Good morning to you all.

As it has already been announced, we received news here in Yaoundé, Cameroon, of the Secretary-General, Dr William Ferdinand Shija’s passing on 4 October 2014, in London, following a brief illness.

Most of you would have met Dr Shija. He was a truly unique breed. An embodiment of:

Integrity
Strength
Honesty
Humility
Tactfulness
Diplomacy; and
He had a strong sense of justice.

No one is completely perfect. Hence, whenever he felt he had erred, he would truly find ways to reach an equitable resolution of the matter that was at stake.

Dr Shija was a truly complete gentleman.

On my part and on behalf of my colleagues at the CPA Secretariat, I salute this giant of a man, Dr Shija.

I pray for Dr William Ferdinand Shija’s soul to rest in perfect peace; and for strength and comfort to be poured on his wife, Mrs Gertrude Shija, and children who he has left behind.

Goodbye Dr William Ferdinand Shija. I salute you. We mourn you. But you will be remembered for a very long time to come indeed.

It is with great sadness therefore that I now read to you his words for the opening of this conference, as follows:

Mr. President, Distinguished Delegates. It is with deep regret that I will not, for medical reasons, be able to be with you at this 60th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference here in the City of the Seven Hills, Yaoundé, Cameroon. However, I will be with you all in spirit [as it has turned out to be indeed] and I wish you the very best of your deliberations over the next few days.

In my absence, the Director of Finance, Mr Joe Omorodion, will assume my duties as Conference Secretary to the General Assembly and Associated meetings.

Graced once again by not only the presence of the representative of the Commonwealth Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr Kamlesh Sharma; Mr Amitav Banerji, Director of Political Affairs, we are privileged to have in our midst the Secretary-General of the Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU), Mr Martin Chungong. Mr Chungong will be known to some of you through your attendance of IPU meetings.
As you have heard earlier today, Cameroon is hosting this major Commonwealth Parliamentary event for the very first time since they joined the membership of the Association on 1 January 1995. I therefore join you, Mr President, in welcoming all the delegates and other participants to Yaoundé as guests of your Branch at this important conference. I thank you for the hospitality, facilities and arrangements.

Secondly, I wish to thank Her Majesty The Queen, the Patron of the Association, for the very thoughtful and encouraging message to all the delegates, wishing this Conference the very best in its deliberations. I join you and all the delegates in thanking the Guest of Honour, His Excellency Paul Biya, President of Republic of Cameroon, for gracing the opening of this conference. I believe that his remarks will enrich the conference discussions, leading to useful deliberations.

Mr President. I wish to express my sorrow and condolences to the Malaysian Delegation and their country for the loss of lives in the two aeroplane accidents involving Malaysian Airlines. I know that investigations into these two tragedies are still ongoing, but I hope that some answers will soon be found to give those who lost loved ones closure, so that they can start to rebuild their lives. Some of our Member Branches or Countries in West Africa are currently battling to contain the Ebola virus which is threatening to rob these countries of their people and economies. I wish to let our colleagues of these Branches know that I pray with and for them and hope that this matter gets resolved as quickly as possible.

Mr President, I wish to take this opportunity to recognize the presence of our partners, in particular, the professional resource persons who have accepted our invitation to make presentations at our plenary and workshop sessions. As delegates who attended last year’s conference will recall, South Africa was the testing ground for the first Commonwealth Parliamentary Concluding Statement.

As you may be aware, this Conference will produce a Conference Concluding Statement. This statement will be circulated around the Commonwealth, including to all Heads of Government. It is not binding, but it reflects, Honourable Delegates, your views and recommendations on current affairs and how Parliament should play its vital role in our democratic system- nationally and globally. To that end, the Concluding Statement of the 60th CPC is of vital importance to make your voices heard with your governments and the international community. However, in order to reflect your views best, we need your support in drafting this important outcome document.

To that end, each presenter at the sessions of the Conference has been asked by our office to submit to his/her session a recommended conclusion. If you are a presenter and have not done so yet, please do. Once submitted, this conclusion is not amendable. All recommendations will be reflected in the final concluding statement once they have been endorsed by a simple majority of participants upon the conclusion of the relevant session. This will be a different procedure from last year’s, where a recommendation would not be included in the statement if one individual voted against its endorsement. By changing this practice, we hope to reflect the views of the majority.

Secondly, we are fortunate to have here with us some excellent Rapporteurs from across the Commonwealth to capture the essence of what has been discussed. This way, our office will be able to compile and issue the Concluding Statement as soon as possible after the end of the Conference.

The CPA wants Parliament to have a stronger voice, and this is a useful medium to promote our views. It is your document. Please make it count.

The Theme of this 60th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference is ‘Repositioning the Commonwealth for the post-2015 Development Agenda’. This theme is relevant and timely because
the global community will be discussing the successor development goals to the current United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which come up for evaluation next year. This theme will therefore give the Commonwealth Parliamentary Community the opportunity to discuss the extent to which it can contribute towards the identification of key areas of focus in the post-2015 MDG Agenda. The UN MDGs include areas of poverty alleviation, maternal health, education for all, etc. It is therefore fitting that as we approach the target date, Delegates not only have an input into ongoing discussions but that they become part of the post-2015 development agenda. Furthermore, I believe that Parliaments through their mandate, have a role to play in shaping the post-2015 development agenda. It is hoped that outcomes of your deliberations would, through the CPA Secretariat, form part of its submission to Commonwealth Heads of Government and ultimately the United Nations.

I have often said that as a member-driven organization, the CPA will always focus on the needs and wishes of its members. This is why just over two-thirds of our annual budget goes into the provision of programmes and services for you, the membership. You will be pleased to know that your Association continues to maintain a very strong financial position, with unrestricted reserves of about £3 million. As we exist for the Membership, the Executive Committee has naturally decided to draw down on the accumulated reserves in accordance with the Association’s Financial Strategy. The purpose of all this is to ensure we continue to remain relevant to the needs of our members.

While we have the resources, we continue to rely on one of our key structural concepts of our activities; and that is, the hosting of our events and activities. I am taking this opportunity to once again appeal for hosts for CPA programmes and events. I also thank all those Branch that have hosted us in the past and those scheduled to do so in the future. We could not do our work without your support on the ground, thank you very much.

I am delighted that we are guests of the Parliament and Government of Cameroon this year. Following the conference in South Africa last year, Pakistan offered to host the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in 2015. This offer will be considered by the General Assembly here in Yaoundé. However, we continue to appeal for future hosts for the mid-year Executive Committee meeting as well as the annual conference.

I wish to end my remarks by expressing my gratitude to you, Rt Hon. Cavaye Yeguie Jibril, MP, Speaker of the National Assembly of Cameroon, for your leadership of the Association as Vice President and President.

I also wish to thank the Chairperson, Sir Alan Haselhurst; Vice Chairperson, Hon. Datuk Ronald Kiandee, MP; the Treasurer, Hon. Marwick T. Khumalo, MP; the Acting Treasurer, Hon. Request Muntanga, MP; and the CWP Chairperson, Rt Hon. Rebecca Kadaga, MP, who, through the work of the Co-ordinating Committee, have greatly guided and assisted me and the Secretariat to meet the many challenges of our work across the Commonwealth, particularly during the implementation of internal audit process at the Secretariat.

Accordingly, I sincerely wish to thank all the Members of the Executive Committee for the work and decisions during the mid-year Executive Committee meeting in London in April this year. Their decisions have enabled me to complete the process of the restructuring of the Secretariat, a process which started two years ago.

Mr President, I thank most specially the outgoing Chairperson of the CPA Executive Committee, Rt. Hon. Sir Alan Haselhurst, MP, for his leadership and patience. I also thank all the members of the CPA Executive Committee who are rotating out at the conclusion of this conference, for their
wonderful support, guidance and friendship to strengthen the CPA activities. My colleagues and I at the Secretariat look forward to the successful election of the Chairperson and other officers of the Association to enable the new team of the CPA Executive Committee to continue working on the unfinished and new matters of the Association.

I wish to thank all the staff members of the CPA Secretariat for their support and understanding. Their skills, experience, long hours of work, sometimes awkward travel schedules, and keeping the communication lines open to make the CPA tick in our branches, countries and partners. I thank them for their work in supporting this conference here in Yaoundé.

Mr President, Distinguished Delegates, I wish all delegates a highly successful conference here in Yaoundé Cameroon.

I thank you all for your kind attention.