Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP)

The Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) is the network of women Members of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association’s Parliaments and Legislatures.

The CWP, as an integral part of the CPA, works for the better representation of women in legislatures and for the furtherance of gender equality across the Commonwealth.

The CWP also seeks, through the nine regions of the CPA, to build the capacity of women elected to parliament to be more effective in their roles and to increase the awareness of all parliamentarians of issues affecting women and girls across the Commonwealth.

MESSAGE FROM THE CWP CHAIRPERSON
Hon. Dato’ Noraini Ahmad MP, Malaysia

Since the Harare Commonwealth Declaration of 1991, the women's agenda has been the heart and soul of our journey. The aims, vision and our plan of action have been encircled between the rights, the fights, the opportunities, the struggles, the empowerment and the developments of women all over the world. The questions always begin with us being a Parliamentarian. The voice that we carry along and the wisdom we believe in.

If we were to look back at journey and achievements of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP), there are so many that we can be proud of. With that I would like to sincerely applaud the Rt Hon. Rebecca Kadaga MP, for her chairmanship of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians and those before me that have made the CWP stand among the thorns and for making our voice - women's voice - heard.

Having in mind that the CWP Strategic Plan 2014-2018 has a few more years to progress, then we must ensure that the priorities are set right. Work plans and programmes should tailor the need to the various demographic necessities and the requirements of our CWP membership. Already this year, we have seen wave of changes in the political arena of the world. We are in the midst of adjusting to the post presidential elections of United States, the rise of China and threats of terrorism. Besides that, major changes in leadership around the world have also made an impact on political constraints and opportunities.

Technology and innovation has surpassed commonality. The significant and core elements that need urgent attention to accelerate progress in any nation are to focus on gender equality and fundamental ethical rights for empowering women, as women represent one half of the global population. It is self-evident that they must have equal access to health, education, earning power and political representation.

However, there is much to be worked on and definitely, it is a work in progress. According to the World Economic Forum’s Gender Gap Report 2016 that covers 144 countries, the most outstanding areas of significant closing of gaps was in the area of health outcomes in which it was reported that the gap between women and men closed by 96% and the educational attainment gap falls just behind by 1% with 95% closure. However, the gaps between women and men on economic participation and political empowerment remain wide: only 59% of the economic participation gap has been closed and about 23% of the political gap. The World Economic Forum predicts the gender gap will not close entirely until 2186, which is way too long. As leaders in our common background, we must initiate and continue forging cooperation so that we can close the gender gap sooner.

As political leaders we must not let setbacks slow us down. In my home country of Malaysia, we believe that struggles and challenges are part and parcel of maturity and wisdom. No mountain’s too high, no valley too low. In line with the International Women’s Day theme for this year: Be Bold for Change, it is timely that we foster positive vibes and charge ahead with our togetherness. We must ensure that we can be bold enough to be the driving force that will change how the world views women in politics.

Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) discuss new ways to tackle political violence against women at fifth CWP triennial conference

Women Parliamentarians from across the Commonwealth gathered in London, United Kingdom for the triennial conference of the CWP in December 2016, as part of the wider 62nd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference. The theme of the fifth CWP Conference was ‘Political Violence against Women’.

Political violence against women remains one of the key obstacles adversely affecting the welfare of many democracies within the Commonwealth and beyond. This manifests itself in terms of physical, sexual and psychological violence. It is commonly observed that women face violence and intimidation when they decide to run for political office.

Leading Commonwealth Parliamentarians and experts in the field addressed the CWP Conference and over 100 Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians attended the conference from forty-three countries and fifty-six Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Branches across the Commonwealth.

The CWP Conference was opened by the outgoing Chairperson of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians, Rt Hon. Rebecca Kadaga MP, Speaker of the Parliament of Uganda who held office since her election in 2013.

The Secretary-General of the CPA, Mr Akbar Khan, in addressing the CWP Conference said: “It is not only for female Parliamentarians to carry the torch against political violence against women, but it is for all Parliamentarians, including men to champion inclusion and gender equality. It is also for Parliament as a public institution itself to set an example for all of society to follow by raising awareness of the issue and taking steps to eliminate violence against women through adopting structures, operations and methods of work, which promote zero tolerance of such behaviour.”

Hon. Nikki Rattle, Speaker of the Parliament of the Cook Islands also spoke at the opening of the CWP Conference and said: “Women must look to assume leadership roles within their respective parliaments. The topic of the fifth triennial conference, Political Violence against Women, is of the utmost importance, as it is essential that women have full, unfettered, and free access not only in the ability to seek office, but also to perform their duties without being subjected to threats, intimidation or violence of any kind.”

The first CWP conference session on ‘Violence and Intimidation of Women during Elections’ focused on the fact that throughout the Commonwealth, women face violence and intimidation when they decide to run for political office. Such intimidation may range from being assaulted, sexually abused, psychologically manipulated or even murdered.

Delegates suggested that it is imperative that women in public office work to safeguard the protection of their right to serve in political life, and put in place such measures as to ensure their protection. While violence and intimidation may be dismissed as a cost of doing politics, it rather serves as a severe detrimental cost to the entire political process.

The second session focused on ‘Parliament’s Role in Raising Awareness of Political Violence against Women, and Women’s Equal Civil and Political Rights’. Delegates urged global parliamentary bodies such as the CWP and CPA to play an effective role in protecting and promoting the cause of women and the CPA was urged to consider establishing an Observer and Inquiry Commission under Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians where women’s grievances can be redressed. Delegates also called for the need for the CWP to regularly monitor the status of women in political participation and exert influence on member states in ensuring transparency.

Collaboration with civil society and the media in denouncing unacceptable behaviour against women was agreed as a viable means of mitigating the political culture barrier.

The key role of both male and female Parliamentarians was highlighted in ensuring an equitable legal environment that deters violence against women, guarantees strong and enforced laws on equality and combats sexism and violence against women.

Members recommended the creation of parliamentary codes of conduct that address sexual harassment and Parliaments were encouraged to establish women’s parliamentary caucuses as a gateway to solidarity in ending gender-based political violence.

Delegates suggested that Parliaments should promote institutional reforms and political cultures that guarantee safe working environments for all, including internal policies against sexist language, attitudes and sexual harassment.

The third CWP conference session on ‘Legislating Effectively to Protect Women from Political Violence’ gave delegates the opportunity to discuss the role of parliament in protecting women from political violence through legislation. Some of the significant factors and positions expressed during this session were: women in politics are exposed to violence by sheer virtue of being women in politics; violence against women politicians deters some women from seeking political office; once women have been elected, violence against them...
serves as an obstacle to fully performing their roles. Awareness needs to be raised that violence against women politicians is a real issue; and it was noted that education is key.

Of particular note, social media has greatly increased women politicians’ exposure to threats of violence and abuse. In seeking to reduce violence against women, it would be helpful to have quantifiable measures of violence against women. While laws do not exist to prevent violence against women politicians, laws should be put in place. Furthermore, where legislation is in place, it needs to be effective and enforceable.

It was noted by delegates that it is helpful for women in politics to stand up for one another. Violence against women affects everyone, not just women; it is important to recognise that many male colleagues also wish to prevent violence against women politicians. An inclusive approach that sees social connections and media presents opportunities, social connections and networks - however, these media and civil society have a significant role to play in addressing the challenge of political violence. It is often argued that a majority of influential positions in the media are still occupied by male counterparts who are still uninformed about the rights of women. Participants endorsed the recommendation that Governments must work with media agencies to counter the use of language that minimises or trivialises violence against women in politics.

The CWP also held a gender-related workshop on ‘Ending violence against women and girls: The impact of social media and the internet in perpetrating violence’ at the main 62nd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference taking place at the same time. It was noted that the growing reach of the internet and social media presents opportunities, social connections and networks - however, these social media platforms are used by perpetrators to carry out acts of violence against women and girls.

Delegates noted that at a political level, women tend to be unfairly targeted, stereotyped and bullied through social media using body shaming rather than the focus being on the substance of their work or ideologies. Victims of cyber violence suffer serious consequences, including murder in some instances and teenagers are driven to suicide. The recommendations from the workshop noted that laws to specifically address cybercrime against women are needed as reliance on existing legislation on gender-based violence is not sufficient. It was also recommended that the CWP could develop digital literacy initiatives that provide awareness campaigns and strategies to address cyber violence; as well as IT and social media workshops to empower women through technology.

Under election rules only female delegates to the 62nd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference could take part in the vote to elect a new CWP Chairperson. There were four candidates for the position of CWP Chairperson: Hon. Dato’ Noraini Ahmad MP (Malaysia); Hon. Linda Reid MLA (British Columbia, Canada); Joyce Watson AM (Wales); Hon. Poto Williams MP (New Zealand).

Following the election, the CWP Steering Committee representing all nine regions of the CPA met to elect Hon. Poto Williams MP (New Zealand) as the new CWP Vice Chairperson for 2016-2017.

The new CWP Chairperson, Hon. Dato’ Noraini Ahmad MP is a Member of Parliament from Malaysia whose political career began in 2000 as the Secretary-General of the Young Women’s Wing who was later elected to lead the movement in 2004. Hon. Noraini Ahmad MP was first elected as a Member of Parliament in 2008, representing the constituency of Parit Sulong. She has served as Deputy Minister of the Human Resource Ministry and is currently the Chair of Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation (MATRADE). Hon. Noraini Ahmad MP was a CWP Steering Committee Member until 2013 and was the CPA South East Asia Regional Representative.

The new CWP Chairperson, Hon. Dato’ Noraini Ahmad MP (Malaysia) has pledged to renew the effort to increase women’s political participation across the Commonwealth.

The new CWP Chairperson was elected for a three-year term (2016-2019) at the CWP Business Meeting at the fifth triennial CWP conference, that took place in London, United Kingdom in December 2016 as part of the wider 62nd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference.

The new CWP Chairperson, Hon. Dato’ Noraini Ahmad MP is a Member of Parliament from Malaysia whose political career began in 2000 as the Secretary-General of the Young Women’s Wing who was later elected to lead the movement in 2004. Hon. Noraini Ahmad MP was first elected as a Member of Parliament in 2008, representing the constituency of Parit Sulong. She has served as Deputy Minister of the Human Resource Ministry and is currently the Chair of Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation (MATRADE). Hon. Noraini Ahmad MP was a CWP Steering Committee Member until 2013 and was the CPA South East Asia Regional Representative.

Newly elected Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Chairperson pledges to increase women’s political participation

Under election rules only female delegates to the 62nd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference could take part in the vote to elect a new CWP Chairperson. There were four candidates for the position of CWP Chairperson: Hon. Dato’ Noraini Ahmad MP (Malaysia); Hon. Linda Reid MLA (British Columbia, Canada); Joyce Watson AM (Wales); Hon. Poto Williams MP (New Zealand).

Following the election, the CWP Steering Committee representing all nine regions of the CPA met to elect Hon. Poto Williams MP (New Zealand) as the new CWP Vice Chairperson for 2016-2017.

The new CWP Chairperson was congratulated by three former CWP Chairpersons - Rt Hon. Rebecca Kadaga MP (Uganda), Hon. Alix Boyd Knights MHA (Dominica) and Hon. Lindiwe Maseko, MP (South Africa).

The Chairperson of the CPA International Executive Committee, Hon. Dr Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury MP (Bangladesh) congratulated the outgoing CWP Chairperson, Rt Hon. Rebecca Kadaga MP on her leadership, her dedication and her commitment to the work of CWP, which has brought about positive results for many women in the Commonwealth.

The Secretary-General of the CPA, Mr Akbar Khan said: “I congratulate Rt Hon. Rebecca Kadaga MP, outgoing Chairperson of the CWP for convening a conference on such a huge banner that prevents women from entering public office. On behalf of the entire CPA Membership, we are incredibly grateful to her for her leadership over the past three years. I very much look forward to working with Hon. Dato’ Noraini Ahmad MP (Malaysia), the new CWP Chairperson during the next three years and wish her all the very best in this important role.”
Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians and International Women’s Day 2016

On International Women’s Day 2016, Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods MP (United Kingdom) represented the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians at an international event held at Marlborough House in London, United Kingdom to celebrate International Women’s Day and to highlight gender issues.

Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods spoke about the work of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians and participated in the panel discussion on the theme of ‘Sustained education of women and girls for their economic and political empowerment.’

The other members of the panel included: Kamalesh Sharma, Commonwealth Secretary-General; Professor Rashida Manjoo, former UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women; and Guy Hewitt, High Commissioner for Barbados in the UK. Guests were invited from a wide range of Commonwealth and international organisations.

To mark International Women’s Day 2016, the Chairperson of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians, Rt Hon. Rebecca Kadaga MP, Speaker of the Parliament of Uganda released a video message where she spoke about women’s representation in the Commonwealth.

To view the video please visit http://tinyurl.com/zng6upn

Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians convene workshop on political violence against women at global network of female Parliamentarians in Jordan

Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians convened a workshop on political violence against women at the Women in Parliaments Global Forum (WIP) Summit 2016 which took place at the Parliament of Jordan in May 2016, the first time the event has been held in the Middle East North Africa (MENA) region.

Under the title ‘Women in Politics: Fast Forward’ the summit focused on the importance of parity of power and addressed urgent matters such as peace, security, migration and integration. Other participating organisations included the UNDP, UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, UN Women, Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the National Democratic Institute (NDI).

Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians held their first CWP Workshop in the margins of the summit on ‘Political Violence Against Women’ led by: Hon. Catherine Cusack MLC (New South Wales, Australia); Hon. Shirley Osborne MLA, (Speaker, Legislative Assembly of Montserrat); Ms Clare Doube, Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative; and Ms Bushra Al Shahout, NDI Jordan.

Some of the key recommendations from the CWP workshop were:

• Parliamentarians should ensure that national and regional legislation encapsulates international obligations as signatories to international declarations and conventions protecting women from violence and discrimination;
• Women Parliamentarians should consider forming gender caucuses to discuss the issue of political violence against women in a cross-party forum, adding legitimacy to the issue;
• Parliamentarians should advocate for awareness-raising initiatives to ensure that people understand political violence against women in all its forms; and
• Parliamentarians should use regional CWP and CPA fora to raise the issue of political violence against women in their capacity as CWP Steering Committee Members.
Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians attended first Commonwealth Women Leaders’ Summit to develop an action plan on gender equality and women’s empowerment

A group of visionary women leaders came together at Marlborough House in London to identify practical steps to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

The Commonwealth Women Leaders’ Summit was organised by the Commonwealth Secretariat and its partners, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, the Royal Commonwealth Society, the Commonwealth Businesswomen’s Network and the Women of the World Festival. Participants started designing an empowerment plan they called the ‘Roadmap to 2020’.

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Headquarters Secretariat supported a number of Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) to attend the summit including Rt Hon. Rebecca Kadaga MP, Speaker of the Parliament of Uganda and CWP Chairperson and members of the CWP Steering Committee from The Maldives; New South Wales, Australia; Wales; Montserrat; British Columbia, Canada; and India as well as many other Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians. The Commonwealth Secretary-General Rt Hon. Patricia Scotland QC said that action on gender equality and women’s empowerment is “core to the success of the Commonwealth”, and that the Summit forms part of her plans to “move from aspirations to entitlements and from plans and intentions to actions.”

Delegates from government, business and civil society came to the Summit ready to share their experience and to discuss an action plan for women’s empowerment in the Commonwealth. They explored solutions ranging from improved education, to technologies, to targets and quotas to boost women’s leadership.

The Summit was hosted by the Commonwealth Secretary-General, who was joined by Jude Kelly, founder of the Women of the World festival and Kiran Bedi, Lieutenant Governor of Puducherry State in India as the keynote speaker.

In the afternoon HRH The Duchess of Cornwall paid a surprise visit to the Summit to show her solidarity with women leaders at the Commonwealth meeting. She was herself convening a meeting on women’s empowerment on the same day.

The Women Leaders’ Summit demonstrated the importance of collaboration. Ms Meenakshi Dhar, Director of Programmes at the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) said:

“The Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians, as part of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, were very pleased to be a part of the Summit and to have the opportunity to bring a parliamentary perspective to the discussions, particularly those centring on women’s political leadership. The CPA was keen to be able to contribute as fully and as meaningfully as possible to the outcomes of the Summit, and was able to bring a pan-Commonwealth range of Parliamentarians, from Maldives, Australia, Montserrat, Canada, India and the United Kingdom.”

Feedback from partners was useful and identified a number of learning points for working together on future partnerships.

The ‘Roadmap to 2020’, as the action plan is now known, was submitted to the Women’s Affairs Ministers Meeting (WAMM) held in Apia, Samoa in early September 2016, and will be taken forward by the Commonwealth Secretariat’s Gender Unit. Once approved, it will be available on the Commonwealth Secretariat’s website. Some key recommendations from the Roadmap include:

- Promote the development and use of Gender-Based Data Disaggregation
- Promote gender-mainstreaming of government policies and issues across all government departments, including mainstreaming of gender in all Ministerial meetings
- Promote the effective utilisation of existing and emerging technologies, including online platforms and mobile phones, for raising awareness, dissemination of information, capacity building, and sharing of experiences, in a manner that promotes collaboration, builds existing and proven interventions and ensures accessibility to all women.

The first Commonwealth Women Leaders’ Summit took place on 14 July 2016 in London, United Kingdom.
The CWP Chairperson stated that "one of the main challenges in all women’s participation initiatives is raising the awareness of male party leaders about the need to increase women’s political participation and leadership as both the right and the politically advantageous thing to do."

The CWP Chairperson further noted that other continuing challenges included women’s lack of influence in party policy and platform development, absence or limited representation on executive bodies in parties, lack of leadership positions and the marginalization of women’s wings within parties.

7th Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Africa Regional Conference hosted in Mauritius

The 7th Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Africa Regional Conference was held in the margins of the 47th Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) Africa Regional Conference in August 2016 in Mauritius.

Delegates attended the conference from CPA Branches across the Africa Region. The CPA was represented by Hon. Shirley M. Osborne MLA, Vice-Chairperson of the CPA International Executive Committee and Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Montserrat.

The workshop was officially opened by Rt Hon. Rebecca Kadaga MP, Speaker of the Uganda Parliament and Chairperson of Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) International.

A large number of recommendations and resolutions from the CWP Regional Workshop were adopted by Members of Parliament.

The workshop was officially closed by Hon. Angela T. Didiza, MP (South Africa), Acting CWP Africa Chairperson.

The workshop focused on four thematic topics: Electoral Systems Candidates Support; Legal Instruments e.g. The Quota Stem; Political Party Policies; and Women and the Media. Participants heard presentations from Dr Linda Musumba, the founding Dean of Kenyatta University School of Law in Kenya and Dr Lucy Willy Massoi, a lecturer at the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania.

The CWP Chairperson stated that while there was tremendous progress being made towards increasing women’s participation in decision-making structures evidenced in positive trends across the regions, various challenges still existed.
AFRICA REGION

Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Rwanda Branch Steering Committee inaugurated

The Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) has been inaugurated in the Parliament of Rwanda and has elected a number of Members of Parliament (both Senators and Deputies) to its Steering Committee to promote the views and concerns of women Parliamentarians throughout the country. The CWP Rwanda Steering Committee is also responsible for developing programmes to further the aims of the CWP within the country. The CWP Rwanda Steering Committee is headed by a Chairperson – Senator Hon. Mukobwa Justine - deputized by two members, one in charge of policy, mobilization and strategy – Senator Hon. Mukasine Marie Claire - and the other in charge of finances – Senator Hon. Kazawu Gertrude – with a further five Members.

Upon her election as the Chairperson of the CWP Rwanda, Hon. Mukobwa Justine informed the House that she was ready to work with other Members for the good of the organisation and also assured them that her stewardship will leave no stone unturned on how best to empower women in Rwanda and Africa as a continent.

The Parliament of Rwanda has one of the highest global numbers for female representation in parliament (in 2016 at 64% women Members).

ASIA REGION

There were no reported CWP regional activities in the region.

AUSTRALIA REGION

CWP Australia Region rolls out ‘Stepping Up’ Campaign to encourage young women into politics

The ‘Stepping Up’ Programme is an initiative launched by the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Australia Region to encourage young women to consider a career in parliament. A number of events have been held in Australia Region Branches following the launch event for the programme in New South Wales (NSW).

In May 2016, the New South Wales CWP launched ‘Stepping Up’, an initiative devised by the NSW CWP Chair, Jenny Aitchison MP and the event was attended by 50 young women from rural and metropolitan NSW, who were each nominated by a Member of the NSW Legislative Assembly and the NSW Legislative Council. Six former Members of Parliament and senior female parliamentary staff also attended.

The event included a lunch with the Speaker of the NSW Legislative Assembly, Hon. Shelley Hancock MP and addresses by the Premier of NSW, Mike Baird and the Chair of the Australia Region CWP, Hon. Catherine Cusack MLC.

An interactive panel discussion called ‘Pathways to Politics’ gave current women Members the opportunity to discuss their career development with panellists who included: Jenny Aitchison MP; Hon. Natasha Maclaren-Jones MLC, Government Whip in the Legislative Council; Hon. Sarah Mitchell MLC, Parliamentary Secretary for Regional and Rural Health; Hon. Sophie Cotsis MLC, Shadow Minister for Women; and Hon. Tamara Smith MP.

A practical session on communication and presentation skills was subsequently conducted by the National Institute of Dramatic Art. Attendees were taught skills to improve their breath and confidence, volume, articulation and physical presence.

The ‘Stepping Up’ event was the first young women’s leadership event organised by the CWP Australian Region and it has become a template for other regional branches to use. Further ‘Stepping Up’ events are being rolled out across the CWP Australia Region.

The CWP Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Representative, Hon. Nicole Lawder MLA held a ‘Stepping Up’ event for thirty young women, who were each nominated by a renowned journalist Ginger Gorman.

The event was also attended by the Speaker of the ACT Legislative Assembly, Mrs Vicki Dunne MLA, who spoke at the event and hosted a lunch for participants.

Further ‘Stepping Up’ events are being rolled out across the CWP Australia Region.
Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians - Regional Strengthening Activities in 2016

AUSTRALIA REGION

CWP Australia in parliament twinning with Bougainville Members of Parliament

In June 2016, the New South Wales CWP hosted four women Parliamentarians from Bougainville’s House of Representatives.

Under the partnership arrangements of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, the New South Wales CWP is twinned with the Autonomous Region of Bougainville.

The delegation included Hon. Francesca Semoso MP, Deputy Speaker; Hon. Josephine Getsy MP, Minister for Community Development; Hon. Marcelline Kokiai MP and Hon. Isabel Peta MP.

As part of the Bougainville Members of Parliament visit, the New South Wales CWP held a roundtable discussion on a number of topics which included women’s economic and social empowerment in the Pacific, challenges facing women getting elected in the Pacific, and violence against women in Bougainville.

The discussion group heard from a number of special guests including: Hon. Catherine Cusack MLC, Chair of the Australia Region CWP; Ann Sherry AO, CEO of Carnival Cruises; Anna Kirk and Jonathan Pryke, Lowy Research; and Jessica Siriosi, UNDP.

Hon. Francesca Semoso MP, Deputy Speaker of the Bougainville House of Representatives spoke at length about the everyday economic challenges facing women living in remote communities; many of whom could profit from the sale of traditional crafts, garments and produce if only there was a more active tourist market.

She also spoke passionately about the forthcoming referendum and the opportunities it presents for Bougainville to recover, rebuild and grow in the wake of the devastating civil war.

Hon. Josephine Getsy MP also talked about the changing role and status of women in politics in the Pacific, and the important role they play in advocating on behalf of the community.

BRITISH ISLANDS AND MEDITERRANEAN REGION

Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians’ British Islands and Mediterranean Regional Conference held in Guernsey

Twenty nine women Parliamentarians from across the British Islands and Mediterranean Region attended the annual regional conference of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) which was held in Guernsey in February 2016.

The theme of the regional conference was ‘Influencing Policy and Legislation for the Empowerment of Women’ and presentations were delivered by a range of high-profile academics, a medical professional, as well as Parliamentarians from the region as well as other Commonwealth nations. Members of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians International Steering Committee - Hon. Meenakashi Lekhi MP (India); Lisa Dempster MP (Canada); Hon. Catherine Cusack MLC (Australia); and Patricia Ferguson MSP (Scotland) – also attended the conference.

Delegates discussed a range of key topics including employment, health and education policies for women, the gender pay gap, gender budgeting, and health disparities and inequalities for both men and women.

The discussions, led by academics and practitioners, underlined the importance of understanding the gender perspective of policy and legislation. By better understanding gender perspectives in policy and legislation, women parliamentarians can use their position and influence to enable women, as well as men, to better opportunities through education, employment and improved health and social care.
Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians - Regional Strengthening Activities in 2016

CANADA REGION

CWP Canada Regional Conference held at the 54th CPA Canada Regional Conference, St. John’s, Newfoundland

The CWP Canada Regional Conference took place in July 2016 hosted by the Newfoundland and Labrador House of Assembly in St. John’s, Canada attended by women Parliamentarians from across the CWP Canada Region. The conference was held immediately prior to the CPA Canada Regional Conference which also took place in St. John’s, Newfoundland.

As per past practice, the CWP Canada Region invited guest speakers and women Parliamentarians to address participants on topics relevant to women’s issues and the CWP organization. Discussion topics included ‘Making Legislatures more welcoming to Female Parliamentarians’ and ‘Gender Budgeting’. This year’s objectives were to promote programmes for young women while outlining the vision, mission and values encouraging women’s participation in the political process. The CWP Canada Regional Conference was attended by women Parliamentarians from all regions of Canada.

The CWP Canada Regional Conference also saw the participation and attendance of Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians from three CPA Caribbean, Americas and the Atlantic (CAA) Branches of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association funded through CWP Canada’s 2016 regional strengthening funding from the CPA Headquarters Secretariat.

The conference also saw the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the legislatures of Prince Edward Island, Canada and the Turks and Caicos Islands in the Caribbean Region and a number of twinning arrangements and partnerships are being considered between the CPA Canada Region and the CPA Caribbean, Americas and the Atlantic (CAA) Region through the Caribbean Twinning Initiative, including British Columbia and Guyana. This activity at the CWP regional conference was an extension of these initiatives.

The participants from the CAA Region who attended the CWP Canada Regional Conference were: Hon. Nicolette Henry MP, Minister within the Ministry of Education and Sheila Bhagmattie Veerasammy MP from Guyana; Hon. Lillian Misick OBE, MP and Hon. Josephine Connolly, Deputy Speaker and Ms Tracey Parker, Clerk of the House of Assembly, Turks and Caicos; and Hon. Natalie Neita-Headley MP, Jamaica.

The CWP Canada Region was of the view that such an initiative, in keeping with the larger Caribbean Twinning Project of the CPA Canada Region, was an excellent means of strengthening the relationship between women Parliamentarians in this hemisphere, leading to a better understanding and appreciation of the challenges facing women in political life regardless of their representational jurisdictions.

Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Outreach Programme takes place in Ontario, Canada

The Vice-Chairperson of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Canadian Region, Ms. Laura Ross, MLA (Saskatchewan), led a delegation of CWP Members from Ontario, Alberta, Ottawa, Quebec, Saskatchewan, British Columbia, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island in attending the CWP Outreach Programme in Toronto and Kincardine, Ontario, Canada.

The purpose of the CWP Outreach Programme is to increase women’s representation in all levels of government. The principal theme of the programme ‘Women engaging to make a difference’ was clearly demonstrated in the following areas; politics, the agri-food industry, social service, the nuclear industry, as well as community engagement and participation.
CARIBBEAN, AMERICAS AND THE ATLANTIC REGION

9th Regional Conference of Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP)
Caribbean, Americas and Atlantic Region takes place in Nassau, The Bahamas
The 9th Regional Conference of Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Caribbean, Americas and Atlantic Region was held in July 2016 in Nassau, The Bahamas. The conference was hosted by the Bahamas Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) alongside the 41st Regional Conference of Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Regional Strengthening Activities in 2016.

The conference was attended by Members of Parliament and parliamentary staff from across the region. A number of topics were discussed including ‘Women in Political Leadership: Why Does it Matter?, ’ ‘Violence: An Impediment to Women’s Political Leadership Within the Region’ and ‘Perceptions of the Role of Women in Society and Their Effect on Women’s Political Leadership within the Region’.

INDIA AND SOUTH-EAST ASIA REGIONS
There were no reported CWP regional activities in these regions.

PACIFIC REGION

New Zealand and Solomon Islands Women Parliamentarians meet to promote dialogue on gender related issues
The Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians New Zealand (CWP NZ) Branch seeks out opportunities for Members to discuss and act on gender-related and other issues in New Zealand and the Pacific Region. In February 2016, CWP NZ Co-Chairs Jo Hayes MP and Louisa Wall MP and CWP Pacific Regional Chairperson, Poto Williams MP from the New Zealand Parliament met with Minister of Women, Youth and Children’s Affairs, Hon. John Dean Kuku, Minister of Public Service, accompanied by Her Excellency Mrs Joy Kere, High Commissioner of Solomon Islands to New Zealand.

The visit of Minister Tuki and Minister Kuku took place under the New Zealand emerging leaders’ programme of the Pacific Partnership Fund. The principal objective of the programme is to build the capacity of emerging Pacific leaders. Minister Tuki is the sole female member of a fifty seat Parliament. Her visit provided an important chance to build relationships with New Zealand Parliamentarians and is part of a wider effort to support effective governance and capacity building in the Solomon Islands.

Minister Tuki shared experiences around family violence and child safety legislation. Violence is seen as an indicator of the status of women and girls, and its eradication is key to improving their lives. Ways to improve women’s representation in local and central government was explored, including leveraging existing women leaders in non-governmental organisations, rural and community groups, small business, and in sports. It was agreed that it was not simply a matter of increasing the number of women candidates, but ensuring they were able to succeed in their roles once elected.

CWP Pacific meeting between New Zealand and Tuvalu discusses women’s representation
Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Pacific Region Steering Committee Member, Hon. Poto Williams MP from the New Zealand Parliament met with Minister Tuki in the Parliament of Tuvalu on a visit to the Parliament of Tuvalu and they spoke about how mentoring and connections between women members in the Pacific can enhance performance and confidence in the House and its Committees.
Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians - Publications

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) publishes a number of booklets, leaflets and guides on behalf of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) which are available from the CPA Headquarters Secretariat direct.

There is also information, links and research about the activities of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) and gender issues published on the CPA website www.cpahq.org with a specific section for the CWP.

Please contact the CPA Headquarters Secretariat for more information or to receive any copies of CWP publications.
Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP)
Visit www.cpahq.org/cpahq/cwp
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