COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATION

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and
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WELCOME MESSAGE
7TH COMMONWEALTH YOUTH PARLIAMENT

DARWIN, NORTHERN TERRITORY

1 – 5 NOVEMBER, 2015
Madam Speaker, Honourable Kezia Purick, MLA, Legislature of the Northern Territory

We saw on our TV sets yesterday the heavy rain and flash flooding in Brisbane which resulted in the loss of lives and properties.

I ask that we rise in a minute of silence to honour the loss of lives in the heavy rain in Brisbane. May their souls rest in peace, Amen.

And now to the business of the day.

- Hon. Kezia Purick, MLA, Speaker of the Legislature of Northern Territory
- Hon. Members of the Legislative Assembly of Northern Territory
- Honourable Members of Parliament
- Mr Michael Tatham, Clerk of the Legislative Assembly of Northern Territory
- Commonwealth Youth Parliamentarians
- Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Morning.

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all this 7th International Commonwealth Youth Parliament. We are honoured and pleased
to be here in Darwin, this beautiful capital city of the Northern Territory.

Madam Speaker, this is the second time the Youth Parliament has been hosted by an Australian jurisdiction – the first was in 2005; it was held in Brisbane, Australia.

The Commonwealth Youth Parliament is now a permanent part of the CPA Annual calendar and will continue to rotate amongst the 9 Regions of the Commonwealth. Last year, the 6th Commonwealth Youth Parliament was held in North West Provincial Legislature, South Africa and next year (2016) it will be hosted by the British Columbia, Provincial Legislature, in Canada.

We have with us here today a representative from the British Columbia Legislature, Ms Susan Sourial who is here to participate and observe as that jurisdiction prepares to host the 8th Commonwealth Youth Parliament. I am sure over the course of the next few days you will all have an opportunity to meet and speak to her.

On behalf of the Chairperson and Executive Committee Members of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and on my own behalf, I would like to take this opportunity to wish you the very best for the events over the next four days.
Now, for those who are not very familiar with our work, the CPA is an Association for Commonwealth Parliamentarians. We connect, develop, promote and support Parliamentarians and their staff to identify benchmarks of good governance, and implement the enduring values of the Commonwealth. Outside of our core membership we have two outreach programmes – the first involves our work for Commonwealth Day, which is celebrated annually, on the second Monday in March, and the second is this programme – the CPA Commonwealth Youth Parliament.

What is the Commonwealth, some may ask? The Commonwealth, as an entity, is a group of self-reliant, independent states, held together by means of historic ties and cultural values. Some say it has lost its significance, but in truth, its relevance in today's world is of vital importance for global peace and security.

With 2.2 billion people, it comprises almost a third of the world’s population. 53 countries are members of the organisation – they span from Africa to Asia, Australia to the Americas, Europe to India and the Pacific.

They could not be more diverse – they are amongst the world’s largest, smallest, richest and poorest countries. 31 of these countries are classified as small states – i.e. countries with a population size of 1.5 million people or less.
We know that over 60% of the population of the Commonwealth is below the age of 30, and it has been recognized that, because of this statistic, it is important that you, our young citizens, be included in our quest to promote parliamentary democracy, and ultimately to promote development throughout the Commonwealth.

The Youth Parliament programme is one of the key programmes organized by the CPA. It was designed to demonstrate to potential future young parliamentarians the fundamentals behind the processes of Parliament. It seeks to show, to some extent, how most Commonwealth Parliaments are able to make legislation; to debate matters of national and international concern; to demand accountability from those in government; to make use of Committees; and to make and enforce their own rules of conduct, practice and behaviour.

This programme offers you an opportunity to experience one of the key institutions which underpin democracy and good governance. It will help you as participants to appreciate the skills that are required for sound debate and the other aspects of the legislative process.

In addition, the programme will provide you with practical experience of the parliamentary system. You will be given an
opportunity to have your opinions heard and to learn the benefits of operating in a democratic framework.

Put simply, it is a programme of ‘learning by doing’ on parliamentary activity.

Each of the 56 young people here today has been selected by your various Parliaments to be their representative here in Darwin. I feel sure that, over the coming days, you will fully embrace this rare opportunity to interact with your fellow participants from all 9 CPA regions.

You are about to embark on a journey that, at the end, will have you involved in a mock parliamentary debate in the Northern Territory Parliamentary Chamber on ‘Human Rights’. Though this event is mainly about ‘role play’, the issue of Human Rights is a very real and important issue in our world today.

The CPA has delivered a series of workshops for Parliamentarians over the last 3 years which have focused on Human Rights. The most recent was delivered this year in Wellington, New Zealand, for Parliamentarians from the Australia and Pacific CPA regions.

The role of Parliament and Parliamentarians in the promotion and protection of human rights is vital as a marker of good governance, and in the evolution of human rights. The ideals of human rights
inform and deepen democracy. They are also a means of creating a fairer and more equitable world order.

I am sure many of you during your research as you prepared for this programme would have come across the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process – this allows the human rights records of states to be reviewed and assessed by the United Nations Human Rights Council. The aim of this process is to improve the human rights situation in all countries and to address human rights violations wherever they occur.

I know that the significance of this exercise will last in your memories as you prepare for possible future careers. I also believe that this opportunity will provide you with the knowledge to make you a better and more informed citizen of the Commonwealth.

I encourage each of you to participate, exchange fully and have robust discussions during each session.

This International Commonwealth Youth Parliament has a unique feature, in that we have now involved Young Members of Parliament from around the Commonwealth. There are 7 of these Members. They are here to act as mentors and to give you, our Commonwealth Youth Parliamentarians, the benefit of their experience – as well as their knowledge. They are not here to debate on your behalf, nor are they here to observe. You must take
advantage of their presence and ensure that you ask questions of them both formally during their sessions as well as informally during the caucusing sessions.

I wish to thank the Honourable Speaker, the Clerk and their staff for their hosting of this event. Without their partnership and cooperation, this Youth Parliament would not have been possible.

I am sure that you will join me in extending our appreciation for all their hard work, and the very warm welcome.

I wish you all a very successful Youth Parliament! Thank you.

2 November 2015
Darwin, Australia