

From: Vrinda Choraria [vrinda@humanrightsinitiative.org]
Sent: Thursday, November 14, 2013 01:01 AM New Zealand Standard Time
To: Jan Logie
Cc: Maja Daruwala; SIP Team - CHRI
Subject: Sri Lanka should not be Chair of the CW

Dear Ms. Logie,

Here is CHRI's note on the Role of the Commonwealth Chairperson-in-Office and Sri Lanka:

The Chairperson-in-Office is the leader of the Commonwealth country that hosts

the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM). The two-year role comes into effect at the start of the CHOGM.

Post November 2013 CHOGM, Sri Lanka will hold the following positions as a result of hosting CHOGM:

- Commonwealth Chairperson-in-Office: The Chairperson-in-Office represents the Commonwealth at meetings of intergovernmental organisations

,

advocates on behalf of the Commonwealth

and

contribute

s

to strategic advocacy of Commonwealth positions in high-level international forums.

The Chairperson-in-Office reinforces the Good Offices role of the Commonwealth's Secretary-General. The Secretary-General can brief and consult the Commonwealth Chairperson-in-Office on matters under consideration and seek his/her intervention as appropriate.

- As the Chair,

Sri Lanka will also be represented in the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group.

It is worth noting that as current Commonwealth Chair-in-Office, Australia played a leading role in the development of the Charter of the Commonwealth which was adopted in December 2012. The Charter is a consolidated document that captures the values of the

Commonwealth. Tasks of such immense value are expected from the Chair-in -office. It is as a result of Sri Lanka's approach to the protection and promotion of human rights that CHRI opposes Sri Lanka taking on this role.

Keeping all this in view, we are of the opinion, that while the Commonwealth is doing a grave harm to its own values and to the victims of human rights violations in Sri Lanka by letting it host the CHOGM, it must not let Sri Lanka chair the Commonwealth for the next two years. The position of the Chair

person

-in

-O

ffice was created at the 1999 CHOGM in South Africa, because the heads believed that the Chairperson of each CHOGM should be able to play a representational role. Similarly, if the Heads of Governments agree that they can not allow Sri Lanka to take this position, they can change the pattern. The point remains, if there is political will, its not an impossible ask. It requires looking for creative ways to achieve what the leaders believe will be best for the organisation.

It might also be interesting to note how some sections of the Sri Lankan media view this opportunity:

<http://www.lankaweb.com/news/items/2013/11/05/commonwealth-gathers-momentum-in-colombo/>

"... So when the Australian Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, the current Chairperson-in-Office, passes the baton to President Mahinda Rajapakse, the latter will be the next Chairperson-in-Office until the next CHOGM is held in Mauritius in 2015. David Cameron and Stephen Harper of Canada, the fire-breathing dragons of the defunct empire, will have to deal with President Rajapakse whether they like him or not. He has stepped into the seat of the Chairperson-in Office at a critical time when the British establishment is still aiming to retain its grip on the old empire through the symbolic British Crown."

Here are a few links that may be of use:

<http://thecommonwealth.org/our-governance>

http://secretariat.thecommonwealth.org/document/181889/34293/35232/152035/35247/the_durban_communicu_november_1999.htm

http://secretariat.thecommonwealth.org/files/245418/FileName/Strengthening-the-Role-CMAG_2011.pdf

<http://www.dfat.gov.au/intorgs/commonwealth/>

I hope this helps! All the best.

We look forward to being in touch on this.

Best regards,
Vrinda

Vrinda Choraria
Programme Officer, Strategic Initiatives Programme
Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative
B-117, First Floor, Sarvodaya Enclave
New Delhi - 110017
Ph: 91-11-43180200 ext.222, 43180222 (direct)
Fax: 91-11-26864688
Email: Vrinda@humanrightsinitiative.org
Website: <http://www.humanrightsinitiative.org>