Honourable Delegates,

I am the Honourable Emilia Monjowa Lifaka, Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly of Cameroon and Chairperson of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. I would like to welcome you to this international conference commemorating the 150th anniversary of the Saint Petersburg Declaration of 1868. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to the Interparliamentary Assembly of Member Nations of the Commonwealth of Independent States and the International Committee of the Red Cross for inviting me to deliver this speech.

As Chairperson of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, the CPA, I would like to briefly introduce you to the aims of the organisation and its activities.

The CPA, now in its 107th year, is a network of over 180 national and subnational legislatures across the 53 nations of the Commonwealth representing a membership of 17,000
parliamentarians. We are committed to upholding Commonwealth political values, including the separation of powers, democracy and the rule of law, enshrined in the Commonwealth Charter, signed in 2013 by our Patron, Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II. The CPA engages in standard setting, benchmarking for parliaments and parliamentarians, and provides an international platform for peer-to-peer learning and development.

The CPA also seeks to upskill its membership in the field of International Humanitarian Law and is currently producing a *Handbook on International Humanitarian Law for Commonwealth Parliamentarians* together with the British Red Cross and with the support of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the University of New South Wales. The handbook will be published next year.

Honourable delegates, we as Parliamentarians have a duty to hold our governments to account. There can be no greater decision for a government than to use force and to commit its men and women to the conflict zone. In order to fully understand the issues relating to the laws of war, parliamentarians need to stay up to date on legislation and developments related to international humanitarian law. We also need to ensure that our countries are party to international treaties which govern and regulate the use of force and weapons, and provide for the humanitarian treatment of combatants once captured.

As Parliamentarians, I firmly believe that we must come to our roles first and foremost with humanity and compassion as fellow human beings and global citizens. Therefore, the 150th anniversary of the Saint Petersburg Declaration is a timely reminder to us all that however justified war or conflict may appear to a nation, as human beings, we should always be guided by the spirit of the Declaration to ensure that we set limits “at which the necessities of war ought to yield to the requirements of humanity”.

With the spirit of the Declaration in mind, I would like to thank you for listening and express my hope for a successful conference.

ENDS