

Sanctions pressure to be stepped up

By Chris Sherwell in
Canberra

COMMONWEALTH governments are to use forthcoming international gatherings to serve joint démarches on countries failing to impose economic sanctions against South Africa.

The decision, agreed by foreign ministers of eight Commonwealth countries at the end of a three-day meeting in Canberra, is part of a wider campaign to step up pressure on Pretoria.

Mr Joe Clark, Canada's Foreign Minister, said the meeting had "unquestionably helped prove the case" for international sanctions, and had documented the "devastating effect" of South Africa's destabilisation policy on its neighbours.

The ministers also:

- Pointed to a "clear danger to free and fair elections" in Namibia. They put forward proposals to ensure the integrity of the November ballot, and made plans to despatch to Namibia both an observer group and, if necessary, extra police.

- Voiced their "strong and unanimous desire" that next year's Commonwealth Games in Auckland should be an unqualified success. The ministers "unreservedly condemned" South Africa's efforts to induce cricket and rugby players to tour.

On sanctions, which dominated the meeting, the ministers agreed to step up their lobbying of bank lenders to South Africa but left action on intensified trade sanctions to October's heads of government meeting in Kuala Lumpur.

The decision on joint diplomatic action against countries failing to impose sanctions marks a significant escalation in the committee's position, in that ministers have hitherto put their case bilaterally.

Now some or all of its eight members - Australia, Canada, India, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Tanzania and Guyana - are to use the UN General Assembly gathering, the Non-Aligned summit and the next Paris meeting on Cambodia to serve joint démarches.

Targeted countries are those whose trade with South Africa has increased over the past few years - among them Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong, Israel, West Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Spain, Turkey and Brazil.

The decisions represent a compromise between "front-line" African states seeking the immediate imposition of comprehensive and mandatory sanctions against South Africa and others, such as Canada and Australia, which agree on the effectiveness of sanctions but wish to move more selectively.

"There's not a paper tissue between any of us... on what's necessary and what the next steps are," Senator Gareth Evans, Australia's Foreign Minister, insisted yesterday. For all the calls for trade sanctions, "the real squeeze" now was over South African debt rescheduling, trade credits and bank lending.