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Sir Ronald Sanders

**'The Commonwealth has to embrace reform' - Sir Ronald Sanders**

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The Eminent Persons Group has made bold recommendations, he says

Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group (EPG) member Sir Ronald Sanders said he believed that the group’s recommendations for reform of the Commonwealth will create “an association fit for purpose in a world that is changing rapidly”.

During the EPG’s fourth meeting at the Commonwealth Secretariat’s headquarters in London, UK, on 21-22 March, the group advanced its work on a package of reforms to sharpen the impact, strengthen the networks and raise the profile of the Commonwealth. The 11-person group was tasked with developing options for reform by Commonwealth Heads of Government at their 2009 meeting in Trinidad and Tobago.

In a meeting with journalists on 22 March Sir Ronald said: “Many of the reforms are, we believe, bold.

“The Commonwealth cannot remain as it is. It has to start adapting itself for coping with that new world.”

In a statement following their fourth meeting, the EPG made a number of recommendations, including: developing a ‘Charter of the Commonwealth’; creating a Commonwealth Commissioner on Democracy and the Rule of Law; and leveraging the association’s strength as a convening and influencing body.

Sir Ronald said the EPG will recommend to Commonwealth leaders that the charter should be subject to consultation with Commonwealth organisations, and through them, Commonwealth people, so they have strong input into its creation.

He added that the role of the proposed Commonwealth Commissioner on Democracy and the Rule of Law will be to advise the Commonwealth Secretary-General and the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) on any violations of the association’s core values.

“CMAG must continue its role and be much more vigorous than it has been,” he said.

“We would like to see it cover a wider range of issues than it has done in the past and we would like to see a graduated response to some of those challenges.

“At the same time we do not feel that everything should be a matter of censure if in fact there could be an early warning system where something could be addressed before they become a problem.”

He continued that the EPG did not want the Commonwealth to duplicate the efforts of other organisations, which he said are far better resourced and better able to deal with certain issues.

“The Commonwealth must stick to its core values: democracy, rule of law and human rights,” he said. “They must become part of the forefront of the Commonwealth’s work.”

Sir Ronald congratulated the Commonwealth on its work on climate change and debt.

“Long before climate change became fashionable the Commonwealth produced documentation and argument as to why this matter should be tackled. The Commonwealth’s work on debt, particularly for impoverished countries, has been ground-breaking.”

But he said the group is recommending that small states and the HIV/AIDS health issue rise up the agenda of the Commonwealth.

“HIV/AIDS in the context of the Commonwealth is a huge problem,” he said.

“It is something we believe that governments must address much more strongly than they have done in the past and the Secretariat must deal with it more effectively. We hope they will do that through developing partnership arrangements with private sector and philanthropic organisations, to build the kind of network that can take the Commonwealth’s work in this field further.”

The EPG’s recommendations will be presented to leaders at this year’s Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in October in Perth, Australia.

Click here for the [EPG’s 22 March 2011 statement](http://www.thecommonwealth.org/press/31555/34582/235294/epg4thstatement.htm) on its recommendations.