

Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians



Published by the Commonwealth
Parliamentary Association

www.cpahq.org

COMMONWEALTH WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS (CWP)

Gender equality is viewed not only as a goal in its own right but also as a key factor in enhancing democracy and peace, eradicating poverty and violence against women, ensuring education for all, improving maternal health, reducing child mortality and combating HIV/AIDS. Advancing gender equality across the Commonwealth will contribute to development, democracy and peace.

Rt Hon. Don McKinnon, Commonwealth Secretary-General
Foreword, Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality
2005-2015

AIMS OF THE COMMONWEALTH WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS

1. To further the representation of women in Parliaments throughout the Commonwealth.
2. To ensure that matters of specific concern to women are put on the CPA agenda and conveyed to individual Parliaments and brought to the attention of the CPA Executive Committee.
3. To work towards the mainstreaming of gender considerations in all CPA activities and programmes.
4. To meet annually at the time of the CPA Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference.
5. To facilitate networking between the women Parliamentarians of the Commonwealth and the women's wings of international organizations.
6. To enhance the participation and representation of women in the CPA by lobbying the CPA Executive Committee, and by applying pressure and raising awareness at both the Branch and Regional levels.
7. To propose possible topics for CPA study groups to consider, or for special conferences to address.

HISTORY OF CWP

The Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) developed from an informal meeting of women Parliamentarians held at the 35th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in Barbados in 1989, initiated by Sen. Norma Cox Astwood (Bermuda). For the first year, and for part of the second year, Sen. Cox Astwood acted as Co-ordinator for the “women’s caucus”, and it is largely due to her efforts that the CWP came into existence at all and that the initial momentum was maintained.

At the midyear Executive Committee meeting in 1992 CWP gained official recognition, which was confirmed by the General Assembly on 8 October 1992.

The sixth meeting of the CWP was held in Banff, Canada. This was the first meeting that was officially reported to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference, thereby ensuring that the concerns of the CWP became known to all the delegates attending the Conference, a practice that continues. Following this meeting, a member of the Secretariat staff was detailed to provide ad hoc support to the CWP.

Since 1995, recognizing that CWP meetings had become an integral part of the Conference programme, the Conference agenda has provided three hours for the CWP to meet at a time during normal Conference hours that does not conflict with other official events.

The year 1997 was a watershed in the CWP’s history. At its meeting in Mauritius in that September, the CPA Executive Committee approved a budget to enable the senior Steering Committee Members to attend the annual Conference and meet before the Conference proper, the first such meeting to be in New Zealand in 1998, and a second budget to facilitate communications between Steering Committee Members and with other women Parliamentarians in their Regions.

At their meeting in Edinburgh in 1997, Commonwealth Heads of Government endorsed the efforts of the CPA and the CWP:

Heads of Government reaffirmed their commitment to the fundamental values of the Commonwealth as set out in the Harare Declaration of 1991 and emphasized that democ-

racy, good governance, sustainable development and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms were interdependent and mutually reinforcing. They commended the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association for its work in strengthening the democratic culture and effective parliamentary practices, and its efforts to enhance the participation of women in public life.

At the suggestion of the CWP Steering Committee, an overt commitment to gender equality was formally adopted into the CPA constitution at the General Assembly of the Association in 1998.

CWP CHAIRPERSONS 1994-2004

- 1994/95 **Hon. Srimani Athulathmudali, MP**
Minister of Transport, Environment And Women's Affairs (Sri Lanka)
- 1995/96 **Hon. Datin Paduka Zaleha Bt. Ismail**
Minister of National Unity and Social Development (Malaysia)
- 1996/97 **Hon. Monique Ohsan-Bellepeau, MP**
Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office (Mauritius)
- 1997/98 **Rt Hon. Jenny Shipley, MP**
Prime Minister (New Zealand)
- 1998/99 **Sen. the Hon. Dr Daphne Phillips**
Minister of Culture and Gender Affairs (Trinidad and Tobago)
- 1999/2000 **Mrs Jean Corston, MP**
(United Kingdom)
- 2000/01 **Dr Lesley Clark, MLA**
Parliamentary Secretary to the Premier (Queensland)
- 2001/02 **Hon. Netumbo N. Ndaitwah, MP**
Minister of Women Affairs and Child Welfare (Namibia)
- 2002/03 **Hon. Begum Khurshid Zahan Haque, MP**
Minister for Women and Children Affairs (Bangladesh)
- 2003/04 **Hon. Lindiwe Maseko, MPL**
Chairperson of Chairpersons (Gauteng) (Acting)
- 2004/07 **Hon. Lindiwe Maseko, MPL**
Chairperson of Chairpersons (Gauteng)

As directed by the Executive Committee, the CPA Secretary-General presented a CWP Report to the General Assembly at its meeting in Bangladesh in 2003. The report charted the progress made on the commitments made by the Executive Committee to monitor the achievements in women's representation, to continue to encourage regions and Branches to appoint women to the Executive Committee and to nominate women as delegates to conferences and all CPA meetings. The report, which was endorsed by the CWP Steering Committee and the Executive Committee, represented a strong commitment to advancing the aims and objectives of the CWP.

It was at the same General Assembly meeting in Bangladesh that the recommendations for changes to the structure of the CWP were agreed. These changes designed to help the CWP play a more significant role in the Association were supported by the CWP Steering Committee and the CPA Executive Committee following an in depth review by a CPA Working Party. These were: to reduce the size of the CWP Steering Committee to 10 Members, one nominated from each region for three years plus the Chairperson and a new post of CWP President nominated by the Branch hosting the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference.

It was also decided that the post of CWP Chairperson should be elected for a term of three years by those Members attending the CWP business meeting at the time of the annual conference, and that the CWP Chairperson be an ex officio Member of the CPA Executive Committee.

The first ever election to the post of CWP Chairperson was held at the CWP Business Meeting in Canada in 2004 and Hon. Lindiwe Maseko, MPL, from the provincial Legislature of Gauteng, South Africa, was duly elected.

The General Assembly at its meeting in Canada in 2004 agreed to constitutional changes relating to the status of the CWP, recognizing the need to bring the CWP more formally into the structure of the Association by adding an article to the constitution defining the purpose of the CWP, formally empowering it to elect a Chairperson and operate within CPA rules and making that Chairperson a Member of the CPA Executive Committee.

This reflects the CPA's constitutional and strategic plan commitments to advance the representation of women in Commonwealth Parliaments and Legislatures, to increase the involvement of women Parliamentarians in CPA affairs and to promote the discussion of gender issues in Parliaments and in the CPA. It would also reflect the commitment of Commonwealth governments to increase parliamentary representation by women.

THE CWP TODAY

The Strategic Plan for the Association, 2003-2007, includes the commitment to improve representation for Commonwealth women in Parliament and for women Parliamentarians in the CPA. Core Objective 6 states:

To promote gender equality in the work of the CPA and across the Association and encourage women to stand for election to representative bodies by advocating the removal of barriers to their participation and to facilitate their professional contribution as Members.

The CWP has been involved in a number of projects directed towards considering how the situation of women in public life can be enriched.

The projects are part of the long-term strategy of strengthening Parliament to promote democratic values and policies, which give people equality, freedom and a voice in their governance. The continuing goal is to improve the representation of women in decision-making positions throughout the Commonwealth and the professional development of women Members once they are in Parliament.

In December 2003 the CPA collaborated with the Gender Section of the Social Transformation Programmes Division of the Commonwealth Secretariat and the British Council to organize a Workshop on Gender, Development and Democracy. The main aims and objectives were to

bring together new Parliamentarians to share experiences as politicians on barriers and challenges they face, and consider strategic partnerships to engender development and democracy;

raise awareness on the role of civil society and the role

they can play in collaboration with politicians in addressing policy issues, and identify issues to be included in the Commonwealth Action Plan for Women's Affairs Ministers' Meeting, and to chart the progress towards meeting CHOGM targets in priority areas

Planned to coincide with the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Nigeria in December 2003, the Workshop provided a very useful opportunity to highlight the issue of gender in the context of development and democracy. The Workshop brought together 17 Parliamentarians from across the Commonwealth together with representatives of the Commonwealth Business Women's Network and the Commonwealth Civil Society Forum.

The Workshop calls on Heads of Government to promote gender equality and equity as a central principle in the achievement of development and democracy for all Commonwealth peoples, recognising the crucial part Parliamentarians must play in partnership with civil society organizations and the private sector.

Extract from the Communiqué to Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting from the Commonwealth Workshop on EnGENDERing Development and Democracy, Abuja, Nigeria, 3-5 December 2003

A follow-up Workshop on Women, Development and Democracy was organized for women and men as a satellite meeting to the seventh Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers Meeting (7WAMM) in Fiji in 2004. The focus was on increasing the representation and participation of women in Parliaments and other decision making bodies; mainstreaming gender equality into all policies, programmes and projects; the adoption, ratification, implementation and monitoring of instruments that promote democracy, non-discrimination, and women's human rights; developing gender-responsive budgets and integrating gender analysis and gender equality provisions into all poverty eradication programmes and United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDG) strategies.



At the Workshop on Gender, Development and Democracy, held in the Fiji Islands.

Recognizing that Parliamentarians, both female and male, are strategically placed to provide leadership in advancing gender issues in political and decision-making processes, the participants forwarded their recommendations in the form of a

Women in Decision-Making

The Workshop agrees that the Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development provides governments with the framework for the attainment of the target of 30 per cent representation of women in Parliament and other decision-making bodies by 2005. Parliamentarians note the progress that some countries have made in achieving this target, including through affirmative action. Parliamentarians express deep concern that the Commonwealth target is not receiving the attention it deserves from governments. Parliamentarians urge Heads of Government to take immediate action to provide resources and practical strategies to make this goal a reality.

Extract from the Communiqué to Commonwealth Ministers responsible for Women's Affairs, Nadi Fiji, 2004 from the Commonwealth Workshop on Gender, Development and Democracy, Suva, Fiji 28–30 May 2004

communiqué to Ministers who were finalizing the new Commonwealth Gender Plan of Action 2005-2015. For the first time, five Members who attended the Workshop went on to represent the CPA at the Ministerial Meeting in Fiji.

STRUCTURE OF THE CWP STEERING COMMITTEE

The CWP Steering Committee now comprises 10 Members: one Member from each of the nine CPA Regions, a nominated President and the elected Chairperson. The structure is designed to provide for maximum continuity and to provide strong leadership for the CWP.

Each Steering Committee Member serves a term of three years, apart from the President who holds the position for a one-year term and is nominated by the Branch hosting the annual CPA Conference. A meeting is held once a year immediately preceding the annual conference and attendance at the annual conference is at the host Branch's expense. However, it is preferable for the Branch to nominate the Steering Committee Member as a formal delegate with voting rights. The responsibilities of Steering Committee Members are as follows:

- To act as conduit of information on CPA/CWP matters from Chairperson/Secretariat to women in their Region,
- To act as an information source for women MPs in their region on CPA/CWP matters, and to personally encourage women Parliamentarians to put their names forward as delegates, panellists and plenary speakers at CPA events,
- To lobby to encourage consideration of women as Regional Representatives on the CPA Executive Committee when vacancies occur,
- To determine the agenda for the CWP Meeting, in consultation with the host Branch, the CWP President and the CPA Secretariat. The CWP traditionally runs one plenary session at the annual conference on a gender related topic which is attended by all conference delegates,
- To promote the formation of local branches of the CWP in CPA Branches, and
- To meet before the Annual Conference and assess the progress made by the CWP across the Association and to put forward proposals for further action. The Steering Committee representative is expected to submit a short

written report at the meeting detailing activities and progress within their Region over the year.

Democracy is a fundamental value of the Commonwealth. Women's full participation in democracy is crucial for the achievement of sustainable development. A target of no less than 30 per cent of women in decision-making in the political, public and private sectors has been set by Heads of Government.

Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality 2005-2015

WOMEN IN DECISION-MAKING

In March 2005, the participation of women in national Parliaments worldwide stood at 15.9 per cent. At the seventh Meeting of Commonwealth Minister's Responsible for Women's Affairs in Fiji in 2003, Ministers reaffirmed the 30 per cent target of women in decision-making in the political, public and private sectors by the year 2015 (previously set by Heads of Government in 1997). The following figures show, however, that most Commonwealth countries will have to make radical changes in the next few years if they are to meet that target.

According to data issued by the Inter-Parliamentary Union



The seventh Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers Meeting (7WAMM) in 2004.

(IPU), the proportion of women in politics has increased from 12.8 per cent in 1999 to 15.9 per cent in 2005.

Analysis of Commonwealth national Parliaments shows that since 1999 24 countries have recorded an increase in female parliamentary representation, with St Vincent and the Grenadines and Guyana recording the largest increases, by 17.7 per cent and 16.7 per cent respectively. Lesotho's representation rose by 7.9 per cent from three Members out of 80 in 1999 to 14 Members out of 120 in 2003. However, 15 countries also recorded a reduction from 0.1 per cent (United Kingdom) to 8.8 per cent (Bangladesh). Canada continues to increase the ratio of women in decision-making posts at all levels: 20.9 per cent in the House of Commons; 34.7 per cent in the Senate; 25.8 per cent of federally appointed judges; and 20.2 per cent of Members of provincial and territorial Legislatures. In June 2005 33 per cent of representatives in South Africa's Legislatures were women, with also 30.4 per cent of the national Parliament. In the cabinet 43 per cent are women holding key ministries including portfolios for foreign affairs, home affairs, education and the public service. The Deputy President is also a woman while four of nine provincial Premiers or Governors are women, as well as four of nine Speakers in provincial Legislatures.

WOMEN ON THE CPA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

At the CPA General Assembly in Bangladesh in 2003, the historic decision to include the CWP Chairperson on the CPA Executive Committee was taken. The CWP Chairperson serves an *ex officio* Member with full voting rights. However, it is still important to improve the number of women nominated to serve as Regional Representatives on the Executive Committee. The Chairman of the Executive Committee therefore continues to write to all Branch Presidents and Secretaries encouraging them to ensure that more women are chosen as Regional Representatives to serve on the CPA Executive Committee. One of the responsibilities of Steering Committee Members is to lobby to encourage consideration of women as Regional Representatives on the CPA Executive Committee when vacancies occur.

The number of women Members on the Executive Committee has increased steadily.

Table B: Women on the CPA Executive Committee (1986–2005)

<i>YEAR</i>	<i>PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN</i>
1986	4 per cent
1991	0 per cent
1996	6.5 per cent
2001	17.6 per cent
2002	19.4 per cent
2003	20.6 per cent
2004	20.6 per cent
2005	22.8 per cent

PARLIAMENTARY INFORMATION AND REFERENCE CENTRE

The Parliamentary Information and Reference Centre (PIRC) of the CPA Secretariat is able and willing to respond to enquiries on women's issues by the provision of statistical data, Acts and Bills, parliamentary reports and other documentation. The Centre is generally well placed to obtain specific pieces of legislation or documentation relating to women by reference to its network of Clerks, typically the Secretaries of CPA Branches.

CWP ON THE INTERNET

Details of the CWP, its aims, activities, and its Steering Committee, have been posted on the CPA's Internet site. Additionally the data on women representation gathered from Branches has also been posted on the Internet, along with other information relating to women Parliamentarians. The CPA website (www.cpahq.org) is currently being developed to not only provide women Members with information relating to the CWP, but also to allow women Members to interact with each other.

**COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATION SECRETARIAT
SUITE 700, WESTMINSTER HOUSE, 7 MILLBANK,
LONDON SW1P 3JA, UNITED KINGDOM.**

TEL.: (+44-20) 7799-1460

FAX: (+44-20) 7222-6073

E-MAIL: hq.sec@cpahq.org

WEBSITE: www.cpahq.org

August 2005