

fidh

International Federation
for Human Rights

Fédération Internationale des
Ligues des Droits de l'Homme

Federación Internacional
de Derechos Humanos

Международная Федерация
за права человека

الفدرالية الدولية لحقوق الإنسان



CHRI Commonwealth
Human Rights
Initiative

To Commonwealth Heads of Government

October 31, 2013

Re: Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Sri Lanka

Dear Commonwealth Heads of Government,

We write to express our continued concerns regarding the holding of the CHOGM from 10 to 17 November in Sri Lanka and the fact that Sri Lanka will take over as the Chair of the Commonwealth for the next two years. Impunity and serious human rights violations persist in Sri Lanka more than four years after the end of a civil war in the country. In addition, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights recently stressed the authoritarian turn in the country.¹ We therefore recommend all Commonwealth member States to:

- Publicly express dissatisfaction with Sri Lanka as a venue both before, at and after the CHOGM;
- Reconsider the level of representation to the official meeting;
- Demand that the Commonwealth does not allow Sri Lanka to chair the Commonwealth following the CHOGM; and
- Use the CHOGM moment to extract from the Government of Sri Lanka precise time bound commitments to uphold its international human rights obligations and take effective steps to ensure accountability of credibly alleged war crimes.

In the long run, we exhort the Commonwealth and its member States to take required actions to uphold the Commonwealth's commitment to its values, as enshrined in the Commonwealth Charter adopted earlier this year. Compliance with the Commonwealth (Latimer House) Principles that require the separation of powers and ensure independence of the judiciary is a verifiable benchmark for assessing compliance with fundamental Commonwealth values. We also urge the Commonwealth to be more transparent about its Good-Offices and specific about its outcomes. We are of the view that the Good-Offices of the Secretary General do not preclude the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group from being vigorous in fulfilling its enhanced mandate.

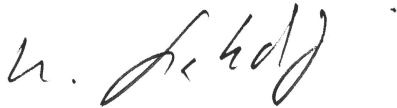
Despite the reforms, the Commonwealth's mechanisms have been inadequate to hold Member States to account over their human rights records. Now more than ever before there is a need to appoint a Commonwealth Commissioner for Human Rights, to rebuild the confidence of its people

¹ At the end of her country mission on the 31st of August, Navi Pillay made the following comment: "I am deeply concerned that Sri Lanka, despite the opportunity provided by the end of the war to construct a new vibrant, all-embracing state, is showing signs of heading in an increasingly authoritarian direction". She repeated this concern on September 25th at the Human Rights Council.

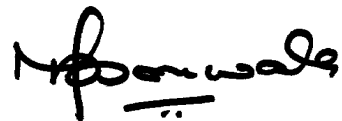
and ensure a renewed, relevant and sustainable Commonwealth. We urge the Member States to champion this call and insert the missing link in the reforms process².

With the summit just a few weeks away, we hope your government will take into consideration these concerns, and bring them into action.

Yours sincerely,



Karim Lahidji, FIDH president



Maja Daruwala, Director, Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative

² See CHRI 2013 report, “The missing link: a Commonwealth commissioner for human rights” (available at http://www.humanrightsinitiative.org/programs/CHOGM/The_Missing_Link_Report.pdf)