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Leaders told to accept suggestions to bring good

PERTH: The Eminent Persons Group (EPG), chaired by former prime minister Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, urged Commonwealth leaders to accept "the voice of the commonwealth" in order to bring betterment to the member countries' two billion citizens.

He said the group, which presented a document of 106 recommendations, was hopeful that it would be considered, including the contentious proposal to appoint a High Commissioner for Democracy, Rule of Law and Human Rights.

"Whether they are accepted or not, it will always be there and remain part of CHOGM (Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting).

"We believe the recommendations should be embraced if the

grouping is to remain relevant at a time when its existence is being questioned," he said here yesterday.

Abdullah said the EPG had received 330 submissions over the past 16 months, which emphasised the danger of the Commonwealth becoming irrelevant and unconvincing.

The submissions said that unless the Commonwealth reforms its machinery and enforces the values it espouses, "it will stand condemned as hypocritical or indifferent".

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak had said that while a few countries supported the recommendations, a significant number of members had strong reservations.

EPG committee member Sir Malcolm Rifkind said the proposal to appoint the High Commissioner had been raised by Gambia in 1977.



Taking a stand: Abdullah (centre) speaking during The Eminent Persons Group (EPG) press conference in Perth yesterday. With him are EPG members Rifkind (left) and Michael Kirby (right). - Bernama