



Speech by Hon. Emilia Monjowa Lifaka, MP

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Topic: A reflection on the human rights work of international and regional parliamentary organisations. In particular, successful initiatives taken by these organisations to strengthen the attention paid by national parliaments to human rights issues



Brief introduction of the CPA

The CPA is a 107-year-old global organisation representing 180 parliaments across 53 countries, bringing together a network of 17,000 parliamentarians. Its purpose is to connect, develop, promote and support parliamentarians and their staff to identify benchmarks of good governance and to implement the enduring values of the Commonwealth.

The role of parliaments and parliamentarians in implementing human rights

As institutions whose purpose is to make laws, parliaments are the branch of government best placed to ensure that laws provide means to remedy alleged violations, to take measures to prevent abuses and to give effect to human rights.

CPA-specific work on human rights and parliaments

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association has been developing the ability of parliamentarians to promote and protect human rights nationally and regionally.

Three seminars were organised together with the Commonwealth Secretariat to achieve this with the aim of exchanging information and experiences on the role of parliaments and promoting the implementation of human rights obligations and commitments. The seminars looked at supporting the implementation of the recommendations of the UN human rights mechanisms through legislation; overseeing government policy and practice, ensuring consistency with the respective states' international human rights obligations; and ensuring sufficient budget allocations for human rights.

The seminars resulted in three regional declarations: the Mahé Declaration for Africa in 2014; the Pipitea Declaration for the Pacific in 2015; and the Kotte Declaration for Asia in 2016. The declarations are a pioneering attempt by parliamentarians to take a stronger role in ensuring that legislatures promote and protect universal human rights standards, including supporting the implementation of UN human rights recommendations, ensuring that governments implement those recommendations, and by overseeing government policy and practice to ensure they comply with the international obligations of the respective states. The declarations are important by themselves but are also possible contributions to eventual draft international principles or guidelines on the role of parliaments in the promotion and protection of human rights.

Regional Commonwealth parliamentary human rights groups have been established, helping turn the declarations into reality. One of these is the Commonwealth Africa Parliamentary Human Rights Group (CAPHRG). As a national example, pursuant to the Mahé Declaration, a Kenyan parliamentarian took steps to establish a national cross-party human rights caucus – the Kenyan Parliamentary Human Rights Association (KEPHRA).

During the 31st session of the Human Rights Council in March 2016, former Commonwealth Secretary-General, Kamalesh Sharma, said: *'We believe there is merit in considering the potential of a set of international principles or standards, such as the Paris Principles, for parliaments.'*

Currently, approximately 28 per cent of parliaments in the Commonwealth have established specialised human rights committees. These committees are well placed to assess human rights treaties and to hold government departments accountable for the implementation of the states' human rights commitments. Some Commonwealth parliaments have adopted the approach to mainstream human rights, endeavouring to ensure that every parliamentary committee takes human rights into consideration as they go about their business. An alternative approach is to set up dedicated human rights committees, dealing exclusively with human rights issues.

CPA's work tangentially related to human rights

Also related to human rights, the CPA has established the Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities network. It was set up in in 2017 at a CPA conference for disabled parliamentarians. The network advocates for greater inclusion of people with disabilities in politics and parliaments.

Additionally, the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) was founded in 1989 to increase the number of female elected representatives in Parliaments and legislatures across the Commonwealth and to ensure that women's issues are brought to the fore in parliamentary debate and legislation. The CWP network provides a means of building the capacity of women elected to parliament to be more effective in their roles; improving the awareness and ability of all Parliamentarians, male and female, and encouraging them to

include a gender perspective in all aspects of their role: legislation, oversight and representation and helping parliaments to become gender-sensitive institutions.

If we do agree that women's rights are Human rights, children's rights are Human rights, knowing that where your right ends that is where another person's right begins, then:

As parliamentarians, we all have a responsibility and a duty as representatives of the people and the voice of the voiceless in ensuring that human rights are placed at the top of the agenda in all aspects of our work, not only by ratifying international conventions but by making sure that our respective governments take a lead in its implementation.

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