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Giving small Commonwealth countries a voice at UN

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues - Malaysia has been asked to contribute towards setting up a New York office for small Commonwealth countries so they can take part in deliberations at the United Nations.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said the request was made by Commonwealth secretary-general Chief Emeka Anyaoku who called on him at Wisma Putra today.

Anyaoku, who arrived here last Friday, is on a five-day visit. He leaves for South Africa today and will visit Namibia before returning to London.

Speaking at a joint Press conference with Anyaoku after their meeting, Abdullah said as the smaller members of the Commonwealth did not have the ability to establish their own offices, given the high costs, the Commonwealth will help them.

"The larger countries in the Commonwealth have contributed towards this but those countries which can afford should also contribute to enable smaller Commonwealth countries who cannot afford it to have an office in New York.

"This is important because even though they are small they are also members of the United Nations. So we will consider the request."

Abdullah said Anyaoku also asked for Malaysian support to set up a fellowship at Oxford University's Centre of Islamic Studies.

On his meeting with Anyaoku, Abdullah said he took the opportunity to discuss matters relating to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Edinburgh in October, adding that Anyaoku urged Malaysia to continue playing an active role as it had done in the past.

Anyaoku said during his visit here he had very useful discussions with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

"I am leaving Malaysia feeling very satisfied and am confident the Edinburgh CHOGM will be successful. I am pleased your Prime Minister will be contributing immensely to the meeting and the Business Forum before that.

"The Prime Minister is one of seven leaders I have invited to address the forum which will be a very big affair, a gathering of 300 top captains of commerce and industry and high level officials of Government and quasi-Government organisations," Anyaoku said.

He said the CHOGM will discuss what was happening to the currencies in the Southeast Asian region and how the Commonwealth could mobilise the trading opportunities that existed in member countries with greater effect.

"There will be discussion of new members wishing to join the Commonwealth and Nigeria and Sierra Leone who have not been behaving in accordance with the Harare Commonwealth Declaration and what the Commonwealth will do about them."

A military coup on May 25 resulted in the overthrow of Sierra Leone's elected Government. The coup had met with condemnation from the international community, which had called for the reinstatement of President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah and his Government.

The Commonwealth, which suspended Nigeria from its membership in November 1995, had been pressing for Nigeria's adherence to the principles of the Harare declaration.

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