

BOLD PROPOSALS FOR COMMONWEALTH CHANGE

LONDON, United Kingdom, Monday January 31, 2011 – The Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group (EPG) is on course to deliver a bold set of proposals to the 54 Heads of Government in Australia in October after its just-ended meeting held in Malaysia.

The EPG was appointed after the last Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference in Trinidad in November 2009 to propose ways to strengthen Commonwealth institutions and sharpen their impact.

Interviewed after the third meeting of the Group in Malaysia, Sir Ronald Sanders, who is one of the two Caribbean representatives on the 9-person group said: “Our objective is to get the top decision makers in the Commonwealth to embrace change that will make the Commonwealth relevant to the lives of ordinary people”.

Sir Ronald explained that the Group has now agreed more than two-thirds of its report which will recommend a number of measures for the Commonwealth to take in helping the development of its member countries.

“Among them will be structured strategic partnerships with the private sector and foundations within and outside the Commonwealth to deliver targeted help in areas where it is needed. This includes tackling disease and human resource development,” the former senior Caribbean diplomat said.

“Climate change and sea level rise also pose huge threats to all Commonwealth countries including the United Kingdom and Australia, and not only to small island states, and we want the Commonwealth to play a global role in addressing this urgent issue.”

Turning to the perception that the Commonwealth – once an organisation associated with big issues such as the fight against apartheid in South Africa – has lost its relevance, Sir Ronald indicated that the Group is very aware of this perception and it will be recommending that the Commonwealth identify global issues in which its membership and diversity can best play a part.

These would include respect for human rights and the rule of law and anticipating trouble spots in which action can be taken before they become a serious problem.

“The burden of debt in the developing Commonwealth countries, especially small states, has also been an area on which we have focused,” Sir Ronald said. “We will be proposing ways in which this issue can be tackled by Commonwealth advocacy and expertise in a meaningful way.”