the tools to do it," said the Group's Chairperson, Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi of Malaysia.

"The Eminent Persons Group is committed to sharpening the impact, strengthening the networks and raising the profile of the Commonwealth association," he continued.

"Our goal is to re-invigorate the Commonwealth so that we can improve the lives of Commonwealth people."

"The Group has consulted widely across the globe and has received over 230 responses to our public consultations which have inspired and informed our discussions."

"We are committed to doing our work in the most transparent way possible. We want as many as possible of the submissions received by the Group to be shared publicly. We will continue to conduct further public consultation, with civil society and others, before we finalise our report."

The Group received presentations by Commonwealth agencies and institutions, including the Commonwealth Business Council, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, the Commonwealth Local Government Forum, the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, and the Commonwealth Youth Exchange Council.

The key issues discussed by the Group at this meeting included:

- A Commonwealth Charter to strengthen commitment to Commonwealth values and to set the organisation's future direction
- Giving greater authority to the Secretary-General to pronounce on serious or persistent violations of Commonwealth values
- Strengthening the role of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) as the guardian of the Commonwealth's fundamental values
- Strengthening support to the Secretary-General on democracy, the rule of law and human rights
- Increasing the transparency of Commonwealth institutions and their commitment to shared Commonwealth objectives
- The need to address HIV/AIDS as a health, human rights and economic development priority
- Empowering small states to strengthen their economic capacity and resilience
- Supporting and encouraging initiatives to unlock the potential of the young people of the Commonwealth
- Supporting initiatives to strengthen the credibility of national elections
- Reinforcing the capacity of the Secretariat to meet its mandates.

The Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group (EPG) held its second meeting in London, on 25-26 October.

The Group has had two meetings and is scheduled to have two more in 2011. The EPG's next meeting will be from 24 to 26 January.

The Group issued a letter of condolence on the death of Prime Minister Hon. David Thompson of Barbados.

They also expressed their sadness on hearing of the death of Peter Lyon OBE, former Director of the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, who had taught and inspired many generations of students about the Commonwealth.

NOTES

The Eminent Persons Group was established by Commonwealth Heads of Government at their summit in November 2009. The Group met at Marlborough House, London, from 19 to 20 July 2010, and from 25 to 26 October 2010. They will meet on 24-26 January and 21-22 March 2011 before reporting to leaders at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), to take place in Perth in October 2011.

The Group comprises:

- Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi (Malaysia, Chairperson)
- Dr Emmanuel Akwetey (Ghana)
- Ms Patricia Francis (Jamaica)
- Dr Asma Jahangir (Pakistan)
- Mr Samuel Kavuma (Uganda, Commonwealth Youth Caucus)
- Hon Michael Kirby (Australia)
- Dr Graca Machel (Mozambique)
- Rt Hon Sir Malcolm Rifkind (UK)
- Sir Ronald Sanders (Guyana)
- Senator Hugh Segal (Canada)
- Sir Ieremia Tabai (Kiribati)