

FINANCIAL TIMES

November 23, 2009 2:00 am

Commonwealth accused of loss of 'moral leadership'

By Michael Holman in London and William Wallis in Accra

Commonwealth leaders gathering in Trinidad for Friday's summit have surrendered their "moral leadership" by failing to act on the crisis in Zimbabwe, according to a report published today.

It also accuses the Commonwealth of ignoring conflicts between member states, backtracking on a pledge to encourage democratic principles set out at a summit in Harare, Zimbabwe, in 1991, and of failing to defend good government.

The 53-member organisation, linked by past colonial ties to Britain, has been criticised in the past, but the 110-page analysis is expected to make a significant impact in Trinidad.

Although commissioned by the Commonwealth Policy Studies Unit and Electoral Reform International Services, both based in London, the report will have the status of an in-house document. It was partly funded by the Commonwealth itself and represents the most thorough and trenchant review of the organisation in its history.

It was conducted with the co-operation of staff at the London secretariat, and written by three experts whose findings have been endorsed by Amartya Sen, the Nobel prize-winner for economics.

"It is time to move from affirmation [of the Harare principles] to full implementation," Prof Sen writes in a forward.

It proposes regular, obligatory democracy "health checks" among other reforms. "Every member country should be required to submit an annual or bi-annual report on the state of its compliance with the Harare declaration, drawn up in consultation with civil society, prepared by a small group of academics appointed in consultation with the Commonwealth secretariat."

The authors also suggest Commonwealth observer missions be given the right to monitor member state elections, a process that currently requires a formal invitation from the host government.

They call for the strengthening of the mandate of the Commonwealth ministerial action

group.

CMAG, which was intended to be the cutting edge of policy formulation and implementation, is singled out for criticism. "The failure to take any initiative on Zimbabwe . . . undermined the Commonwealth claim to moral leadership," the report says.

It cites "a number of conflicts" where the Commonwealth has failed to respond. Sri Lanka and Bangladesh are the "most egregious" and Kashmir "is always studiously avoided, as was the UK's trouble in Northern Ireland", it says.

"The involvement of Namibia, South Africa, Uganda and Zimbabwe in the Democratic Republic of Congo tragedy would seem to merit attention - even more so if and when Rwanda is accepted as a member."

Rwanda's application for membership is due to be considered at the summit.

You may be interested in

Time Warner in talks to sell magazine business Are we being served?

Hacking victims resolve to go to court

One such war should be enough for any country

India working on advanced nuclear missile

Cutifani pans threat of SA mining review

New York: Day one

Postcard from ... France

G4S takes £88m hit for Olympics fiasco

Cinema review: Mea Maxima Culpa, This is 40,

Side by Side and more

Republicans reject minimum wage increase

Printed from: <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/447959a6-d7d0-11de-b578-00144feabdc0.html>

Print a single copy of this article for personal use. Contact us if you wish to print more to distribute to others.

© **THE FINANCIAL TIMES LTD 2013** FT and 'Financial Times' are trademarks of The Financial Times Ltd.