CLOSING CEREMONY

14TH SEPTEMBER 2012

Venue: BMICH

Prepared by

HANSARD DEPARTMENT
Parliament of Sri Lanka
CLOSING CEREMONY

Present:

Hon. Chamal Rajapaksa - President of the CPA and Hon. Speaker of Sri Lanka
Dr. William F. Shija - Secretary-General of the CPA
Hon. Mninwa Johannes Mahlangu - Vice-President of the CPA
Rt. Hon. Sir Alan Haselhurst - Chairperson of the Executive Committee
Hon. Chandima Weerakkody - Hon. Deputy Speaker of Sri Lanka
Mr. Dhammika Dasanayake - Secretary-General of Parliament of Sri Lanka
And other Delegates

The Rt. Hon. Sir Alan Haselhurst: Mr. President, it is my happy duty and responsibility to say a few words to thank, first of all, the staff of the CPA Secretariat and also your staff for ensuring that arrangements have gone smoothly and we have had a successful Conference. A great deal of preparation for a Conference of this kind has to be done by our Secretariat in London and much liaison is necessary with the staff and the officials of the host country’s Parliament.

It is a mammoth undertaking and not everybody answers letters, when they should, indicating whether they are coming, who their delegates are and how many observers they would bring. There is a certain amount of energy that goes into doing all that and it is done very thoroughly and willingly by the staff members concerned. There is also a tremendous amount of paperwork that has to be produced, sometimes at speed. So, there is a considerable burden on the staff members as the Conference gets closer. So, I would like, first of all, to thank the CPA Secretariat staff warmly on your behalf for the important contribution that they have made to ensure that we all are here and in good order.

Then, of course, when we descend on the host country, I think from the first moment of arrival, there has been every intention to ensure that we should enjoy our time here, that we should be well looked after and that the arrangements should go smoothly. I think it is probably impossible to achieve a hundred per cent satisfaction simply because not everyone plays the game according to the rules. In the sense, you set a time and if somebody is a bit late, the staff to be able to absorb all those little difficulties and do it with a smile and still ensure that we get our business done is a considerable triumph. So, I think that the Parliamentary staff here in Colombo must really be diplomats in that way; they have smoothed any edges that have occurred. On the whole, I have no doubt that they have given us a very good experience while we are here. We shall remember our visit to Sri Lanka with great affection and respect for all that has been done on our behalf.

So, I hope our thanks will be conveyed through the Secretary-General to you, Mr. Speaker and to the Deputy Speaker who chaired the organizing committee.

Thank you very much.

The President: Thank you. Now, I call upon the incoming President, the Hon. Mninwa Johannes Mahlangu, MP to make his remarks.
The Hon. Mninwa Johannes Mahlangu: Mr. President, Programme Director, Your Excellencies, President of the CPA International, President of the CWP, Chairperson of the CPA, Secretary-General, Members of the Diplomatic Corp, members of the Secretariat of the Association, fellow Delegates, Observers and Distinguished Guests.

I am humbled by the singular honour of delivering the Vote of Thanks at this historic event which marks the end of the proceedings of the 58th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference. It is also worth noting that South Africa was re-admitted to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) during the 1995 Conference hosted by Sri Lanka. Some of you do not know that history. You would understand that during the apartheid era, South Africa was expelled from the Commonwealth and it was reintroduced here in Sri Lanka in 1995. I think that is commendable, wonderful and we are proud of it.

Accordingly, I bring with me a message of deeply-felt gratitude and humility on behalf of the Delegates across the length and breadth of the Commonwealth to the Sri Lanka CPA Branch for agreeing to host the Conference. The sterling work and the unwavering support in ensuring that this event becomes a success have not gone unnoticed, and for that we shall forever remain indebted to you, Mr. President. This has been a well-organized Conference. I have said it at the Opening Ceremony of this Conference too. We have just been caucusing with the South African Delegates right now as to what are we going to do to up our standards when we host the Conference in South Africa. So, it was so wonderfully done and I want to thank you for that. Mr President, I say this because I do know from my own country's experience, that it is not always easy to host such a big international event when one's country is still seized with the process of nation-building, reconciliation and still engaged in post-conflict transition. Just like Rwanda and South Africa, this country has gone through difficult moments of historical injustices which very few countries have ever experienced. But, we are amazed and very pleased at the fastest pace at which this country is recovering and developing. The development projects we have seen during our tours, the state of tourism and infrastructure, health, education and their impact in society are a reflection that indeed you are a nation at work, committed to reclaim the destiny of your people.

Some of these projects and natural wonders we came across will serve as lessons learnt for our Parliaments and will leave fond memories when we return to our respective countries. The courteous reception and generous hospitality extended to all our Delegates by the Sri Lankan people since the arrival deserve our deepest appreciation and deepest applause. Mr. President, in reflection of what we have discovered in Sri Lanka, I wish to borrow from the words of one of South Africa's freedom fighters, President Josiah Gumede reflecting and describing his visit and experiences in Georgia, Russia, in 1925. He said, “I have seen the new world to come, where it has already begun. I have been to the New Jerusalem. I have brought the key which would unlock the door to freedom. In outward appearance, the men and women are comely and black and brown hair, the complexion is white and rosy. They are brave and hard at work with great powers of endurance. They are hospitable to guests and strangers”. Mr. President, although ushered many moons ago, these words can still accurately describe our positive view of Sri Lanka. I must also express my appreciation on the high level of debate and robustness you have demonstrated during the workshops. This is a reflection of the extent to which our countries in global arena are committed to uphold the principles of democracy. Equally, I have the fervent hope that resolutions taken in this Conference will go a long way in
extricating our countries from many challenges they are seized with through empowering our Parliamentarians. Once again, I wish to extend my deep sense of appreciation to our fellow Delegates for the commitment demonstrated throughout the conference proceedings. In closing, I would like to thank the outgoing President, the Hon. Chamal Rajapaksa of Sri Lanka for all the hard work that went into for making the 58th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference a success. Let me also thank the President of the CWP for the valuable contribution to the CPA work throughout this Conference.

On behalf of South African CPA branch and its sub-branches, I express our deep sense of humility to all CPA branches for the confidence shown in my country to host the 59th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference.

We are looking forward to welcome the Commonwealth family to the shores of the Rainbow Nation and I have complete confidence that by working together as a Commonwealth family we will make the 59th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference a success.

I thank you.

Dr. William F. Shija: Mr. President, now I would like to kindly request the incoming President to present to you an official gift of silver salver as a remembrance of your work.

(At this stage, the outgoing President, the Hon. Chamal Rajapakse was awarded a silver salver by the incoming President, the Hon. Mninwa Johannes Mahlangu)

Dr. William F. Shija: Mr. President, Chairperson of the Executive Committee and Distinguished Delegates, let me now really take the opportunity first of all to smile to you and then invite the President of the CPA to make his closing remarks.

The President: Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is with great pleasure that I address you today at the Closing Ceremony of the 58th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference. Let me tell you how glad I am to state that in the true spirit of the Commonwealth family, we have had very cordial and fruitful deliberations during the last few days.

It is our sincere belief that all of you would have enjoyed and savoured the scenic beauty and the rich cultural heritage of our country. I am also certain that on some occasion or the other, you would have felt the warm hospitality of our people. There are many who contributed in one or more ways to make this Conference happen and that too, in a way, all our visitors would have benefited.

I am very grateful to His Excellency Mahinda Rajapaksa, the President of Sri Lanka for continuously extending his strong support and co-operation to make our Conference successful. I am also thankful to the Hon. Prime Minister, Hon. Ministers of the Cabinet, Hon. Leader of the Opposition and all the other Members of Parliament, for extending their wholehearted support in organizing this Conference.

A special word of thanks to Hon. Chandima Weerakkody, Deputy Speaker of our Parliament, who as the Chief Organizer of this landmark event played a pivotal role looking into every little detail and providing strong leadership.
There were, as I said earlier, many organizations in the Government that extended strong support to make this event what it was. Ministries of Defence and Urban Development, External Affairs and Mass Media and Information are some of them. My sincere thanks to all those institutions.

Let me also express my sincere gratitude to the Delegates and their spouses who accepted our invitation and came here to Colombo, not merely to participate in the Conference, but to get to know each other and renew our old friendship, to share, assess and evaluate our experiences, with a view to ensuring the future well-being of the Commonwealth and its institutions. It is because of your genuine interest in the Commonwealth, all our distinguished delegates have travelled long distances from many parts of the world to be here with us during the last few days. Let me express my sincere appreciation again to all of them for having accepted our invitation and participating so actively in the 58th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference.

I must also sincerely thank Dr. William F. Shija, Secretary-General of the CPA and his able team from the CPA Headquarters for the excellent support provided to us in organizing this event.

Last, but not the least, I must thank our Secretary-General of Parliament and his team for their commitment and effort in planning this event and executing it resulting in a successful Conference.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is our sincere hope that you will carry pleasant and warm memories of your stay in our beautiful land. Distinguished Delegates, I wish to express to you, my deep appreciation of your presence at this Conference and your active participation in the deliberations that made this Conference a great success.

Whilst taking this opportunity to wish you a safe journey back home, let me conclude by congratulating the new President of the CPA, the Hon. Mninwa Johannes Mahlangu of South Africa and wish him every success during his tenure of office. Thank you.

Now, I call upon the Secretary-General of the CPA to make an announcement.

**Dr. William F. Shija:** Mr. President, I know at any time you are going to declare the Conference closed and all of us will have to go back and I really wish the distinguished delegates here and all officers of the Association, God’s blessings on your return.

The Executive Committee wants to inform the officers of the Association, Regional Representatives and the CWP Chairperson to come to the Hosting Conference Executive Committee Meeting which is going to meet immediately after we leave here in the Committee Room C4 of the BMICH. Thank you very much.

**The President:** Thank you very much. I declare the 58th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference formally closed.

*(The Session Adjourned)*