STAFF DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP FOR THE CARIBBEAN, AMERICAS AND ATLANTIC REGION

ST GEORGE’S, GRENADA

21 AUGUST 2016

WELCOMING REMARKS

ON BEHALF OF MR AKBAR KHAN
SECRETARY- GENERAL

COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATION

DELIVERED BY MS ANNA SCHUESTERL, CPA REPRESENTATIVE
Good morning.

I am honoured to welcome you to the 6th CPA Parliamentary Staff Development Workshop for the Caribbean, Americas and Atlantic Region.

The CPA Secretary-General, Mr Akbar Khan, sends his best wishes and very much regrets that he cannot be here with us today. As some of you know, the Secretary-General’s roots lie in the Caribbean, more specifically in Guyana, where he was born. He is very fond of this Region of the Commonwealth and values the warm hospitality of its people immensely. The Secretary-General visited the region only last month, when he attended the CPA Regional Conference of the Caribbean, Americas and Atlantic Region, where he had the opportunity to meet with some of the regional parliamentary staff. He takes his mandate as Secretary-General to support Parliamentarians and Parliamentary Staff very seriously, especially when it comes to Parliamentary staff. This is because he knows that Parliamentary staff are often the unsung heroes of Parliamentary democracy.

I am delighted that so many of you could join us for this Workshop here in St George’s, Grenada. The high level of attendance clearly shows an appetite for continuous development from parliamentary staff in this region. This is what the CPA is all about - connecting, developing and supporting Parliamentarians and parliamentary staff across the Commonwealth. At the CPA, we believe that the best solutions to common challenges are crafted when different minds meet - such as here.
For the past 105 years, the CPA has been a pioneer of advancing parliamentary democracy across the Commonwealth. How does the CPA do this? By enhancing the knowledge and understanding of parliamentary systems and issues of parliamentary concern across its membership. By doing so, the Association builds an informed parliamentary community that is able to deepen the Commonwealth’s commitment to democratic governance. The core of the Association’s mission is to strengthen co-operation among its Parliaments and Legislatures.

Political representatives change with time and so do the societies they represent. It is therefore vital for the survival of effective and modern Parliaments that their institutional memory is maintained and that the institution itself grows with the society it stands for. It is the parliamentary staff who ensure that Parliament transitions successfully from the past into the present and that the institution is set for any challenges that will arise in the future.

Challenges, however, always mean that there is also an opportunity ahead of us. Just to name one example: while information and communication technologies (ICTs) demand a greater amount of transparency from its democratic institutions on the one hand, they also offer unlimited possibilities to produce and manage information on the other.

However, ICTs are not the only area in which Parliaments have (and will) experience opportunities for growth: The possibilities of modernisation are tremendous. To that end, the CPA has developed Benchmarking guidelines to enable member Parliaments to better identify areas of potential reform. To reflect the specific characteristics of each CPA region, the CPA Benchmarks were adapted in 2011 to take note of the nuances of the parliamentary set up and conduct in the Caribbean, Americas and Atlantic Region. The Benchmarks have been used as a successful guideline to measure modernisation frameworks by many CPA Member Parliaments. In 2014, a Benchmark assessment was carried out in the CAA Region.
To strengthen parliamentary oversight of government spending, a Caribbean Network of Public Accounts Committees (CarNPAC) has been established in 2015. The importance of this development to support Parliamentarians to be better prepared to ensure effective oversight by Parliamentary Committees cannot be underestimated. However, when exploring best practices across the region, Parliamentarians would not be able to put any reforms in practice without the support and guidance of parliamentary staff. It is also the parliamentary staff which will ensure that any initiatives in this regard will be absorbed by their Parliament’s institutional memory.

Any successful initiative, however, is not sustainable without ensuring that parliamentary staff develop and grow alongside these developments and take advantage of opportunities for professional growth. The CPA is prepared to assist you in maximising these opportunities by providing training programmes for parliamentary staff across its membership, such as this programme. As you may know, the CPA Executive Committee has recently approved a new programmes strategy for the Association. As part of the new strategy, CPA will launch its new Programme Strand 1, the CPA Parliamentary Fundamentals Course on Practice and Procedure. Under the umbrella of this programme strand, the CPA will continue to sponsor an increasing number of staff to attend the International Professional Development Programmes at McGill University in Canada, which was developed in partnership with the CPA. The CPA will also continue to deliver its Regional Parliamentary Staff Development Workshops.

In addition, the CPA Secretariat will be launching the CPA Clearing House facility. Thereby, the CPA will identify training opportunities for parliamentarians and parliamentary staff across the Commonwealth which are offered by the member parliaments themselves. At the moment, most of these programmes take place without the knowledge of other parliaments, unless there is a twinning arrangement in place. The CPA will uncover these training opportunities for you and create a repository of information.
In concluding, let me point out what makes the CPA so unique as a Commonwealth parliamentary strengthening organization. Historically, members of the Commonwealth share the same language and in large measure the same origins of their parliamentary systems - which are, as you know, derived from the Westminster model. However, the golden thread that runs through our diversity and holds us together are the values on which we are founded. These are:

- Democracy;
- Rule of law;
- Human rights;
- Gender equality; and
- Good governance.

Underpinning these values is the importance of the separation of powers concerning the relationship between the three branches of government, the legislature, the executive and the judiciary. In their respective spheres, they are the guarantors of the rule of law. They promote and protect fundamental human rights and ensure the adherence to good governance.

This Workshop is very much held in the spirit of the Commonwealth principles which I have just mentioned. It is your forum to seek solutions together to identify benchmarks of good governance and to implement the enduring values of the Commonwealth.

In closing, I wish to extend my appreciation to the Honourable Speaker and the Parliament of Grenada for hosting this programme. I very much look forward to a productive and engaging three days.

Thank you.

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