

**Human Rights Commissioner Can Help Alert Abuse In Commonwealth Countries -
Abdullah
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By Nor Faridah A. Rashid**

PERTH, Oct 29 (Bernama) -- The proposal for a human rights commissioner, if adopted by the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), could alert the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) on situations of human rights abuse, Eminent Persons Group (EPG) chairman Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today.

He said the commissioner could actually assist the CMAG and the Commonwealth secretary-general in making them more aware of cases of human rights abuse in the Commonwealth countries.

"However, only the CMAG has the power to act (on the issues) and not the Commissioner," he told Malaysian journalists here.

Earlier, Abdullah and other EPG members held a media briefing relating to the proposal, which formed the core part of a report containing 106 recommendations presented before heads of government at the three-day meeting which ends on Oct 30.

He said Friday night, only the two core issues, namely the setting up of the Commissioner for Human Rights and the Commonwealth Charter were discussed by the leaders.

The leaders are expected to have further discussions on the report during their retreat sessions.

Media reports have highlighted much of the commissioner proposal, stating that a number of countries, including India, Sri Lanka and some African nations, had played down the commissioner idea, saying that it duplicated the role of United Nations officers and CMAG, and would cost too much.

However, at the media briefing, the EPG emphasised that the commissioner would only have a small staff and stressed on the need to have the commissioner who would monitor the human rights situation in Commonwealth countries.

Abdullah is hopeful that the leaders would accept the report, which has been compiled into a book, 'A Commonwealth of the People

Time for Urgent Reform'.

He described the book as the Voice of the Commonwealth.

It is an important document as the voice of the Commonwealth is reflected in the book, he said.

The recommendations in the report came from 330 submissions and emphasised that the Commonwealth was in danger of becoming irrelevant and unconvincing as a values-based organisation.

The report also touched on prejudice in getting treatment for HIV. It contained a recommendation to do away with laws which prevented people from getting treatment for HIV.

The EPG said, during the briefing today, that many HIV cases could be found in Commonwealth countries.

Abdullah said the report was not binding on the countries concerned, but would only provide the various recommendations for the Commonwealth to look into and turn into some kind of programmes.

They have to decide, we don't make any decision, he added.

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