

Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group

At the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Auckland, New Zealand, in 1995, leaders accepted an initiative by Canada's Prime Minister and South Africa's President to put the Harare principles into practical action by giving the Commonwealth an expanded mandate on democracy, including mechanisms for responding to problems when they arise in member countries. The result was the Millbrook Action Program, authorizing increased Commonwealth action to promote democracy, development, and consensus building.

The Millbrook Program also established the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group made up of ministers of foreign affairs from all regions. The group investigates serious and persistent violations of the Harare Declaration by members of the Commonwealth and recommends collective Commonwealth action. Present members are Botswana (chair), Barbados (vice-chair), Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Malaysia, Nigeria, and the United Kingdom. The group has sent ministerial missions to Fiji, Nigeria, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands and The Gambia.

At the 2002 leaders' meeting, the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group will report on the situations in Fiji, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, The Gambia and Zimbabwe.

Fiji: The Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group held an emergency meeting in June 2000 following a crisis in Fiji that saw the transfer of power from a democratic government to a government appointed by the military. The group suspended Fiji from the councils of the Commonwealth and sent a ministerial delegation to visit Fiji to encourage the interim government to commit itself to a timetable for restoring democracy. In December 2000, the Commonwealth Secretary-General named a special envoy to help resolve the situation.

Commonwealth and UN observers found Fiji's national elections in early September 2001 to be free and fair. At a meeting held in London on Dec. 20, 2001, the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group decided that Fiji's suspension from the Councils of the Commonwealth should be lifted, given its progress in restoring democracy. However, the group decided to retain Fiji on the agenda and to continue to monitor the situation, given that there is an outstanding case before the courts challenging the constitutionality of the government.

Pakistan: Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs led a Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group mission to Pakistan in 1999 following a military coup. Pending its return to democratic government, Pakistan has been suspended from the councils of the Commonwealth, preventing participation at high-level Commonwealth meetings. Members of the group have welcomed a commitment by the President of Pakistan to hold democratic elections by October 2002 in keeping with a