MESSAGE FROM THE CWP CHAIRPERSON
Rt. Hon. Rebecca Kadaga, MP
Speaker of the Parliament, Uganda

As we celebrate the end of the year 2015, the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians family should take a minute to reflect on the achievements of the past year and also to think about new strategies to address our future challenges.

The engagement and participation of women in decision making at all levels remain a major setback to the attainment of equity. Women must be seen participating in making decisions that affect their livelihood. The majority of the population in many of our rural villages is constituted by women. They need opportunities equal to that of men to make decisions that positively impact on their communities. Both rural and urban women have unique needs that can only be addressed when their voices are heard in the corridors of power.

With many laws in place including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action, the time to implement and follow up at the community level is now.

Women must be actively involved in politics. They must run shoulder to shoulder even as parties elect leaders at all levels. Although some countries have achieved parity in national legislatures, many women are still struggling to break free from the chains of abuse and patriarchy. Some cultural practices seem to relegate women to the private sphere in the backyard; their ability to enter the political arena is greatly curtailed. As leaders, we need to engage with men to reduce the levels of patriarchy in our societies that makes it difficult for women to have their interests and voices heard.

The struggle for women’s emancipation can be fast tracked if young girls are provided with education, ensuring that legislation doesn’t limit women’s participation in decision making and promoting the empowerment of those at the grassroots.

As we put all our efforts together to achieve targets set by the post-2015 development agenda, we should note that women’s participation in decision making will form a foundation for their achievements for the future.
AFRICA REGION

The Africa Region has plans to deliver a Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Conference in Tanzania in January 2016. The workshop will be under the theme of ‘Increasing Women Participation to Decision Making Structures’ and will include interactive sessions on: ‘The Electoral System – Candidate Support’; ‘Legal Instruments; Quotas’; ‘Political Party Policies’; and ‘Women and the Media’.

The Conference will bring together delegates from all of the national CPA Branches in the Region, as well as some sub-national Branches in order for women to share experiences and support each other through developing stronger networks.

ASIA REGION

The Asia Region has launched a new website http://cwpasia.org. The website aims to offer a hub of information to women MPs in the Region both about the work of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP), and also women in politics in the Asia Region.

The Asia Region has also produced a leaflet about the CWP Asia Region entitled ‘Women empowerment; human development; real democracy’, which has been distributed across the Region. The booklet provides the CWP Asia Region’s vision, aims and objectives, as well as key facts about women’s development in each Branch within the Region.

AUSTRALIA REGION

CWP Regional Conference takes place in Sydney, Australia

The Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Australia Regional Conference took place in Sydney in July 2015. The CWP Conference featured two special luncheons as part of the event. The first luncheon was addressed by Dame Quentin Bryce, Australia’s first female Governor-General, who launched the Katrina Dawson Foundation for the Education of Girls. Ms Dawson was a victim of the Sydney Lindt Cafe siege in Martin Place last December. The event was attended by her brother, Mr Angus Dawson and 400 current and former MPs, barristers, solicitors and professional women. During the CWP Conference, the Women MPs Alumnae was also launched with the Patrons being two distinguished former Commonwealth Ministers - Helen Coonan and Rosemary Crowley.

Other participants at the Conference included Anna Bligh (Australia’s first ever elected female Premier - Queensland), Rosie Batty (Australian of the Year), Catherine Cusack, MLC (CWP Chair Australia) and Jenny Aichison (CWP Steering Committee - NSW Representative).

The Women and the Media Forum at the conference was chaired by Monica Attard, winner of five Walkley Awards (Australia’s highest honour for journalism) and participants included Senator Marise Payne (Commonwealth Minister) and two of Australia’s leading female journalists - Bridget Glanville and feminist icon and author Eva Cox.
Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP)

Regional Strengthening Activities

**BRITISH ISLANDS AND MEDITERRANEAN REGION**

CWP BIM Regional event on ‘Violence Against Women’ hosted in Gibraltar

The British Islands and Mediterranean Region held a conference in February centred on ‘Violence Against Women’.

Bringing together women from across the Region and beyond, delegates gathered in Gibraltar to discuss preventative measures taken to circumvent violence against women, the economic impact and also the online nature of abuse suffered by women. The Conference was hosted by Hon Samantha Sacramento MP, Gibraltar.

Ms Patricia Ferguson MSP provided an overview of the Region’s CWP chapter work programme and what had been achieved to date.

Baroness Scotland examined how to quantify the destruction and damage caused by domestic violence against women to the economy and how to share the learning collectively.

The event was also attended by Hon. Dr Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury MP, Speaker of the Bangladesh Parliament and Chairperson of the CPA Executive Committee and Rt Hon. Rebecca Kadaga, MP, Speaker of the Parliament of Uganda and Chairperson of the CWP.

**CARIBBEAN, AMERICAS AND THE ATLANTIC REGION**

CWP Regional Steering Committee takes place at CAA Regional Conference

The Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Caribbean, Atlantic and Americas Regional Steering Committee took place in Tortola, British Virgin Islands prior to the CPA Caribbean Regional Conference. The CWP Regional Steering Committee are pictured with the Deputy Premier of the British Virgin Islands, Hon. Dr. Kedrick Pickering.

**INDIA REGION**

The India Region has not indicated any regional strengthening activities.

**SOUTH-EAST ASIA REGION**

The South East Asia Region has not indicated any regional strengthening activities.
Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP)

Regional Strengthening Activities

CANADA REGION

CWP Regional Steering Committee takes place during Canadian Regional Conference

The Canadian Regional Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Steering Committee took place prior to the 53rd Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Canadian Regional Conference in Victoria, British Columbia in July 2015.

The Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Conference provides unique opportunities to meet with parliamentarians from across Canada to exchange views and experiences on parliamentary practices and operational innovations.

Hon. Linda Reid, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, and Chair, Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians, Canadian Region hosted the successful CPA Canada conference.

CWP at Ottawa Outreach Event

In November 2014, the CWP Canadian Region held an outreach event at the Parliament Buildings in Ottawa, the national capital of Canada. Hosted by Hon. Noël Kinsella, Speaker of the Senate, and Hon. Andrew Scheer, Speaker of the House of Commons, the reception was well attended by over 30 MPs and Senators, university students and members of specially invited women’s groups.

In addition to the keynote speaker, CWP Federal Representative, Susan Truppe MP for Ontario, the CWP was represented by Vice-Chair Laura Ross MLA (Saskatchewan) and steering committee members, Lisa Thompson, MP (Ontario) and Lisa Dempster MLA (Newfoundland & Labrador).

In her speech, Ms. Truppe, also Parliamentary Secretary for the Status of Women, outlined the goals of the CWP since it formed in the Canadian Region ten years ago. She spoke of the CWP’s determination towards increasing the number of female members in the parliaments of Commonwealth countries and its promotion of the greater participation of women parliamentarians.

Emphasizing that a central feature of our democratic landscape is the representation and active participation of women in our parliaments, Ms. Truppe was able to report the progress of the campaign school in the remote north. Those challenges include not only getting elected, but once elected, being effective in your role. Towns are very spread out, air travel is costly and often smaller areas speak a native language that may require an interpreter. Due to the vast geography, door to door campaigning isn’t always possible, so the importance of signage with a brief but clear message that voters will remember is essential.

These challenges are heightened when the candidate is female; gender issues and ‘old boys’ clubs’ are still alive and well in many parts. However, an impressive number of women are considering running in the general election (at least six). Lisa Dempster offered her future assistance to any women who move forward with an election plan. She noted that “two females in a legislature of 19 MLA’s was a glancing statement of just how under represented we are at this level and a reminder of how much work we still have left to do. It’s imperative that we continue to see female representation grow in the legislatures across our country. Women do bring a different perspective to the table. Politics can be a viable and rewarding career for women and those of us involved have an important responsibility to encourage and support those interested in pursuing this worthy vocation.”

North West Territories Campaign School for Women

In preparation for the Canadian general election in October 2015, the Status of Women Council of Canada’s North West Territories (NWT) held a campaign school in February 2015. The event was organised by CWP members, Wendy Bisaro MLA along with Lisa Dempster MLA (Newfoundland and Labrador).

The campaign school was attended by 45 women from all over the vast territory who were interested and engaged. A panel discussion took place withLisa Dempster, MLA along with Wendy Bisaro and Jane Groenewegen, the only two elected women of the NWT. The panel discussed the role of MLAs, managing people’s expectations and maintaining a work/life balance in public service.

It was noted that there are many challenges to campaigning in the remote north. Those challenges include not only getting elected, but once elected, being effective in your role. Towns are very spread out, air travel is costly and often smaller areas speak a native language that may require an interpreter. Due to the vast geography, door to door campaigning isn’t always possible, so the importance of signage with a brief but clear message that voters will remember is essential.

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Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Regional Strengthening Activities

PACIFIC REGION

Samoa Women’s Commonwealth Parliamentary Programme (SWCPP) 2015

The Office of the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly in Samoa hosted its inaugural Women’s Commonwealth Parliamentary Programme (SWCPP) in March 2015 at the Tofilau Eti Alesana Building. The SWCPP is a joint initiative by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) and the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) through presentations and discussions led by the Hon Gatoloaifaana Amataga Alesana Gidlow, Deputy Chairperson of the CWP Steering Committee and parliamentary officials.

They toured the Parliament House and the Offices of the Legislative Assembly, where the participants learned about the work of each division. The presentations were geared to give participants basic knowledge and understanding of the Commonwealth, the CPA, the CWP and Samoa’s involvement in these organisations.

The Clerk, Feepuleaia Attilia M. Ropati spoke on The Roles of the Commonwealth and the CPA, highlighting the principles and objectives of the Commonwealth as well purpose of the CPA and how they work together with the Parliament of Samoa. The Deputy Clerk, Charlene Polaivao Fosi Schmidt delivered the opening address where he stated that ‘the theme, ‘A Young Commonwealth’ recognizes the capacity, contribution and potential of young people, who play a vital role in sustainable development and democracy.” He emphasized the need for good leaders to make good decisions for Samoa and encouraged the young women to get to know their Parliament and its place in the Commonwealth and also make use of this opportunity to make a contribution to the legislative process.

Participants observed the Parliament Pre-Sitting Briefing where five Bills scheduled to be introduced in the next sitting were discussed. They toured the Parliament House and the Offices of the Legislative Assembly where they discussed the need to encourage women to actively participate in national political institutions.

The programme concluded in a panel discussion on the topic, ‘Samoa as a Member of the Commonwealth of Nations Today’, and a question and answer session lead by Hon. Gatoloaifaana Amataga Alesana-Gidlow. Subsequently participants were divided into two groups for further discussions, where it focused on the role of the CPA in the Pacific and their move to ensure the boost in women representation in the Pacific. The groups also identified obstacles preventing women from entering Parliament and how these obstacles can be overcome.

Niue Women’s Parliamentarians Past and Present Reunion

An event was held in March 2015 by the Niue Legislative Assembly to link past and present members of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) and the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP).

This event was an excellent get-together for past and present Niuean women parliamentarians to listen and socialize with invited guests. The invited guests were young leaders of Niue, both male and female who have potential to become future parliamentarians.

Invitations were also extended to current male parliamentarians who are champions of gender equality and have supported the women parliamentarians’ causes in the past.

The reunion focused on the following objectives:

a) Reconnecting present women parliamentarians with former women parliamentarians to strengthen and invigorate ideas to promote future women parliamentarian involvement in the Niue Legislative Assembly;

b) Rejuvenate relationships between past and present women parliamentarians as well as male parliamentarians who can support and champion women’s participation and involvement in the Niue Legislative Assembly;

c) Revive and revitalize relationships between past and present women parliamentarians with young women leaders with potential to become the future political representatives in the country.
International CWP Activities

National Women’s Machineries’ meeting, New York

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is the principal global intergovernmental body exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women.

The CSW is instrumental in promoting women’s rights, documenting the reality of women’s lives throughout the world, and shaping global standards on gender equality and the empowerment of women.

At each meeting on the Commission on the Status of Women, the Commonwealth gathers for the ‘National Women’s Machineries’ meeting. The theme for the 2015 Annual Consultation of National Women’s Machineries (NWMs) is ‘Women’s Political Leadership within Beijing+20 and the Post-2015 Development Agenda’.

As the world commemorates 20 years of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in New York, the Commonwealth acknowledged the contribution of the Commonwealth in advancing the participation of women in political decision-making at all levels.

The Chairperson of the CPA Executive Committee, Hon. Dr Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury MP, Speaker of the Bangladesh Parliament delivered a keynote address at the event, on ‘Women’s Political Leadership within Beijing+20 and the post 2015 Development Agenda: Success and Challenges from the Commonwealth’.

She focussed on the Commonwealth’s values in diversity and striving towards gender equal representation in Commonwealth Parliaments and Legislatures.

The Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Chairperson, Rt Hon Rebecca Kadaga MP, Speaker of the Parliament of Uganda delivered a presentation detailing the Parliamentary experience from Uganda; sharing good practice from her experience both as Speaker of the Parliament and also as Chairperson of the CWP.

International Women’s Day

International Women’s Day (IWD) is celebrated annually on 8 March. This day is identified to highlight issues such as respect and appreciation for women’s economic, political and social achievements and the progress made by women in their struggles for democracy, development and peace.

This year, to commemorate the event, the Commonwealth Secretariat organised a panel discussion at their Headquarters in London, United Kingdom in March. The theme of this discussion was ‘Equality for Women is Progress for All’, which is in line with the 2015 UN theme for International Women’s Day.

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) and Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) were represented by Ms Eleanor Laing MP, Deputy Speaker of the House of Commons and First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (United Kingdom) who delivered a Keynote Address on ‘Engaging Youth and Civil Society on Women’s Empowerment’. She spoke about her personal experiences and the value of her own education; she attested that girls’ education is a catalyst for women’s empowerment. Commenting on the value of education, she indicated that education was also an enabler to political empowerment. She spoke of the strength of women who are in parliaments to bring about the change we need; if Parliaments across the Commonwealth have a critical mass of women, and if we concentrate on quality education for women and girls, that is where we can initiate positive development towards greater gender parity across the world.

Women’s Day

8 March
Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Publications

Publication on Women and Girls in the Post-MDG Era
In June 2014, the CWP met to discuss current thinking behind, and to develop its own considerations about the role of women, girls and gender equality in the aftermath of the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) period on the theme ‘Women in the Post Millennium Development Goal Era’.

The Post-Millennium Development Goal agenda is at the forefront of much international debate. The Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians wished to develop gender specific thinking on the structure of the post-2015 development framework and the role that Parliament can play in contributing to this. 13 Branches of the CPA were represented from eight of the nine regions of the Commonwealth, bringing together 17 Members of the CWP.

The conference produced a series of recommendations on the role of women and girls in the Post Millennium Development Goal Era which centred on: Establishing a Gender Balance in Parliament; Gender and Social Policy; A Vision for the Future of Gender Equality; Negotiating a better position for women and girls after 2015; and The role of Women in the Post-MDG era.

CWP Strategic Plan 2014-2018
The CWP Strategic Plan aims to serve as both a strategic communications and a strategic planning tool to enable the CWP to act as a powerful tool for Women Parliamentarians in the CPA.

It communicates the mission and work of the CWP to its own women Members, to all other Members of the CPA, Branches of the Association, to the constituents that Members represent across the Commonwealth, as well as to outside organisations and the general public.

The Strategic Plan provides a framework for CWP to identify its achievements, strategically assess the challenges it encounters, build alliances, and undertake actions across the CPA and beyond in order to ensure that both men and women are involved in decision making in legislatures of the Commonwealth and that women Parliamentarians are supported in their work.

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 Strategic Plan has identified three principle strategies to achieve this mission, namely advocacy work, information sharing and learning and strengthening CWP’s position in the CPA.

Please contact the CPA Secretariat for more information or to receive a copy.
Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) at the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conferences

CWP at the 60th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference
In October 2014, the 60th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference took place in Yaoundé, Cameroon. The CWP Steering Committee met on 3 October 2015; five of the nine regions were represented which was also attended by Senator Emma Lafon, then CWP President from the CPA Cameroon Branch.

The CWP Business Meeting took place on 8 October 2014 and was attended by women delegates and observers, as well as some male parliamentarians who we welcomed warmly. The meeting opened with the CWP Anthem. The Business meeting was delighted to hear from then CPA Chairperson, the Rt. Hon Sir Alan Haselhurst MP and then CPA President, Hon Speaker Djibril MP who both offered their continued support to CWP’s work. Also attending the meeting was the Minister for Women’s Empowerment and the Family in Cameroon, Hon Marie Therese Abena Ondoa.

The CWP Session also met on 8 October to discuss “Increasing Women’s Political Representation in the Commonwealth in the Post-2015 era: Challenges and Way Forward.”

Below: CWP Steering Committee Members pictured at their 2014 Meeting in Yaoundé, Cameroon with CWP President, Senator Eno Emma Lafon (Cameroon), CPA President, Rt Hon. Cavaye Yegue Djibril, MP (Cameroon) and CWP Chairperson, Rt Hon. Rebecca Kadaga, MP (Uganda).

The CWP Session also met on 8 October to discuss “Increasing Women’s Political Representation in the Commonwealth in the Post-2015 era: Challenges and Way Forward.”

Below: The CWP nominated session at the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in Cameroon takes place.

The Session was chaired by the CWP Chairperson and features esteemed speakers: Senator Emma Lafon, CWP President, Cameroon Branch, Hon Alix Boyd Knights MHA, Speaker of the Dominican Parliament and Hon Chris Charlton MP from Canada.

Members received an account of the increase in women in Cameroonian politics and Members congratulated Cameroon for its example. Delegates discussed the importance of mentoring, mobilizing and motivating women in or entering politics. They stressed the importance of involving men in gender equality work and received resounding assent. Members agreed that women politicians must be unified in their voices, strong and consistent in their calls for equality in all sectors of society and all development efforts. Members discussed the biggest obstacles to women in politics, which included the amount of family and household responsibilities they undertake, the discrepancy in income between men and women and the fact that fewer opportunities are afforded to women.

There was a strong call from Members to show unity and engage international organizations in enhancing female representation in politics, to share experiences and examples of best practice and embrace mentoring opportunities in the pursuit of absolute gender equality. The following recommendations were borne out of the session:

• Despite Socio-cultural beliefs and patriarchy, Cameroon’s significant increase in female political representation makes a case for further legislation. Sustained progress however depends on capacity building.
• We have been speaking about getting more women in Parliament for many years. We now have to propose new, unique strategies to realize our goals.
• That the CPA and Member States establish mentorship programmes to provide support and guidance to women aspiring to run for political office and the Municipal, Provincial and National Level.

The Gender Related theme during the main workshops at the CPC, was “Joining hands for women’s rights: The role of Parliamentarians in gender empowerment.”

Members attested the need to go ‘beyond numbers’ when reflecting on the representation of women in Parliaments across the Commonwealth. Members discussed the importance of creating women’s
caucuses across party lines in Parliaments, which can develop and strengthen women's presence in Parliament.

Members considered improving international links between women Parliamentarians for mutual support and sharing best practice. Reaching out to gender empowerment organizations can help to understand how women are excluded in society.

Members agreed that it is essential to understand the challenges specific to women to influence the development agenda on gender. Tracking legislation is important to ensure gender equity is achieved. Parliamentarians agreed that mentoring schemes for women Parliamentarians are key to furthering women in the political sphere and that getting communities to encourage more women to enter public office is vital to increase numbers of women in legislatures.

The recommendations borne out of this workshop were as follows:

- Intensive lobbying for more Bills that encourage more women in politics and allocate funds to create rehabilitation homes for abused and abandoned aged women
- Access to justice, equal treatment, right to own property, right to access credit, fairness in the distribution of family inheritance and obligations to children in case of divorce or separation

CWP at the 61st Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference

The CWP Steering Committee was not able to meet in 2015 due to the cancellation of the 61st Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in Pakistan.

However the CWP Steering Committee convened a teleconference meeting which took place on 1 October 2015 where the CWP Steering Committee were able to provide direction on key decisions for the work programme for the coming two years.

The next triennial Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Conference will take place in 2016.

Below: The CWP Steering Committee Teleconference takes place in October 2015 with CWP Chairperson, Rt Hon. Rebecca Kadaga, MP and Ms Lucy Pickles from the CPA Secretariat.