



**49th CPA BRITISH ISLANDS AND MEDITERRANEAN
REGIONAL CONFERENCE**

The Role of Parliamentarians in Times of Crisis

Thursday 24th September 2020

Delivered Remotely

CPA Chairperson's Opening Address

Hon. Emilia Monjowa Lifaka, MP

- **Hon. Angelo Farrugia MP, Speaker of the House of Representatives of the Parliament of Malta**
- **Hon. Delegates of the CPA British Islands and Mediterranean Regional Conference**
- **Hon. Ministers**
- **Right Honourable and Honourable Members**
- **Members of the Diplomatic Corps**
- **Mr Stephen Twigg, Secretary-General of the CPA**

- **Mr Jon Davies, Regional Secretary for the BIM Region**
- **Clerks and Secretaries of the Delegations**
- **Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen**

Hon. Members,

It is a great honour to have been invited to make the Chairperson's Opening Address at the 49th CPA British Islands and Mediterranean (BIM) Regional Conference on the topic of 'The Role of Parliamentarians in Times of Crisis'.

I would firstly like to thank our hosts, the Parliament of Malta and CPA Malta Branch, and in particular Hon. Angelo Farrugia MP, Speaker of the House of Representatives of the Parliament and former CPA Small Branches Chairperson. I am delighted to be sharing a platform with my esteemed colleague once again and I am sure all delegates are greatly appreciative of the hard work from yourself and your parliamentary team which has ensured this conference could take place.

I believe this is the first BIM Regional Conference to be held remotely and its success is testament to the ingenuity of the Parliament of Malta and the wider region. It follows a very effective and fruitful virtual CPA International Executive Committee Meeting that I chaired in August and I imagine we will be harnessing these new technologies increasingly in the coming months as face to face meetings still remain difficult in many parts of the world.

For those who are attending a CPA event for the very first time, may I briefly say that the CPA, which was founded in 1911, comprises some 180 national and sub-national Branches and seeks to promote the advancement of parliamentary democracy by enhancing knowledge and understanding of democratic governance. 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.

CPA activities focus on the Commonwealth's commitment to its fundamental political values, including - just and honest government, the alleviation of poverty, fundamental human rights, international peace and order, global economic development, the rule of law, equal rights and representation for all citizens of both genders, the separation of powers among the three branches of government and the right to participate in free and democratic political process.

Regional conferences such as these are an excellent opportunity for Members and staff alike to join together and discuss these values and how best to approach them in what is often a challenging and fast-moving global context. These meetings allow us to explore these issues both from a regional perspective and, with the valued involvement of Observer Members and Officers from other CPA Regions, from a broader, holistic Commonwealth angle as well.

Over the next two days you will have the opportunity to share best practice, generate innovative ways of approaching regional challenges and create long lasting and mutually beneficial connections between Parliaments within the Region and further afield – all key functions of the CPA's work.

Honourable Members, in addition to this Conference I have been very encouraged to see many successful events this past year being held within the CPA BIM Region, most notably the CPA Small Branches Sustainable Economic Development Workshop in January 2020. Hosted by the Parliament of Malta and the CPA Malta Branch and attended by 19 Commonwealth Parliamentarians, including the CPA Small Branches Chairperson, Hon. Niki Rattle, the outcomes from the workshop and the subsequent Toolkit: Climate Change and Small States, A Guide for Effective Climate Change Action, are just some examples of the effective impact of the CPA in aiding our membership.

The BIM Region was also an active participant in the celebration of the CPA community's unique connection of almost 2.4 billion people on Commonwealth Day in March 2020. It was only shortly after this occasion that the

Commonwealth was struck by the full force of one of its greatest challenges yet – COVID-19. My thoughts go out to all those affected by the pandemic. It has greatly impacted the way in which we go about our everyday lives and has curtailed the means with which Parliaments and Parliamentarians are able to successfully operate and promote the fundamental values of the Commonwealth.

Whilst the COVID-19 pandemic has raised great challenges for us as legislators, it has also allowed us to embrace new methods of communication and highlighted our ability to adapt to changing circumstances. Adaption was a key theme for our 64th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference held in Kampala, Uganda last year and it is a vital element in how the CPA can be of aid to its Members in times of crisis.

Parliamentarians are now focusing their minds on public health and creating safe and secure environments for their constituents. To succeed in this endeavour, we have had to embrace rapid and uncertain change in the form of technical, social and cultural adaptations; from how we communicate and travel to the ways in which we legislate, represent and scrutinise governments. As such, adapting to and embracing these new ways of working is essential for us to fulfil our civic duties.

Moreover, whilst the whole world has felt the effects of this pandemic, not all of us have been impacted equally. I am therefore greatly pleased to see that the conference programme includes sessions on how small jurisdictions have managed and attempted to reduce the impact of COVID-19 and the relationship between gender and crisis specific policy. In recognising that crises such as these do not have a uniform impact on the health or socio-economic status of an individual or a jurisdiction, we as legislators can be more tailored and effective in our responses and future planning.

Whilst the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting which was due to be held in Kigali, Rwanda in June 2020 has understandably been postponed until next year, the theme of 'Delivering a Common Future: Connecting, Innovating,

Transforming' has never been more relevant. The CPA has, in this time of crisis, maintained a constant focus on innovation and transformation when looking at what we offer to our membership and how we can best support you in times of flux. This week, for example, we are hosting a fully virtual Post-Election Seminar for the Parliament of Dominica, our second such event following a very successful programme for Anguilla in collaboration with CPA UK. The Secretariat also produced a timely CPA Toolkit for Commonwealth Parliaments and Legislatures on the COVID-19 pandemic and delivering parliamentary democracy and have engaged in numerous online Masterclasses and Webinars.

The CPA has been part of this incredible surge in the digitalisation and virtual nature of processes taking place across the Commonwealth. Whilst we may not be able to engage in person during these unprecedented times, the advantage of modern technology is that it allows us to support our membership and has the ability to reach a wider audience. Inclusion is a key element of the theme of the 65th CPC "Inclusive, Accessible, Accountable and Strong Parliaments: the Cornerstone of Democracy and Essential for Development". At our recent Executive Committee Meeting, Members made the difficult decision to postpone the 65th CPC in Halifax, Canada from January to August 2021. I hope that by that point we are able to meet and discuss this important topic in person but I am confident that we will be able to adapt come what may.

Last week, 15th September was the International Day of Democracy and, in my video message to the CPA membership, I highlighted the importance of scrutiny and accountability as vital components to democracy. As legislators we must be a voice for citizens and continually adapt our practices to fulfil our critical functions during this crisis - essential in the ever-evolving nature of democracy. Recognising the power of collectively providing an accessible and inclusive space, I am optimistic that our Branches will use their own platforms to encourage greater adaptation and development within their own jurisdictions.

We as Parliamentarians must be at the forefront of responding and evolving in this time of crisis. The last six months has shown us that when pushed we can be more connected, co-operative and flexible than was perhaps initially thought possible. I hope that this spirit of collaboration extends far past the lifetime of

COVID-19 and continues for many years to come as we pursue our shared goals. I look forward to hearing the outcomes of your discussions over the forthcoming days and trust that through the sharing of our experiences we can keep on evolving as responsive Parliamentarians and as our organisation demands of us.

Thank you very much, dear colleagues. I look forward to the coming days. Thank you.

ENDS