

25 January 2002

**Submission to the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group  
London, United Kingdom, 30 January 2002**

1 The Initiative welcomes the decision by the Group, at its meeting last month, to include Zimbabwe within its terms of reference in view of the serious breaches of the Harare Principles in that country. It regrets the premature readmission of Fiji Islands to the councils of the Commonwealth, prior to a ruling on the constitutionality of Prime Minister Qarase's government by the Fiji courts.

2 The Initiative reiterates its view, put forward before the 17<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Group last month, that the regime of President Mugabe should be suspended from the councils of the Commonwealth. Legislation enacted by the Zimbabwe government since the last meeting of the Group severely reduces the rights of expression and association of the Zimbabwean people, and makes it less likely that the presidential election in March will be a fair expression of their will. Furthermore, widespread evidence exists that the Abuja Agreement is not being operated by the Zimbabwe government.

3 In this connection the CHRI is particularly concerned that the Zimbabwe has been slow to invite a Commonwealth observer group, and that members of the government have suggested that they may wish to veto certain nationalities from participating. It is crucial that the Secretary-General is free to nominate whomever he chooses, subject to regional, gender and expert considerations, in the tradition of the Commonwealth. In view of continuing reports of intimidation and bias in state media, long-term Commonwealth observers should start work in Harare as soon as possible.

4 CHRI has already urged Commonwealth action for humanitarian relief in Zimbabwe, given the growth in malnutrition and the collapse in living standards. The impact of continuing decline in that country on its neighbours is already being felt, and the Commonwealth has always distinguished between the needs of a people and the incompetence and injustice of a government.

5 The Group needs to work out, with the Secretary-General, alternative plans to cope with an unfair election in Zimbabwe, or a change of government, or a further implosion of living standards leading to greater hardship and refugee flows. The Commonwealth has a special relationship with the people of Zimbabwe which goes back to the end of the civil war in 1979-80; much of its work and reputation since 1991 has been based on the Harare Declaration of that year. It cannot be seen to let the people of Zimbabwe down.

6 The Ministerial Action Group should recommend suspension of the government of Zimbabwe from the councils of the Commonwealth on 30 January 2002. Following precedents which already exist, the Secretary-General should then carry out an instant consultation of Heads of Government. President Mugabe should not be invited to attend the Heads of Government Meeting in Coolum on 2 March 2002.