

PRESS STATEMENT ON THE JUST-CONCLUDED 2011 CHOGM HELD IN PERTH, AUSTRALIA, 24-28 OCTOBER 2011

The 2011 Commonwealth of Heads of States and Government (CHOGM) took place in Perth, Australia from 24-30 October, 2011 under the theme: "Building National Resilience, Building Global Resilience". The Nigerian delegation, comprising of Ministers and senior officials, was led by President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, GCFR. CHOGM 2011 was preceded by the meetings of the Committee of the Whole (CoW) made up of senior officials and that of the Foreign Ministers, which was presided over by the Australian Foreign Minister, Mr. Kevin Rudd. The two meetings had extensively deliberated on various issues on the agenda, including Human Rights, Terrorism; Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG); Eminent Persons Group (EPG); Small States; Food Security, Climate Change, Health, Gender and Youth.

2. By the time the Heads of State and Government commenced their meeting, the Ministers and senior officials had held wide-ranging debates on above issues with a view to reaching consensus on the text of the draft Communiqué. The negotiations were tough and inconclusive on a few items, owing to divergent view points. Indeed, this scenario which played out during the senior officials and Ministers meetings was again repeated during the meeting of the Heads of States and Governments. Principal among these issues debated by CoW were those on strengthening the role of CMAG, the EPG report, Human Rights, Solidarity with Cyprus on the violation of its Economic Exclusive Zone (EEZ). A stand alone text on Food Security, introduced by Australia, was negotiated to highlight the importance of this subject to the issue of sustainable development especially as it affects developing States and also to address the dire famine situation in Somalia. The Foreign Minister's meeting had on its agenda items such as consideration of political values, international trade, engagement with G. 20 and migration. The Ministers also received the reports of some Commonwealth organisations such as Commonwealth Foundation, Commonwealth of Learning (COL), Commonwealth Business Forum (CBF) and Commonwealth Youth Forum (CYF), and Civil Society Statement as well as that of building global and national resilience. Others were the reports of CMAG, the EPG, that of Developing Small States and the Draft Communiqué.

OFFICIAL OPENING CEREMONY

3. The opening ceremony was very colourful featuring dances from various parts of Australia. The Queen declared in her opening speech that the CHOGM could not have come at a more auspicious occasion than when member-States of the Organisation were confronted with fresh challenges including financial crisis,

insecurity, climate change, famine, trade and development. She also reiterated that the Summit also presented the opportunity to underline the potentials and the significant role women could play in a rapidly evolving world. .

Discussions on some Agenda Items

4. The reports of CMAG represented the most contentious issues. The sticky points of the EPG report pertained to two core recommendations dealing with establishing a Charter for the Commonwealth and the appointment of a Commissioner for Democracy, Human Rights and the Rule of Law. Most of the developing countries thought that establishing the Charter for the Organisation would detract from the character of the Commonwealth, which is based on its loose association, diversity and flexibility. The codification of core values and principles would, no doubt, give rise to legal obligations and a gradual move towards a structured treaty-based Organisation. The appointment of a Commissioner was viewed by a large number of delegations as an intrusion into the domestic affairs of member-States and which could detract from the mechanisms already in place to monitor the compliance of member-countries with the fundamental principles, especially the good Offices of the Secretary-General; the CMAG and the Chair-in-Office. It could also make the work of the Chair-in-Office redundant.

5. The report on strengthening the role of CMAG focussed on reforming the Group to make it pro-active and positive in its engagement with member-States towards assisting them to adhere to the core values and principles of the Commonwealth, as encapsulated in the Harare Declaration on Democracy and Human Rights. This was against the background that CMAG was viewed as reactive and punitive in dealing with issues of serious or persistent violation of Commonwealth principles. This has resulted in member-States being reluctant to engage with the Group, to avoid stigmatisation. The thrust of the report, therefore, outlined mechanisms and measures on how the Group should identify issues of serious and persistent violations and engage member-States with a view to assisting them stay in compliance. In this regard, a range of mechanisms were agreed which would be triggered when such violations occurred. The report was approved by the Heads.

6. The meeting also discussed women as agents of change to underscore the 2011 Commonwealth Day Theme and expressed support for addressing the specific needs of women in all aspects, including areas of public policy, decision making and empowerment. There was general support for the report received from the Youth Forum on Youth Engagement through involvement in policy making that would lead to self-employment and employment of labour.

7. Australia raised concern about human rights condition in Sri Lanka and how this might affect attendance at the next CHOGM. The delegation of Sri Lanka registered a strong protest about such issues being flagged at the CHOGM rather

than being better addressed bilaterally. An overwhelming number of member-States from Africa, Caribbean and the Pacific supported the position of Sri Lanka, while only two delegations felt that the concerns were justified to warrant discussion. However, Canada and Australia which had flagged the issue during one of their earlier interventions, declined to restate the issue. It might therefore not appear in the official record of the CHOGM.

8. The Heads approved the recommendation made by the Foreign Ministers to the effect that the Secretariat should further study some recommendations that had been categorised and make its findings available to member-States for their comments. These would be considered at a Special Meeting of Foreign Ministers in New York in September 2012.

9. The CMAG was reconstituted with Sierra-Leone and Tanzania elected to replace Ghana and Namibia, respectively for Africa. Mr. Kamalesh Sharma was also re-elected as Secretary-General of the Commonwealth for another 4-year term, commencing from April, 2012.

10. Finally, the leaders agreed to congratulate Her Majesty on her Diamond Jubilee next year when she would have provided the leadership of the Association for 60 years continuously. Sri Lanka was also affirmed as host for CHOGM 2013. The text on Cyprus was approved without naming Turkey as the violator of the EEZ, while the Secretary-General and CMAG were asked to evaluate options relevant to appointing a Commissioner for Democracy, Human Rights and the Rule of Law.

THE OFFICIAL BILATERAL VISIT

11.. Mr. President met with the Premier of Western Australia, Mr. Collin Barnett, the Australian Prime Minister, Ms. Julia Gilliard and was hosted by the Governor-General, Ms. Owen Bryce to an official dinner, which was attended by prominent members of the Australian business community and Nigerian professionals, some of whom have lived and worked in Australia for over 20 years. In addition, the Chief Executive Officers of top mining companies such as Rio Tinto, BHP also hosted Mr. President to a dinner at the exclusive Yacht Boat Club in Perth. During the bilateral discussions with the Australian Prime Minister, Ms. Gillard, Nigeria's leadership role in West Africa and contribution to UN Peace Keeping operations were acknowledged. Australia's readiness to work closely with Nigeria for peace and development of the African continent and indeed, in other troubled parts of the world, was also reiterated.

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE AUSTRALIA-NIGERIA TRADE AND INVESTMENT COUNCIL

12. The high point of Mr. President's official visit to Australia was the inauguration of the Australia-Nigeria Trade and Investment Council on 27th October, 2011. In the Framework Agreement establishing the Council, it was agreed that:

- (i) The Council would initially focus on collaboration between Australia and Nigeria in the area of energy, mining, agriculture and financial services;
- (ii) With private sector backing, the Council would establish small secretariats in Perth and Lagos;
- (iii) A conference would be held in Nigeria next year to launch and promote the initiative to the Nigerian Private Sector;
- (iv) Founding co-Chairs of the Council would be Mr. Hugh Morgen, AC, CEO of First Charmock Australia and Mr. Pascal Dozie, Chairman of the Diamond Group Advisory Board; and
- (v) Patrons of the Council would be the Minister of Trade and Investment, Mr. Olusegun Aganga, and Australia's Trade Minister, Dr. Craig Emerson.

In establishing the Council, it was acknowledged that Nigeria was a strongly growing emerging market and currently, Australia's second largest trading partner with six (6) Australia mining companies already active in Nigeria.

13. Nigeria participated actively at CHOGM 2011, Perth, Australia. Nigeria's delegation flagged the need to have a general discussion on the EPG report, supported clauses on food security, terrorism, and the diplomatic conference on small arms and light weapons slated for 2012. Nigeria's delegation equally expressed solidarity with Cyprus and tried to broker a compromise language. It also emphasised the danger of subjecting funds for the Secretariat to unclear reform guidelines and the need to provide adequate resources for whatever new mandate would emerge out of the current CHOGM.

14. At the pre-CHOGM Ministerial meeting, Nigeria led the debates on the CMAG report on how to strengthen its role and suggested the way forward on establishing the process for the establishment of a Charter. She also argued in favour of strengthening existing mechanisms for monitoring adherence to the fundamental principles of the organisation, instead of creating a new office of a Commissioner for Democracy, Human Rights and the Rule of Law.

15. The outcome of CHOGM 2011 were at par with expectation, as the topical issues of CMAG, EPG and the Declaration on Food Security were thoroughly discussed and dealt with to the satisfaction of majority of the members. Great efforts were deployed to ensure that issues were duly processed before they were brought for the consideration of Heads by using the facilities of the Secretariat and senior officials. Thus, the Special Foreign Ministers Meeting scheduled for 2012 is expected to consider the modalities for possible implementation of EPG's recommendations and the adoption of a Charter. It is to be hoped that, given the intentions of certain members, the issue of human rights would not be raised as a pre-condition of attendance at CHOGM 2013 in Sri Lanka.

16. Furthermore, the invitation by the Australian government for Mr. President to undertake an official visit on the sideline of CHOGM 2011 is a reflection of the high esteem in which the Australian government holds Nigeria. At every discussion, the stabilising role and importance of Nigeria in West Africa was emphasised by the Australian side. The successful conduct of Nigeria's general election in April 2011 and growing democratic culture, which featured prominently during the talks, no doubt contributed to the high profile and good press reviews which our country received during the period of the visit.

17. Finally, the establishment of the Australia-Nigeria Trade and Investment Council certainly signalled the determination of the two sides to work closely together and expand the frontiers of the ties that bind Australia and Nigeria, for the benefit of the two countries.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Abuja

3rd November 2011