55th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference
Arusha, Tanzania

Sunday 4 October 2009
Commonwealth Parliamentary Task Force on Climate Change

Moderator: Mr Nigel Evans, MP, United Kingdom

Discussion Leaders: Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods, MP, United Kingdom

Hon. Madame Fatima Houda-Pepin, Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly of Quebec, Canada

Hon. Timon R. Aneri, MP, Kiribati

Sheik Fazlul Karim Selim, MP, Bangladesh

Mr Mitchell O’Brien
Parliamentary Strengthening Program, World Bank Institute

Dr Habiba Gitay, Ecologist
Parliamentary Strengthening Program, World Bank Institute

Task Force Conclusion

It is vital that Parliaments and Parliamentarians contribute to world leadership in addressing the problems arising from climate change. A parliamentary network will enable individual jurisdictions and regions to better share and disseminate information on how to achieve energy reduction and to reduce carbon emissions at a local level. This exchange of information will enable individual Parliaments and Parliamentarians to facilitate practical action to implement changes to improve resilience in communities at the local and global levels.

The CPA should lead global collective action now, including by contributing to the upcoming Climate Change Conference (COP15), scheduled to take place in December 2009 in Copenhagen, Denmark, and beyond, to mitigate the adverse effects of climate change. The members of the CPA desire an ongoing dialogue on climate change so that Parliamentarians can develop better access to available information which will enable them to engage with their communities, the private sector and the media and to contribute to responses to climate change for the long term. The Task Force will establish a programme to provide support to Parliaments and Parliamentarians, of developed and developing countries, in preparing action plans to establish legislation and policies to mitigate the effects of and adapt to climate change.
Overview
It is a significant development for Commonwealth members that the Commonwealth Parliamentary Task Force on Climate Change has been established, and many delegates spoke strongly in favour of the Task Force taking a strong leadership role in addressing climate change problems. The Task Force provides a critical mechanism for parliamentarians from developed and developing countries alike to enhance their understanding as to what climate change is and of its impact on local communities. Through its role in encouraging delegates to work together, the Task Force can enhance processes for countries in developing individual legislative and programme responses in adaptation to and mitigation of climate change.

Mr Nigel Evans welcomed the launch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Task Force on Climate Change, commenting that the Task Force could be the voice for individuals who know the impact of climate change in their own countries and regions. While dialogue at the government level is important, he encouraged delegates to reflect on the added dimension of a dialogue among parliaments and parliamentarians and to support the building up of a parliamentary network on climate change. Mr Evans mentioned that parliamentarians could apply the knowledge they gained in this way, recognise common themes and argue for governments to take certain actions and deliver on stated aims and plans.

Mr Evans advised delegates that a budget of £Stg25,000 was available to the Task Force to implement a programme to address the concerns identified. The aim was that together, the Task Force, the World Bank Institute and the Commonwealth Secretariat could support delegates and their parliaments to target national and international commitments.

Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods agreed it was a good idea to gather information about what resources and funds are available to support climate change responses, to help ensure resources are used effectively. She observed that legislation provides a certain foundation for action. Discussions should take place on a regional basis so others in the same region learn about what actions people are taking. The Task Force on Climate Change could assist this process by directing extra resources into measures which recognise that climate change is a priority area for policy programming. Dr Blackman-Woods also encouraged delegates to use the resources which had already been developed by the CPA.

Mr Mitchell O’Brien stated that the World Bank Institute (WBI) was committed to assisting with the demand for greater community outreach, improving the knowledge of parliamentarians about climate change issues, sharing information and assisting in developing legislative responses. The WBI recognises the particular challenges for small countries and the value in identifying local solutions and sharing experiences. Mr O’Brien encouraged delegates to join in the work of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Task Force.
Dr Habiba Gitay saw a high priority need in better managing risks and sharing information, including technology transfer. She considered that the Task Force could provide a link from local issues into the global agenda. Dr Gitay referred to the conference in Copenhagen in December 2009 as a rallying point for participants to adopt plans and measures to reduce the adverse effects of climate change on the environment, societies and economies, especially in developing nations. However, it is but one step and not the endpoint. Effective responses to climate change need to address issues critical for the long term, such as land management. The CPA network could be most effective in this process because it includes some of the worst affected countries. There is the opportunity for having mentoring arrangements and capacity development, which in turn can lead to local action and finding a way forward. The way forward should address reaching out to the private sector, including the media, to set up a positive legacy for the future.

The Hon. James Netto, MP, Gibraltar, restated the need not to focus too strongly on Copenhagen in the short term, but encouraged delegates to look beyond that meeting. In particular, he identified the significant scale of the difficulties to be accepted and resources needed to address them. Mr Netto considered that governments would need to implement legislation, and that each local region or government would need to develop a response but that a network of local areas would be required.

Some delegates expressed specific concerns that decisions needed to achieve appropriate outcomes. The Hon. Jim K. Muhwezi, MP, Uganda, commented that while action was needed, policies needed to recognise practical issues, such as the need to eat as well as to protect the environment. Mr Shane Ardern, MP, New Zealand, encouraged the Task Force to take careful action in preparing contributions to the conference in Copenhagen, because outcomes needed to be realistic. He had a concern that sometimes actions don’t seem appropriate for individual countries, for example, he cited the Kyoto Protocol ban on forestry offsets as inappropriate for agrarian economies and countries like New Zealand.

Mr Tom Marsters, MP, Cook Islands, expressed a doubt that some proposals for change would truly lead to best practices, for example, he was concerned about whether carbon trading schemes would result in a reduction of greenhouse gases. On the other hand, Hon. John Pandazopoulos, MP, Victoria, Australia, argued that a price mechanism was needed because he considered that someone had to pay to ensure positive change was achieved. He also supported the call for better education of communities about real problems, and to commit resources to achieve positive change. Similarly, The Hon. Hari Ramkarran, MP, Speaker of the House, Guyana, proposed that in relation to the issue of deforestation, there be a carbon market for standing forests so developing countries would be encouraged to earn money or credits for nurturing forests, to prevent them all being cut down to facilitate other land uses.

Delegates from Kiribati, Mr Timon Aneri and Dr Tataina, MP, and Bangladesh, Dr Oli Ahmad, Bir Bikram MP, Mr Nawab Ali Abbas Khan, MP, and the Hon. Dr Ashequr Rahmin, MP, spoke further about the serious threats of rising sea levels to the very existence of their communities on low lying lands. The Hon. Phee Boon Poh, MP, Penang, Malaysia, identified that coastal flooding due to climate change seriously affected Malaysia also because most of its border area was coastal.
Dr Ahmad said that countries who had contributed most to climate change needed to make a commitment about what behaviours to address, and that effective measures needed to be identified and included in legislation to give effect to commitments. He made several proposals – developed countries should make an effective commitment of financial and technical support to developing countries; Commonwealth countries should make a commitment to reducing greenhouse gases; developing countries which are adversely affected should receive immediate attention from the world community; and the CPA should play an important role in the Copenhagen conference. Mr Khan emphasised that Bangladesh did not have enough resources to tackle the solutions alone. Dr Rahmin suggested that measures such as a national environment committee were needed. The future of every country, not only these low lying nations, was at stake because of the adverse changes taking place. To address these issues, it was necessary to encourage an attitudinal change in everyone to contribute. Mr Aneri argued that it was important for all nations to reduce dangerous emissions, and the delegates agreed that all countries should stand united to tackle this important issue with all available resources.

The Hon. Njoroge Baiya, MP, Kenya, identified that adverse effects of climate change were leading to changes in village life in Kenya and to reduced agricultural production. He was concerned that adverse effects were leading to an economic crisis. Mr Baiya agreed that a user pays principle should apply and that the dissemination of information was very important.

Shri Baijayant Panda, MP, India, observed that there had already been adverse impacts of climate change on the environment in India. He was concerned about future development in India, which had 4% of the world’s carbon and 16% of its people. The nation needs to access energy to enable development, and Shri Panda considered that with wind and solar energies still requiring further development to make them viable, he was in favour of carbon trading to enable the development of resources, including by using coal energy. Mr Poh too was concerned that charges associated with carbon trading schemes acted as a tax on development and would mean lost revenues to individual economies.

Ms Vicky Dunne, MLA, Australian Capital Territory, Australia, informed the discussion that her region had been affected by drought, bushfires and storms. The local government had committed to Kyoto Protocol style goals, and there was substantial community support for feed-in tariffs and energy efficiency targets.

The Hon. Paul Delorey, MP, Speaker of the House, North West Territories, Canada, reported that the adverse effects of climate change were evident in the North West Territories of Canada and that caribou and polar bear were disappearing. He observed that there seemed to be considerable variance in claims about what would happen in the future and it was important to identify as clearly as possible what changes could or were expected to take place. The Hon. Mwansa Kapeya, MP, Zambia, recognised that some countries were reporting on targets. He suggested that the Task Force review the current policies in response to the recent disasters in Asia and the Pacific areas. It was important to look at what developed countries had done and were doing, because of the potential for developing countries to follow the same path.
Ms Sue Kedgley, MP, New Zealand, said there wouldn’t be one solution appropriate for everyone, rather it was necessary to use appropriate technology for individual circumstances. She recounted a recent report about an inspiring young person from Milawi who had built an energy system to power his whole village from discarded and recycled materials.

The Hon. Dharamlal Koushik, MP, Speaker of Chhattisgarh, India, informed delegates that India had established a national action plan on climate change, which incorporates India’s vision of ecologically sustainable development with energy efficient economic development. Put simply, people would like high standards of living, but they also want clean water to drink, fresh air to breath and a green earth to live in. Mr Koushik said that the world must encourage a shift from economic activity based on fossil fuels to fuels from clean, renewable energy sources. He said India was prepared to commit to and be active in an effort for sustainable development which was global, collaborative and cooperative, and at the same time fair and equitable.