

But it did also show, dramatically, how far the Commonwealth has come in recent years. It reacted in a bolder and speedier way than ever before, and showed how the Commonwealth is capable of doing things that the UN and other bodies would find unthinkable – it does not regard military coups as ‘internal matters’. The Secretary-General spoke out before the news was confirmed to say that a coup “would be in contravention of the Commonwealth’s fundamental political values”, and would therefore “inevitably invite Pakistan’s suspension”. This was confirmed within days in an emergency meeting of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG), which was created in 1995. The Commonwealth can make a real difference when it promotes its values and takes action against those that abuse them – just as it led international opposition to the Nigerian dictatorship and campaigned hard against apartheid South Africa. The 1990s have been an era in which the Commonwealth has taken democracy seriously, stated its values clearly and begun to act on them. It can now help its members to realise the benefits of this – as long as they know that they are being asked to act together in their shared interests, and feel ownership of the process.