Leaders' declare Aids emergency

DURBAN(South Africa), Monday

The Commonwealth today declared a global Aids emergency a final statement at its summit today.

Britain and her former colonies ended their biennial meeting by declaring a global Aids emergency and support for women's rights, and by demanding a Turkish withdrawal from divided Cyprus.

The heads of government agreed that HIV and Aids "constituted a global emergency, and pledged personally to lead the fight against (the disease) within their own countries and 'internationally." ,

Sixty per cent of HIV infections are found in former British colonies, a British report said last week.

Bowing to one of President Mbeki's favourite issues, the group saw "gender equality as an essential component of human equality ... and as a particular Commonwealth challenge."

On other issues the leaders: Said all Turkish forces should be withdrawn from Cyprus. On Sunday, the United Nations announced talks on the conflict between Greek and Turkish Cypriots would restart next month. Turkish troops occupied the northern one-third of 'Cyprus in 1974 in response to a coup backed by the military junta that then ruled Greece.

- Expressed "concern" over a Gambian decree that "proscribes the political activities of certain political parties and individuals."

Called for immediate implementation of the Lome Peace Agreement over the civil war in Sierra Leone.

Reaffirmed their support for the "territorial integrity, security and sovereignty; of Belize in relations with Guatemala.

- Urged all parties in the five country Congo conflict to "adhere to the letter and spirit; of a peace accord adopted in September. Uganda, a Commonwealth member, backs rebel groups trying to unseat Congolese President Laurent Kabila. Namibia and Zimbabwe - also members of

the group - are backing Mr Kabila. (AP)