



**CPA Parliamentary Strengthening Seminar for
the Parliament of Bermuda**

1-2 May 2019

Opening Remarks

**Commonwealth Parliamentary Association
(CPA) Secretary-General**

Mr Akbar Khan

- **The Hon. Dennis P. Lister, JP, MP, Speaker of the House of Assembly and Joint President of CPA Bermuda Branch;**
- **Hon. Mrs. Joan E. Dillas-Wright, MBE, JP, President of the Senate and Joint President of the CPA Bermuda Branch;**
- **The Hon. Craig Cannonier, JP, MP, Leader of the Opposition;**
- **Honourable Ministers and Members of Parliament;**
- **Distinguished Members of the CPA Resource Team:**
- **Hon. Dr Angelo Farrugia MP, Speaker of the Parliament of Malta and Chairperson of the CPA Small Branches Network**
- **Hon. Shirley Osborne, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Montserrat;**
- **Mr Paul Bélisle, former Clerk of the Canadian Senate and Clerk of the Parliaments in the Canadian federal Parliament;**
- **Mrs Jacqui Sampson-Meiguel, Clerk of the House, the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago;**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen;**

Good Morning,

It is a great pleasure to be able to join you all here in Bermuda for this Parliamentary Strengthening Seminar.

It is always a privilege for me, as Secretary-General, to visit a CPA Branch within our Commonwealth family. I have visited this delightful Island before.

The growing interest in our Parliamentary Strengthening Seminars demonstrates the region's continuing interest in strengthening its parliamentary democracy which no doubt is a reflection of this island being one of the oldest continuous democracies in our Commonwealth.

Honourable Members,

On behalf of the CPA, I would like to acknowledge and thank the Honourable Speaker and his staff for the warm welcome that the Resource Team and I have received since our arrival here in Bermuda.

I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to the Clerk to the Legislature, Mrs Shernette Wolffe, and her team who have worked diligently to make this programme possible.

I would also like to recognise the President of the Senate, the Honourable Joan E. Dillas-Wright and her fellow Senators whom we are glad to have joining us today.

Our attendance here today demonstrates our collective commitment to promoting and ensuring that Commonwealth values of democracy – enshrined in the Commonwealth Charter – are upheld, nurtured and maintained to the highest standards.

Honourable Members,

The United Nations has described good governance as having eight characteristics. One of these characteristics is participation¹ of all men and women. More specifically, this means that:

*‘All men and women should have a voice in decision-making, either directly or through legitimate intermediate institutions that represent their interests. Such broad participation is built on freedom of association and speech, as well as capacities to participate constructively’.*²

This is further reflected in the UN Sustainable Development Goal number five, which I will touch upon shortly.

The Commonwealth Charter also gives a firm commitment to democracy. The Charter states that:

“Governments, political parties and civil society are responsible for upholding and promoting democratic culture and practices and are accountable to the public in this regard. Parliaments and representative local governments and other forms of local governance are essential elements in the exercise of democratic governance.”

¹ <https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/good-governance.pdf>

² <https://www.gdrc.org/u-gov/g-attributes.html>

The CPA over the past twenty years has supported legislatures through a variety of parliamentary strengthening programmes. Among these programmes, Parliamentary Strengthening Seminars have been particularly popular, whether they be for small or large Legislatures, since they look into the specific challenges individual Parliaments face and offer targeted solutions which can be implemented locally.

Our seminars aim to build and strengthen the capacity of both new and seasoned Parliamentarians, and to achieve a broader understanding of their roles as elected Members of Parliament.

We at the CPA understand that democracy is a continuously developing concept that requires nurturing. We are the CPA Headquarters Secretariat and you are our Members, together we will work together to embed the principles of the Commonwealth Charter.

We recognise that no single country or Parliament can provide a source of best practice in all areas of governance but believe that all Parliaments, big or small, can be sources of vital transformation and influence regardless of the age of their network.

Bearing this in mind, the Commonwealth can be seen as a laboratory of innovation and experience for promoting parliamentary development where countries can share and learn from each other through knowledge transfer.

In this context, this Parliamentary Strengthening Seminar will provide the opportunity for you to engage with your colleagues from across the Commonwealth and to learn from their experiences to be able to carry out your duties as parliamentarians even better than before. We look forward to discussing best practice and hearing innovations from you. It's vital to stress that it's not about talking at you, it's about sharing between each other.

Honourable Members,

Allow me to make reference to specific streams of work the CPA has undertaken to support you as Parliamentarians. As a membership organisation, the CPA relies on you and we create

many working groups drawing upon your experience. One of the cornerstones of our work is the CPA *Recommended Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures*, which your Parliament has already assessed itself against in 2014.

The original benchmarks were the outcome of a Study Group in late 2006 hosted here at the Parliament of Bermuda.

I was pleased to hear the progress made in Bermuda in those areas identified through the Benchmarking process. The self-assessment reflects a maturity and critical analysis as a Legislature, and I look forward to hearing more about the developments here since the Benchmarking.

The CPA Benchmarks were further updated in June 2018 following a Study Group meeting at Wilton Park in the United Kingdom, which Hon. Farrugia chaired and involved senior Parliamentarians and parliamentary staff representing six regions of the CPA. The original benchmarks had been drafted over a decade ago, and the updated version saw Sustainable Development Goals being introduced, particularly Goal 16 which focuses on Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions, and gender issues taking a stronger role, among other improvements.

These updated Benchmarks continue to play an important part in providing a minimum standard and guide to Parliaments to develop the effectiveness of parliamentary institutions across the 180 Parliaments and Legislatures of the CPA.

All Parliaments are charged with an immense responsibility to leave no one behind and Parliamentarians play a critical role in developing and delivering the SDGs. I commend the updated Benchmarks as the navigation tool to analyse the SDGs and embed them in our Parliaments.

The CPA continues to work with its partners, the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, the CPA UK Branch and the Commonwealth Local Government Forum, to promote the updated Benchmarks and will work with our membership to review how they are being implemented within different jurisdictions.

I would also briefly like to talk about the CPA's commitment to involving young people in decision-making and to ensuring that they can help shape their own future. This is reflected in our programmes and outreach activities. With over 60% of the Commonwealth's 2.4 billion citizens currently under the age of 30, it is vitally important that young people, as leaders of today and tomorrow, embrace and embody Commonwealth political values and feel that the Commonwealth matters to them in the 21st century.

I had the privilege of speaking to young people in Bermuda the last time I visited when I conducted a CPA Roadshow with the former Speaker of the Bermuda House of Assembly, the Hon. Randolph Horton MP and Hon. Susan Jackson, MP was also present and I recognise her here today.

It was truly inspiring to engage with the young people of Bermuda, which has a very vibrant youth society. I would encourage all of the CPA Branches to continue and deepen their engagement with young people in their societies.

Government and Parliament are looking at how they can introduce the voices of young people in decision making and we must listen to and action the voices of young people.

Honourable Members,

I would also like to reflect on some of the developments in various Parliaments since my visit to Bermuda in 2017.

Last year, the United Kingdom celebrated the 100th anniversary of the *Representation of the People Act*, which gave some women the right to vote. The past century has seen almost all countries grant women the right to vote, and to encourage women to run for office. Empowering women to participate in politics is an important priority not just in the Commonwealth, but in the whole world.

These aspirations are also expressed in the UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number Five, which calls for the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women

and girls. The SDG sets out to *'end all forms of discrimination to ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic and public life, by adopting and strengthening policies and legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls everywhere.'*³

The Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) has played a vital role in helping to increase the representation of women in our Legislatures and hold the objective of having at least 30% of women in decision making positions globally. We should be extremely concerned when we see these numbers regress.

The last election here in Bermuda saw a total of twelve women entering Parliament; eight elected into the House of Assembly and four into the Senate, representing a total of 25% of Parliament, up from 19.4% in the previous elections.⁴ I am pleased to see the number of women is continuing to increase in Bermuda and I look forward to hearing how this upward trend has been encouraged.

October 2017 saw the PLP's (Progressive Labour Party's) women's caucus host an event which was open to all women regardless of party membership.⁵ The event discussed the role of women in Bermuda today and the advantages and the impact of women in elected offices in Bermuda.

Hosting events such as this is important in educating and encouraging more women to be future political leaders. Bermuda can be proud of the efforts it is making towards achieving this objective.

One of the most critical global issues of our time is climate change. It has the power to impact every nation in the world. Climate change creates serious challenges and, in very concrete

³ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/topics/women/decisions>

⁴ <http://www.royalgazette.com/christopher-famous/article/20181109/women-are-resetting-bar>

⁵ <http://bernews.com/2017/03/plp-womens-caucus-to-host-launch-event/>

terms, leads to the increase of extreme weather conditions, which Bermuda and many islands in the Caribbean region and beyond have been devastated by.

The Commonwealth seeks to remain at the forefront of global leadership on climate change. Following the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting held in London in 2018, the Commonwealth Blue Charter was launched. Agreed by all fifty-three countries of the Commonwealth, the charter seeks to protect the health of the world's oceans and promote the growth of blue economies.

Actions that Commonwealth countries have committed to in this charter range from tackling ocean acidification to the protection and restoration of coral reefs and mangrove forests.

As the heads of government of some of the world's largest and influential countries gather to find solutions to the effects of climate change, the world's smallest nations are the first countries and areas to be affected and are often overlooked.

According to the UNDP, despite contributing less than 1 per cent to the world's greenhouse gas emissions, Small Island Developing States are among the first to experience the worst impacts of climate change.⁶

As a British Overseas Territory, Bermuda holds responsibility together with the United Kingdom to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and adhering to international laws on climate change.

Being a group of islands with a population of approximately 65,000, Bermuda is a part of the CPA Small Branches Network. The network, present in seven regions of the CPA, provides opportunities to identify and address specific challenges to Small Jurisdictions through bespoke CPA activities.

⁶ <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2017/09/18/small-island-nations-at-the-frontline-of-climate-action-.html>

We are fortunate to have the Chairperson of the Small Branches Network, the Hon. Dr Angelo Farrugia, MP, Speaker of the Parliament of Malta, attend this Seminar as a resource person. He will elaborate on how your Branch can benefit from the Network and what kind of support is available to you.

The CPA has agreed to support the Parliament of Bermuda in its project to enhance public awareness and understanding of the role of Parliament. We look forward to embarking on this project with you and are keen to see the impact it will have in Bermuda.

Honourable Members,

The CPA firmly believes in the benefits of ‘peer to peer’ learning to maximise the development of parliamentarians and the broader parliamentary community. It is in this spirit of mutual learning and partnership that this seminar takes place with the support and presence of our highly experienced and dedicated resource persons.

CPA is a collegiate organisation and a place where we look beyond the politics. You are working together as citizens of Bermuda and as Parliamentarians and by working together we can better identify gaps for strengthening.

Our resource team has kindly taken time away from their busy schedules this week to best show their dedication to the CPA statement of purpose *‘to bring Parliamentarians and parliamentary staff together to exchange ideas among themselves and with experts in various fields, to identify benchmarks of good practices and new policy options they can adopt or adapt in the governance of their societies’.*

The Members of the CPA resource team are:

- **Hon. Dr Angelo Farrugia, MP**, Speaker of the Parliament of Malta and Chairperson of the CPA Small Branches network
- **Hon. Shirley Osborne, MLA**, Speaker of the Legislature of Montserrat and CWP Steering Committee member for the CPA Caribbean, Americas and Atlantic Region
- **Mrs Jacqui Sampson-Meiguel**, Branch Secretary and Clerk of the House of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago

and,

- **Mr Paul Bélisle**, former Clerk of the Senate of Canada.

Honourable Members,

I look forward to being a part of this long-awaited seminar. I wish you the very best in your deliberations over the next two days.

I am certain that we will see many positive contributions and firmly believe that the seminar will fortify relationships and the CPA in the region and beyond.

Thank you.

-ENDS-

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