Looking Back Over the Past Year

Time has passed by so quickly, with it almost having been a year since I assumed the office of Chairperson of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians in Johannesburg, South Africa, in September 2013. It has been a busy 12 months with the CWP workload as well as the pace of activities of the CPA in general. This is why I feel a strong duty to engage all of us in looking back at the past year and take stock of our results in advancing the global cause of women.

I first of all want to congratulate my predecessor, Hon. Alix Boyd Knights, MHA, who left a wonderful legacy when she passed the baton on to me. I also want to extend a vote of thanks to all the staff at the CPA Secretariat who I must say have been hugely supportive.

Credit must also be given to Rt Hon. Sir Alan Haselhurst, MP, for his passion and commitment towards increasing resources for CWP activities. Lastly, I wish to also express my confidence in the CWP Steering Committee that has been active in our first year.

Since September 2013, we have made various inroads. I am happy to report that the CWP family is expanding by the day and that our work continues to assist hundreds of women within the Commonwealth. For instance, a new CWP branch was opened in Seychelles late last year – a step in the right direction given the patriarchal history of the Seychelles’ society. It is also a telling sign that the level of women’s representation is now over 40 per cent.

We have also continued to advocate for increased women representation in Parliaments, the Judiciary, and Cabinet and local governments within the Commonwealth. However, I must concede that we are still grappling with some really low percentages particularly in the Pacific and Caribbean regions. As CWP Chairperson, I intend to hold discussions with Heads of State and women leaders in the Pacific region regarding this matter.

I have held a number of discussions with Heads of State in the Caribbean geared towards forging mechanisms of increased women political representation. There have been concrete promises made to take up this matter with increased vigour and we are grateful for that. On the same note, I would like to remind Heads of Commonwealth States about the Harare Declaration of 1991 in which they resolved to pursue with vigour the quest for equality of women.

As a member of the Steering Committee, I would like to report that we have in place a draft Strategic Plan 2014-2016. It is my pleasure to report that this plan was generated through an all-inclusive process where the inputs and peculiar needs of each region were integrated. It is my profound hope that this plan will help to guide the implementation of our activities and strategic interventions.

In my capacity as CWP Chairperson, I have attended and participated in a number of conferences and events of CPA and CWP where various businesses have been transacted and suggestions made.

Earlier this year, I attended and participated in a “special call” meeting in Nassau, Bahamas where again the issue of increasing women political representation in that region formed part of the core discussions.

I also participated in an enriching Pan-Commonwealth conference in June this year in London in which we deliberated on the post-Millennium Development Goal era.

In July 2014, I had the opportunity to attend and participate in the 52nd CPA Canadian Conference in Fredericton, New Brunswick. I want to commend the CWP Canadian region Branch for its excellent outreach programme which has reached hundreds of people in Canada.

The CWP has continued to stand for women globally and detests all forms of abuse and violence against women on an international scale.

The cases of honor killings in Pakistan, the Mariam Yahia Ibrahim Ishag prosecution in Sudan and the abduction of schoolgirls in north-east Nigeria highlight the ill treatment of women across the globe. As Chairperson of the CWP, I have written letters to the Pakistan and Sudan Parliaments strongly urging them to fight for justice on behalf of these abused women.

During the recent 25th CPA Commonwealth Parliamentary Seminar in Arusha, Tanzania, the CWP moved a motion condemning the abduction of schoolgirls in Nigeria. It was an inhuman and cowardly act and one the CWP does not condone.

In conclusion, I want to remind everyone that the CWP is an Association that will make little progress unless we unite and work together. I therefore want to urge all of us to uphold the values and benefits of continued discussions and close dialogue.

This connection is vital in promoting the exchange of ideas. I look forward to meeting all of you and continuing to build upon this connection and fellowship during the upcoming 60th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in Yaoundé, Cameroon.
Above: The CWP Chairperson (second left) with members of the CWP Steering Committee and the CPA Secretary-General Dr William F. Shija (far right).

Below: Speaking at a session of the Pan-Commonwealth Conference, seated next to the CPA Secretary-General.