

Commonwealth parliamentarians meet CHRI asks law makers for transparency on HR

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NEW DELHI, Sep 22: On eve of the 53 rd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference starting here from Monday, human rights groups have asked law makers of these countries to seek accountability and transparency while passing anti-terrorism laws in their countries. Releasing a report on the impact of anti-terrorism laws, an international NGO Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) has called on 800 parliamentarians who have converged here to revisit commitments of Commonwealth regarding democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

"In the international stampede to cooperate in countering terrorism, many Commonwealth countries have enacted new anti-terrorism laws or strengthened existing security provisions. The states have increased police powers and diminished accountability," says the 80-page report.

Lamenting that legislators of 56 Commonwealth countries have more or less remained mute spectators, while passing these laws, the CHRI has pointed out that harsher measures have added to the distance between police and society. "In some Commonwealth countries measures to counter terrorism are also creating violence and insecurity undermining human rights, due processes and rule of law," the report said.

It further says, the answer to the terrorism lies in case, crystal and clear laws based on principles of human rights to ensure policing is aimed at protecting people's rights and freedoms. "Without, this, counter-terrorism can only be counter-productive," maintains the report.

Asking law makers to take lessons from MPs in Australia and the United Kingdom, who have defended democratic liberties even when pitted against national security, the report has highlighted obligations on legislatures. "Legislatures are the final forum for substantive debate on new anti-terrorism or security legislation, and the onus is on them to bear this responsibility through serious consideration," says the report.

The report has also reminded counties 2005 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CWHGM) declaration recognizing that all actions to fight terrorism must be conducted in conformity with international human rights law. Instead, the governments have undermined the consultative processes allowing human rights to fall victims to police malpractice.

"The trend in Commonwealth anti-terrorism legislation indicates willingness by governments to legislate too easily on an issue they cannot precisely define or delimit. In many countries measures are alienating populations. All too often they are used to stifle the democratic urge while privileging the authoritarian impulse," the report added.