



60th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference

Conference Concluding Statement

No. 01, 14 October 2014

PARLIAMENTARIANS attending the 60th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference and associated meetings recognized the Commonwealth's commitment to equality and the respect of political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development, in light of the conference theme **"Repositioning the Commonwealth for the Post-2015 Development Agenda"**.

The conference, hosted by the Parliament of Cameroon from 2 to 10 October in Yaoundé, was attended by over 500 Members and clerks representing Parliaments and legislatures from across the Commonwealth.

The meeting was chaired by the Speaker of the National Assembly of Cameroon and 2014 President of the CPA, Hon. Cavayé Yéguié Djibril, MP. It also included the Small Branches Conference (SBC) and the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) meetings.

This concluding statement contains

- the topics of discussion,
- a summary of delegates' discussions, and
- recommendations that were either endorsed or noted.

First Plenary:

Acknowledging that this meeting is taking place in the shadow of tragedy, the 60th CPC First Plenary paid homage to Dr William Ferdinand Shija, late CPA Secretary-General, who passed away on 4 October, 2014.

The First Plenary, chaired by the CPA President, heard from Mr Joe Omorodion, Acting CPA Secretary-General and Director of Finance, Mr Amitav Banerji, Director of Political Affairs Division at the Commonwealth Secretariat, the representative of the Commonwealth Secretary-General, H.E. Kamalesh Sharma, and the Secretary-General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Mr Martin Chungong.

The Conference acknowledged that Parliaments have a crucial role to play in defining the post-MDG era. The CPA provided a unique blend of experience for the 60th CPC Conference theme 'Repositioning the Commonwealth for the Post-2015 Development Agenda', from their work with Parliaments old and new, large and small, national and provincial, with both Westminster and presidential style Parliaments. Everyone recognized that Parliaments are no longer only concerned with issues within their national boundaries; but are engaging in global debates at the national level; empowering Members to turn their attention to local and international realities alike.

The Conference heard that public trust is crucial to the life of a Parliament. It is a matter that needs urgent attention and comes only when people feel that Members are successfully articulating the views of citizens. Members were urged to use technology and social media to bring Parliament closer to the people. The Plenary heard that Parliaments must be truly representative of society, with more women, more young people, and more Members of marginalized groups.

CPA Statement of Purpose

The CPA connects, develops, promotes and supports Parliamentarians and their staff to identify benchmarks of good governance and the implementation of the enduring values of the Commonwealth.

In order for Parliament to properly contribute to the new development agenda, it must be democratic and modern. The Commonwealth community must focus on democratic governance, to transform societies. Parliament must use its power to make laws and provide oversight to its people. It must be accountable to its people and uphold the constitution to improve the Commonwealth for the good of its citizens.

The eight conference workshops and their recommendations were as follows:

Workshop A: Unity in diversity: The role of Parliament

Section 65 of the Constitution of Cameroon mentions “unity in diversity”. The concept of unity underpins the diversity within Cameroonian society, a true asset to the nation. Delegates discussed the importance of protecting this unique diversity and nourishing the cultural differences Cameroon enjoys.

Cameroon has English and French influences, as well as its diverse indigenous cultures and languages. All Cameroonians speak a local dialect as well as French and/or English; political parties have actively embraced the linguistic and cultural diversity of Cameroon since independence and campaigned to protect the various cultures contributing to Cameroon’s people today.

Members debated how local languages and indigenous law should be protected, as well as the influences of European languages and cultures in the country. They recognized that national unity is the basis for ensuring and embracing diversity.

Recommendations from the workshop were:

- **Parliament must ensure that unity in diversity, as enshrined in the constitution of Cameroon, continues to be the foundation on which the Cameroonian nation reposes**
- **Parliament must ensure that its inter-Parliamentary diplomacy enhances the spirit of “unity in diversity”, a peculiarity of Cameroon which is essential for growth and development of Cameroon**
- **Parliament should ensure that diversity, which is the foundation of a strong society, is properly assessed and harnessed within constituencies with the view to building development programmes**
- **Parliament must ensure that, in its internal process as well as in its public expression, national cohesion in Cameroon is being consolidated**

All recommendations from the workshop were endorsed.

Workshop B: Joining hands for women’s rights: The role of Parliamentarians in gender empowerment

Members attested the need to go ‘beyond numbers’ when reflecting on the representation of women in Parliaments across the Commonwealth. Members discussed the importance of creating women’s caucuses across party lines in Parliaments, which can develop and strengthen women’s presence in Parliament. Members considered improving international links between women Parliamentarians for mutual support and sharing best practice.

Reaching out to gender empowerment organizations can help to understand how women are excluded in society. Members agreed that it is essential to understand the challenges specific to women to influence the development agenda on gender. Tracking legislation is important to ensure gender equity is achieved.

Parliamentarians agreed that mentoring schemes for women Parliamentarians are key to furthering women in the political sphere and that getting communities to encourage more women to enter public office is vital to increase numbers of women in legislatures.

Recommendations from the workshop were:

- **Intensive lobbying for more Bills that encourage more women in politics and allocate funds to create rehabilitation homes for abused and abandoned aged women**
- **Access to justice, equal treatment, right to own property, right to access credit, fairness in the distribution of family inheritance and obligations to children in case of divorce or separation**
- **Education is the key that opens doors of opportunities for women and also empowers them to take routine risk that someone else would shrink from**

All recommendations from the workshop were endorsed.

Workshop C: Evaluating the emergent content of the post-2015 development agenda against the standards set out in the Commonwealth Charter

Members considered how Commonwealth Parliaments could help develop and implement the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It was agreed that any action taken in Commonwealth countries should be linked to the aims of the Commonwealth Charter. Members also discussed the important role that Parliaments can play during the finalization of the SDGs, and in ensuring their governments implement them effectively.

The workshop noted that although some progress had been made in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), there were still many outstanding issues to tackle, and it was therefore extremely important that the process dealing with the new SDGs was robust and effective. There has been an exhaustive consultation process for developing the SDGs, collaborating with working groups, technical support teams and civil society. Though the current draft goals and targets need to be refined, they cover a much wider range of human activity than the MDGs.

Members referred to situations in their respective countries and parliaments. Some had created Parliamentary task forces to review the draft SDGs. Other Members were concerned for the lack of a specific goal in the draft on HIV/AIDS, which has now been encompassed into a more general health goal.

Recommendations from the workshop were:

- **Implementation support to developing countries in the Commonwealth should tackle domestic revenue collection, policy and institutional coherence as well as institutional and human resource capacity,**
- **Sanctorum: The will of democracy, governance, peace, freedom, tolerance, moderation, law, protection, inclusiveness, social equity demands a pragmatic action plan nationally and internationally**
- **Commonwealth Charter commitments to good governance should inform SDG implementation by Commonwealth Governments, and mean that Commonwealth parliaments should be well-informed to monitor such implementation**

All recommendations from the workshop were endorsed.

Workshop D: Good governance for the 21st century: Transparency and accountability continue to be needs and requirements throughout the Commonwealth

Members affirmed that the first accountability for Parliamentarians throughout the Commonwealth is to the people they serve. In doing so, every elected member should accept their responsibility as a public officer, and always act in the best interests of the people. Above all they have a duty to hold the government to account. Parliament must be independent in its practice of financial scrutiny, ensuring that proper checks and balances are placed on all government expenditures.

It was attested that responsible government should reflect how the executive is responsible to Parliament and not the other way around. The principle lies in the supremacy of parliament, with the executive accountable to it. Robust access to information systems, an independent commission reporting to Parliament, and the establishment of a public accounts committee would accomplish this.

Recommendations from the workshop were:

- **Legislatures and parliaments can achieve sustained and detailed transparency and accountability of government when elected Members are adequately supported in their scrutiny role**
- **Parliament has the responsibility to ensure accountability and openness of Executive government through powers including; oversight of government agencies, programmes and service delivery; scrutiny committees; and minimizing opportunities for corruption**
- **That legislatures throughout the Commonwealth each deliver an open government partnership action plan developed with public consultation, and commit to independent reporting on their progress**

All recommendations from the workshop were endorsed.

Workshop E: How can Parliament ensure that young people are placed at the centre of sustainable development: The role of education

Members were informed of a variety of potential actions and solutions around this. The discussion focused on the need to create an enabling environment whereby young people are meaningfully involved in the dialogue on sustainable development. This in turn will ensure their voices are heard, and their stake in the future is fully acknowledged.

Discussion leaders and Members also examined the need to integrate educational curriculum with skill development. This includes aligning vocational and technical training with current economic and employment opportunities, to achieve truly global and sustainable development. Educational programmes must become more accessible to young people regardless of economic circumstance or gender. Everyone agreed that legislators and policymakers have a myriad of tools at their disposal to ensure young people take their rightful place in society and help to shape sustainable development.

Recommendations from the workshop were:

- **Legislatures should enact laws to empower youth and ensure sustainable; governments should make policies and allocate funds for vocational and technical education**
- **Parliaments need to ensure that the education system of their jurisdiction actively engages young people in shaping how sustainable development is planned for and delivered**
- **Parliaments ought to create enabling environments for young people to participate in scrutinizing programmes designed to facilitate job creation and skills development through public hearings**
- **Parliament must, for sustainable development to be achieved, master and use its powers to legislate and oversee the implementation of a visionary educational policy**

All recommendations from the workshop were endorsed.

Workshop F: Financial oversight in Westminster style and francophone parliaments: sharing good practice

Discussion leaders shared their experiences of good practice in their individual legislatures. Members remarked on the considerable body of knowledge on Westminster style financial oversight, and on the lack of similar information on francophone Parliaments.

Members and discussion leaders discussed the differences in practices between the Napoleonic and Westminster systems, noting the strengths and weaknesses of each. The lack of public trust in Parliaments' ability to effectively enforce financial oversight was a common theme among Members' comments. The public will lose faith in the system of government if Parliaments do not continue to perform this vitally important role. Members noted the lack of confidence and trust in the institution of Parliament, and agreed this is largely due to the public knowing more and having better technology, enabling them to see where Parliaments' shortfalls lie.

Members agreed that it is incumbent that all Parliamentarians act transparently and accountably. Preparing and training for committee proceedings will ensure that legislatures improve financial oversight. It is important that Legislature has access to resources for this, so their committees can operate and research effectively.

Recommendations from the workshop were:

- **That transparency and effective information for the public be the primary objectives of any reform of the financial oversight exercised by Parliaments**
- **Parliament must ensure that effective financial oversight depends on the independence, objectiveness, solidness of structures and the level of its cooperation with the audit institutions**
- **Parliaments must ensure that committee Members undergo training in questioning techniques and the preparation of questions to ensure they deliver effective financial scrutiny of government departments**
- **Acknowledging that Parliaments in English- and French-speaking countries share common objectives regarding budgetary oversight, greater collaboration and sharing of good practices is recommended**

All recommendations from the workshop were endorsed.

Workshop G: What is the role of Parliament in providing for the most vulnerable in society?

The workshop focused upon two main aspects. The first related to the legislative aspect of transforming the lives of the most vulnerable. This requires a properly functioning democracy with a secure human rights regime in place and the will of legislators to ensure that the most vulnerable are protected.

The second aspect was directed less towards legislation itself, and more towards the framework in which legislators operate. It was stressed that Parliamentarians need to use Parliamentary tools to achieve their ends. Parliamentarians debated the extent to which Parliamentary resources should be dedicated to the plight of the vulnerable and in turn, relieving patterns of inequality.

Recommendations from the workshop were:

- **Parliaments and governments should work together with civil society and faith groups to transform the lives and opportunities of the most vulnerable people in society**
- **As a key aspect of their duty of representation, Parliaments should have regard to the particular importance of dismantling entrenched patterns of inequality.**

All recommendations from the workshop were endorsed.

Workshop H: Parliamentarians and public trust: do codes of conduct help?

Members heard the perspective of a UK Parliamentarian who described the crisis of public trust in Parliamentarians that stemmed from an expenses scandal. The consequent review of the code of conduct has resulted in a more robust system. Delegates discussed the impact of such scandals on the public's trust of politicians, negative media on politicians and lack of faith in the Parliamentary system. They considered the responsibility of the media to continue to hold politicians to account, but stressed that balance is key, and that Members should demand reason and perspective from the media.

Discussions centred on the role of an MP as a public officer, occupying a position of trust, authority or service under constituted authority. Codes of conduct reflect the very purposes of Parliamentary democracy and should advance public trust in Parliaments as institutions and Parliamentarians as representatives of the public. Members agreed on the importance of the position of non-political commissioners who are charged with enforcing standards. Though sanctions set out in codes vary immensely, from expulsion, which is rare, to admonishment, the most important variation is the cultural underpinning of the enforcement of rules. Culture affects how codes are enforced and Members agreed that developing a culture of standards within political parties is also paramount to the integrity of politics.

Recommendations from the workshop were:

- **That benchmarks be prepared to guide Parliaments in the development of codes of conduct which aim to enhance public trust in Parliaments and Parliamentarians**
- **Codes of conduct only improve trust in Parliamentarians if the public see that they are upheld, and that Parliamentarians represent all their constituents equally**

All recommendations from the workshop were endorsed.

Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians session: Increasing women's political representation in the commonwealth in the post-2015 era: challenges and way forward

Members received an account of the increase in women in Cameroonian politics and Members congratulated Cameroon for its example. Delegates discussed the importance of mentoring, mobilizing and motivating women in or entering politics. They stressed the importance of involving men in gender equality work and received resounding assent. Members agreed that women politicians must be unified in their voices, strong and consistent in their calls for equality in all sectors of society and all development efforts.

Members discussed the biggest obstacles to women in politics, which included the amount of family and household responsibilities they undertake, the discrepancy in income between men and women and the fact that fewer opportunities are afforded to women.

There was a strong call from Members to show unity and engage international organizations in enhancing female representation in politics, to share experiences and examples of best practice and embrace mentoring opportunities in the pursuit of absolute gender equality.

Recommendations from the workshop were:

- **Despite socio-cultural beliefs and patriarchy, Cameroon's significant increase in female political representation makes a case for further legislation. Sustained progress, however, depends on capacity building**
- **We have been speaking about getting more women in Parliament for many years. We now have to propose new, unique strategies to realize our goals**
- **That the CPA and member states establish mentorship programmes to provide support and guidance to women aspiring to run for political office at the municipal, provincial and national level**

34th Small Branches Conference

1st Plenary: The challenges of small states' vulnerabilities in their quest for social and economic development

It was recognized that improving the skills of the local workforce in small states improved the wider labour force, increasing potential revenues for social spending. In addition, studies showed that nations with higher educational standards had an increased GDP with one study concluding that a country with literacy scores that were 1% above the average could expect to see GDP per capita up to 1.5% higher. Better education also leads to better health, both indirectly, with inter-generational effects of better educated parents on the health of their children, and directly, with greater self-esteem and well-being for the educated.

Participants recognized that it was important to ensure that education linked to the needs of the community and that vocational education and apprenticeships were as important as purely academic education. Those who worked in sectors where wages had traditionally been lower should not be undervalued: many small states found that it is often necessary to rely on immigrant labour to undertake these lower paid roles if locals did not.

The recommendation from the 1st Plenary was:

- **Education is fundamental to improving small states resilience to improve social and economic outcomes that will be central to all policy decisions**

The recommendation from the workshop was endorsed.

2nd Plenary: What is the role of Parliament in providing for the most vulnerable in society?

Members outlined three vital points to consider when providing for vulnerable people in society: commitment to transformation, understanding of the nature of the transformation by listening to vulnerable people's needs, and partnering with non-government organizations (NGOs), which are often better placed than government to help vulnerable people.

Parliament needs to know where the key vulnerabilities lie, and lead and represent vulnerable people. They could do this by representing the most vulnerable groups in Parliament, especially women and indigenous people. Members agreed that political parties also played a role in ensuring the pre-selection of vulnerable groups. That, in turn, leads to parliament legislating accordingly, but also to raise awareness of particular issues: Parliamentarians have the ability to cajole, influence and give airtime to vulnerability issues. By scrutinising, Parliamentarians should ensure that policies are enhancing solutions for these issues and the budget allocates sufficient funds to mitigate vulnerability.

Recommendations from the 2nd Plenary were:

- **Parliaments and governments should work together with civil society and faith groups to transform the lives and opportunities of the most vulnerable people in society**
- **That all Parliamentarians, government or opposition, accept their responsibility for providing recommendations to support the vulnerable in society**
- **It is the duty and responsibility of all Parliaments to legislate to ensure effective social protection in particular of the most vulnerable**
- **As a key aspect of their duty of representation, Parliaments should have regard to the particular importance of dismantling entrenched patterns of inequality**

All recommendations from the workshop were endorsed.