We are delighted to visit the [Insert name of school/university] here in [insert country name] along with colleagues from the [Insert name of CPA Branch].

My name is [Insert name of speaker] and I am [Insert job title/parliamentary role or CPA position].

I am/We are delighted to be here today to speak to you about the Commonwealth and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

How many of you have heard of the Commonwealth?
And can anyone tell us what the Commonwealth is?
What do you understand the Commonwealth to mean?

[Opportunity for initial feedback from students and finding out their common misconceptions about the Commonwealth]

The CPA enables Commonwealth Parliamentarians to come together to share good practices in parliamentary matters from across the Commonwealth. With membership currently standing at approximately 180 branches, including both
National and Sub-National parliaments and legislatures, the CPA is uniquely placed to share expertise to strengthen good parliamentary governance; contributing to the development of all Commonwealth people.

**SLIDE 2**

So, what is the Commonwealth and what is the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association or CPA?

Let’s begin with the Commonwealth’s official definition: A group of **self-reliant, independent states**, held together by means of **historic ties** and **cultural values**. Some say the Commonwealth has lost its significance, but in truth, its relevance in today’s world is of vital importance for **global peace and security**.

With 2.4 billion people, the Commonwealth comprises almost a **third** of the world’s population. **53 countries** are members of the Commonwealth and they span the globe from **Africa, to Asia, the Americas, Europe and the Pacific**. They include small states, overseas territories and the biggest and smallest countries in the world.

The countries of the Commonwealth could not be more diverse – they are amongst the world’s **largest, smallest, richest and poorest** countries. 31 of the Commonwealth’s members are classified as **small states** – countries with a population size of 1.5 million people or less.
There is no written constitution and membership is voluntary. Some say this is a weakness – however we see this as a strength. Commonwealth Nations meet because they want to - not because they are obligated to.

I am going to touch on three areas to illustrate this, known as the three D’s:

- **Diversity**
- **Development,**
- **Democracy**

Let’s turn to: **DIVERSITY**

The countries of the Commonwealth could not be more diverse – they are amongst the world’s largest, smallest, richest and poorest countries. They include small states, overseas territories and crown dependencies and the biggest and smallest countries in the world. All having an equal say about how we live our lives.

Diversity in the Commonwealth is a celebration of our strength and culture. It teaches us not to be afraid of difference but to value and nurture it. Because where there is a willingness to share ideas, to exchange views and to work together for the common good, the greater the diversity of the people around the table contributing to that shared enterprise the greater the gains for all of us in the Commonwealth.
As Kofi Annan, the former United Nations Secretary General has said: "There are very few countries in the world that can tackle the challenges that we face today on their own. We have to work across borders and with other countries; it is an independent world and the Commonwealth brings together states and its peoples which is extremely important [to solving these global problems]."

SLIDE 3

A Young Commonwealth - of the Commonwealth’s combined population of more than 2.4 billion people, more than 60% are under 30 years of age. Young people have a proven capability to lead change and can play a vital role both now and in the future in the Commonwealth. Young people are key to the Commonwealth’s success and its future.

Why does the Commonwealth matter to you? As young people, you are the future of the Commonwealth and you will shape its future and the societies that we live in.
So what does it take to become a member country of the Commonwealth? Well at the 2007 Heads of Government meeting in Uganda, a core criteria for membership to the Commonwealth was defined and so an applicant country must have:

- A constitutional association with an existing member country;
- It must comply with Commonwealth values, principles and priorities set out in Commonwealth Declarations, such as the Harare Declaration and;
- It must demonstrate commitment to: democracy and democratic processes, including free and fair elections and representative legislatures; the rule of law and independence of the judiciary; good governance, including a well-trained public service and transparent public accounts; and protection of human rights, freedom of expression, and equality of opportunity;
- It should accept Commonwealth norms and conventions, such as the use of the English language as the medium of inter-Commonwealth relations, and acknowledge Queen Elizabeth II as the Head of the Commonwealth (NOT as head of state – although a number of Commonwealth countries (16) have the Queen as their head of state as well).
One of the key recommendations borne out of the Commonwealth Eminent Persons’ Group report was the **Commonwealth Charter** which was signed by Her Majesty The Queen on Commonwealth Day in March, 2013.

The **Commonwealth Charter** brings together the values and aspirations which unite the Commonwealth

- Democracy
- Human rights &
- The rule of law - into a single, accessible document.

**So what is the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association or CPA?**

The Commonwealth grew out of the British Empire and the Empire Parliamentary Association was established back in 1911 – demonstrating the commitment from the Commonwealth from the outset to stronger parliaments.

In 1948, we became the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, an organization no longer dominated by any one country. For the last 100 years, the CPA, an international grouping of Parliaments and Legislatures, has been working to achieve common goals, share ideas and expertise and to make a positive impact on the governance and development of each member country.
The Commonwealth’s commitment to democratic governance and its focus on curbing the democratic deficit has meant that the role of the CPA, as the only Commonwealth body strengthening Parliaments and Legislatures, is all the more vital.

We enable Commonwealth Parliamentarians to come together, on an equal footing, to share good practice in parliamentary matters to achieve our statement of purpose which is to:

“connect, develop, promote and support Parliamentarians and their staff to identify benchmarks of good governance and the implementation of the enduring values of the Commonwealth.”

Her Majesty The Queen is the Patron of the CPA and is highly respected across the Commonwealth for her leadership over many years.

SLIDE 7

The CPA is organised into nine Regions, 53 countries, 180 Parliaments – at national and sub-national level - across the world. Each Parliament is a CPA Branch – so the CPA has over 180 Branches.

You can see the regions across the Commonwealth here:

Canada | Caribbean, Americas & Atlantic | British Islands & Mediterranean
Africa | Asia | India | South-East Asia | Australia | Pacific
Every region and branch of the CPA is represented within the organisation and CPA Branches are formed in Parliaments or Legislatures in Commonwealth countries which all subscribe to parliamentary democracy.

For a Branch to qualify for CPA Membership it must be a legislative body so in some countries both the national and state or provincial Parliaments as well as the Legislatures of dependent territories can also be members of the CPA. This really is a unique feature of the CPA.

- Overall there are roughly **17,000 Members** of the CPA. This includes: CPA Officials, Members of Parliament and Branch Secretaries.
- In terms of Regions and Branches, we have 9 Regional Secretaries and over 180 National, state, provincial, territorial Parliaments and Legislatures.

The CPA also has a Chairperson, who is a senior parliamentarian and they are elected by CPA Members for three years as Chairperson – currently, the Chairperson of the CPA is: **Hon. Emilia Monjowa Lifaka MP, Chairperson of the CPA Executive Committee and Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly Cameroon.**

The CPA Secretariat staff of 15 people is headed by a Secretary-General – the 7th Secretary-General is Mr Akbar Khan from the United Kingdom.
The strength of the CPA is in its diversity. We exist to enable the very different countries within it to share good practice and experiences, set benchmarks of good democratic governance, and to establish a network on a range of parliamentary issues between these varied jurisdictions, who share the common goal of strengthening their parliamentary institutions.

SLIDE 8
Let me turn to:

DEVELOPMENT
Development is about making the world a better place for everyone. In the 21st century, as a Commonwealth, we are confronted with poverty, climate change, terrorism and migration to name but a few issues appearing across our daily newspapers. There are many international organisations that deal with these issues but no other organisation provides a voice for the small and vulnerable states like the Commonwealth as well as representing a third of the world’s population.

In this regard, let us not forget that it was the Commonwealth that led the way in 1994 to the end of apartheid; it was also the Commonwealth that stood for debt reduction for small states in the early 1990’s leading to the International Monetary Fund multilateral debt reduction programmes for small indebted states; and most recently it was the Commonwealth that led the way for all states to have their voice heard at the Climate Change talks held in Paris at the end of 2015 known as COP 21 (Convention of the Parties).
The CPA hold seminars and workshops aimed at strengthening parliaments. From Samoa to Sri Lanka, from Nigeria to Newfoundland, the CPA recognizes that effective policies and practices can come from the small, the inexperienced and the underdeveloped, as well as from the large, the sophisticated and the rich.

Learning from each other, drawing from the expertise of our partners, the CPA provides

- Professional Development for Members of Parliament and for Staff
- Technical Assistance Programmes for Parliaments

**We focus on issues such as...**

- Human Rights (Gender, Freedom of Information)
- Poverty Reduction & Sustainable Development (Financial Scrutiny, Trade), CDFs, Extractive Industries, Benchmarks
- as well as promoting the Commonwealth.

**SLIDE 9**

The CPA exists to mobilise Parliaments, Legislatures, Members and Staff to advance good democratic governance and the institutional and professional development of its membership. Essentially, our mission is to build an informed parliamentary community.
This brings me to:

**DEMOCRACY**

Development and democracy go hand in hand. When we talk about democracy we mean ‘governance by the will of the people’ or as President Lincoln said in his Gettysberg speech of 1864: “The principle of government of the people, by the people, for the people.”

The CPA aims ‘to advance parliamentary democracy by enhancing knowledge and understanding of democratic governance and to build an informed parliamentary community that is able to deepen the Commonwealth democratic commitment and furthers co-operation among parliaments and legislatures’.

**SLIDE 10**

But we don’t stop there! Of course young people are our future; making up around 30% of the population in the Commonwealth.

The Commonwealth Youth Parliament is our way of investing in the future development of the Commonwealth and giving young people the opportunity to experience what being in Parliament is all about.

The CPA organises an annual Commonwealth Youth Parliament which enables young people to experience life in the parliamentary spotlight. Hosted at a Commonwealth Parliament (in 2016 it will be in British Columbia, Canada),
the Youth Parliament is organised for young people representing all the Branches of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association – large and small – and it gives you the opportunity to meet Members of Parliament and hear about how Parliament works.

The CPA also provides assistance for CPA Regions and Branches to organise ‘local’ youth parliaments and you could even organise your own youth parliament here at [insert name of school/college/university].

[Optional CPA video – Young people speaking about their experiences at the last Commonwealth Youth Parliament in 2015 – https://youtu.be/nBbf2nXssLI - video is 22 minutes]

The CPA organises youth events each year around Commonwealth Day – which is the global celebration of the Commonwealth held on the second Monday in March.

SLIDE 11

Two new programmes for young people organised by the CPA are our new Young Leaders Programme supporting the future Commonwealth Parliamentary leaders across the nine CPA regions who embrace and uphold Commonwealth political values; and the CPA Roadshows which brings the CPA out to schools and universities and which you are taking part in today.
One of the important areas of our work is gender equality in parliaments and we have formed the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians or CWP to ensure that women Parliamentarians have a forum to discuss ways of increasing representation of women in Parliaments and to work towards the mainstreaming of gender issues in all CPA activities and programmes.

The CWP has resulted in greater awareness of the representation of women in Parliament. Across the world there are only 9,000 women Parliamentarians and in some parliaments there are no women at all - that is effectively saying that 50% of your society has no voice in Parliament.

The work of the CWP has resulted in greater awareness of the representation of women in Parliament.

[Extra question – does anyone know which Parliament in the Commonwealth has the most women Members of Parliament? Answer = Parliament of Rwanda with 61% Women MPs in 2017]

There are many international organisations that deal with global issues but no other organisation provides a voice for the small and vulnerable states like the Commonwealth. The CPA recognises its small branches and we have 31 small states that we give a voice to on the international stage through the collective
voice of the Commonwealth to ensure that global solutions reached are inclusive, fair and embrace all peoples.

The CPA works closely with Small Branches in all Regions to identify their particular needs and requirements in parliamentary strengthening, development and cooperation.

SLIDE 14

The CPA has a wide range of information about Parliaments and its members available for the public to use. We can provide useful information for your projects and research during your studies.

You can also access copies of The Parliamentarian, the Journal of Commonwealth Parliaments via the CPA website. Published quarterly, The Parliamentarian contains articles by Members of Parliament, analysis of global issues and information on parliamentary, political and constitutional developments in the Commonwealth.

Why not visit the CPA website www.cpahq.org to find out about your Parliament?
In conclusion, in changing times the need for an active, vibrant and engaged young Commonwealth has never been greater.

If you remember nothing else from this talk, remember the three D’s – **Diversity, Development and Democracy** – this is your Commonwealth, a young Commonwealth ……..

It has been a great pleasure speaking to you today. If any of you would like to find out more then search for the ‘Commonwealth Parliamentary Association’ online to find the CPA website or connect with us on Facebook or Twitter.

The CPA loves to hear about what is happening in our membership countries and so send the CPA your photos, activities and news about how you are learning about your Parliament and other Commonwealth countries.

You can also contact the CPA Secretariat at our headquarters in London.

Thank you for your attention today and does anyone have any questions regarding the Commonwealth and the CPA?

[Opportunity for questions from students and staff about the Commonwealth and the CPA and EVALUATION FORMS - [Don’t forget to complete your evaluation forms] -ENDS-]