

AI INDEX: ASA 33/27/99

EMBARGOED UNTIL 16 OCTOBER 1999

Pakistan: Commonwealth states have vital role in reaffirming human rights protection

As the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG)* prepares to meet on Monday to discuss the current political situation in Pakistan, Amnesty International urges members of the Commonwealth to exert all possible influence on the new regime in the country to improve the human rights situation.

"This is an opportunity for Commonwealth states to play a positive role in the reconstruction of Pakistan's civil society and ensure that fundamental human rights and civil and political freedoms become a reality," Amnesty International said.

The human rights organization pointed to the valuable role that the Commonwealth can play in monitoring the human rights situation in the country, in exerting political pressure and providing support for the necessary legal, judicial and constitutional reforms required to safeguard human rights.

"CMAG can help usher in a new era of awareness and respect for the protection of human rights in Pakistan," Amnesty International stressed.

Amnesty International urges CMAG to visit Pakistan and engage in open and frank discussions with different sections of Pakistani society. This will enable them to fully assess the human rights situation on the ground, in preparation for the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting due to take place in South Africa in November.

ENDS.../

Note to editors

*CMAG was established by the Commonwealth Heads of Government in 1995 to address serious and persistent violations of Commonwealth principles as outlined in the Harare Declaration of October 1991.

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on + 44 171 413 5566 or visit our website at <http://www.amnesty.org>