



**CPA Post-Election Seminar for
the Grenada House of Representatives
9-10 January 2018**

Opening Remarks, on behalf of

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

Mr Akbar Khan

**Delivered by Mr Jarvis Matiya, CPA Director of
Operations**

Wednesday 9 January 2019

- **The Right Honourable Keith Mitchell, Prime Minister of Grenada;**
- **Honourable Chester Humphrey, President of the Senate of Grenada and Joint President of the CPA Branch;**
- **Honourable Michael Pierre, Speaker of the House of Representatives and Joint President of the CPA Branch;**
- **Honourable Ministers and Members of Parliament;**
- **Distinguished Members of the CPA Resource Team;**
- **Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen**

Good Morning,

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you to this Post-Election Seminar on the beautiful island of Grenada. It is always a great pleasure for me to work with our Members, particularly here in the Caribbean where the CPA has always been afforded an extremely warm welcome.

It is always an honour and privilege for me, as Secretary-General, to visit a CPA Branch within our Commonwealth family of nations and to work together to deliver our flagship Post-Election Seminar.

I also note with pleasure, the construction and opening of your striking new parliament building, which not only serves as a symbol of democratic values and Grenadian independence but also reminds us of the strength and resilience of the Grenadian people in the face of the devastation caused by Hurricane Ivan in 2004.

It is with great interest that I note the design of the chamber reflects the shape of the nutmeg which gave Grenada its nickname, the Isle of Spices. I am greatly encouraged to see such a large public viewing gallery, that will give Grenadian citizens the opportunity to experience and learn more about parliamentary business.

Honourable Members,

On behalf of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, I would like to express my gratitude to the Honourable Speaker and his staff for the warm reception given to me and the Resource Team since arriving in Grenada.

I would also like to extend the sincere thanks of the CPA to the office of the Clerk, Mr Adrian Francis, who has worked tirelessly with the CPA Headquarters Secretariat to deliver this Seminar and without whom this event would not be possible.

I am also delighted to welcome such a highly experienced Resource Team to Grenada who will be supporting us here for the next few days. We at the CPA have always sought to enlist the most qualified and erudite individuals for our Resource Teams. These teams have lead the CPA to produce approximately sixty successful Post-Election Seminars in the past twenty years.

Finally, I am delighted to welcome Members of the Grenada Senate and House of Representatives. Attendance at this Seminar is itself a demonstration of your commitment to the values declared in the Commonwealth Charter, notably the principles of democracy and good governance.

Honourable Members,

I wish to congratulate you all on holding a successful election in March! Your recent election has demonstrated your commitment to the shared values of the Commonwealth and the Commonwealth Charter from which I quote:

“We recognise the inalienable right of individuals to participate in democratic processes, in particular free and fair elections in shaping the society in which they live.”

Elections also demonstrate democracy’s potential to bring diversity into parliamentary business and breathes new life into parliaments themselves, thereby reflecting the diversity of the populations they represent.

Grenada’s election earlier this year serves as a fine example of this. With three new women entering the House of Representatives, seven of the fifteen members are now women. At nearly 47% of members, Grenada is ranked 5th out of 190 legislatures around the world, by the Inter-Parliamentary Union for women’s representation in elected seats¹.

Furthermore, of the national parliaments across the Commonwealth, Grenada is second only to Rwanda for gender balance.

I also note, with pleasure, the commitment of the Right Honourable Prime Minister to the increased presence of youth voices in parliamentary decision-making, and his belief that *“young people have a very good idea what they want and that we can’t decide by ourselves what they wish to have”*².

This commitment to young people and to ensuring that they can help shape their own future is something that is supported wholeheartedly by the CPA, and reflected in our programmes and outreach activities. With over 60% of the Commonwealth's 2.4 billion citizens currently under the age of 30 years, it is vitally important that young people, as leaders of today and tomorrow, are informed about the nature of Commonwealth political values and why the Commonwealth should matter to them in the 21st century.

Honourable Members,

At the CPA, we have also long recognised the need for elected members to be supported throughout their time in office, and to enable them to fulfil their constitutional duties whilst also maintaining the ambition and enthusiasm that the election captured.

The CPA has delivered this support to Members through its flagship Post-Election Seminars. These seminars enable both new and returning Parliamentarians to achieve a broader understanding of parliamentary democracy, parliamentary practice and procedure, and the role of a Parliamentarian.

In organising these seminars, the membership of the CPA has shown a dedication to the understanding of democracy as an ever-evolving value that requires our constant attention. And, in this regard, it is important to recognise that every country in the Commonwealth is unique in its circumstances and characteristics. No country nor institution can provide, or be provided with, a one-size-fits-all system of parliament or governance.

With this in mind, the Commonwealth can be looked upon as a thriving community and network that supports parliamentary development where Members can share knowledge and exchange best practice; this connection and unity best represents the beauty and the strength that underpins the Commonwealth family and the CPA Post-Election Seminar itself exemplifies this Commonwealth value as the Seminar will provide the opportunity for you to gain skills and share ideas with contemporaries from across the Commonwealth. It is in this spirit that these seminars take place.

Honourable Members,

I would like to congratulate Grenada on delivering a free and fair election to the people of this island. It is to your credit as elected members of the House that electoral engagement has substantially increased with a rise of approximately 16,000 registered voters from 62,148 in 2013 to 78,294 in 2018.³

The election earlier this year had many successes of which the New National Party can be particularly proud. However, members must remain diligent and with the election now well in the past, this is the time for you to deliver on promises to the electorate.

Although the election campaign is now over, this is not the end of the road. To the contrary, it is the beginning. Election to this legislature signifies the beginning and continuation of parliamentary careers and, above all, service and responsibility to the people of this Island.

As a well-known Election observer, Dame Audrey Glover, once observed *“Elections cannot of themselves bring about democracy, but it is not possible to have democracy without elections. They enable people to express their preference for those they would like to govern them and thus bring security and stability. Furthermore, elections are a celebration of human rights because they embrace the right to association and assembly, freedom of the media, freedom of expression and the right to vote.”*

Honourable Members,

There must also be careful consideration for the absence of opposition that this election, as with the previous 2013 election, has resulted in. A committed and active opposition that holds the government to account is precious to the health of any democracy. As political commentator Walter Lippmann once stated, *“A good statesman, like any other sensible human being, always learns more from his opposition than from his fervent supporters.”*

Going forward, it should always be considered what more can be done to draw differing perspectives and ideas to Grenada’s political landscape, without which governments can become stagnant and complacent.

It is therefore of critical importance that, to echo the theme of the 63rd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in Bangladesh, Grenada must continue to enhance the high standards of performance of its Parliamentarians.

In this context, let me reference the body of work that has been undertaken by the CPA to support you as Parliamentarians; and to promote the effective functioning of democratic legislatures to fully express the will of the people and involve them in governance.

The work that I refer to is the CPA's ***Recommended Benchmarks for Codes of Conduct applying to Parliamentarians*** published in 2015 – which of course you have already adopted - and the ***CPA Recommended Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures*** which were revised and updated in June 2018 following a two year process which concluded with a Study Group which convened at Wilton Park, West Sussex, United Kingdom and involved senior Parliamentarians and parliamentary staff representing 6 of the 9 Regions of the CPA . These updated Benchmarks will continue to play an important part in developing the effectiveness of parliamentary institutions across the 180 Parliaments and Legislatures of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) looks forward to working with its partners to promote the updated CPA Benchmarks and will work with its membership to review how they are being implemented within their jurisdictions.

Honourable Members,

Before commencing this Post-Election Seminar, it is imperative that we take a moment to consider issues that Grenada and the Caribbean Region as a whole have faced in the past year.

In 2018, with the upcoming 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in December, human rights have become a pivotal focus of attention in the Commonwealth and the wider world.

There are few other countries that have displayed a greater commitment to combatting constraints on human rights in the past year than Grenada. With the support of the Commonwealth Secretariat, Grenada has continued in its efforts to become the first Caribbean nation to establish a national human rights institution (NHRI) in compliance with the Paris Principles.

These independent institutions are integral to a strong human rights protection framework and are an indicator of compliance with the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goal 16. In leading the region on this topical issue, Grenada is seen as a model example for other countries that wish to eliminate human rights abuses and pursue the achievement of the SDGs.

On a larger scale, climate change remains an ever more pernicious issue for both Grenada and the Caribbean. Following the commitment by Grenada to achieving the sustainable development goals, Grenada has set the deadline of 2030 for reaching targets relating to climate change. In 2013, Grenada pledged to source 50% of its supply of electricity from renewable forms such as solar and wind energy.⁴

Climate change is an issue that the Commonwealth has focused on greatly in 2018. Following the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting this year, a campaign called the 'Blue Charter' was established, this campaign seeks to protect the health of the world's oceans and promote the growth of blue economies. Actions that Commonwealth countries have committed to within this campaign range from climate change and ocean acidification to the protection and restoration of coral reefs and mangrove forests.

Often campaigns on climate change comprise gatherings of Heads of Government from some of the world's largest countries, but it is often forgotten or overlooked that the first countries and areas to be affected can be far smaller.

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.⁵

It is a very positive sign that Grenada connected with the CPA on this issue by sending two participants to our Small Branches Workshop on Climate Change earlier this month. As always, we welcome this proactive display of commitment to such a critical issue and are motivated to ensure that this event is as well-received .

Honourable Members,

Key to the CPA's approach is 'peer to peer' learning, bringing parliamentarians and parliamentary staff together to share best practice and to be part of an exciting knowledge transfer.

Our resource team has generously offered their time to be here this week in the best demonstration of CPA shared values of democracy and good parliamentary governance recognising that within the *Commonwealth diversity is our strength: and that through sharing different experiences, approaches and attitudes we foster variations in practices and policies which stimulate innovation everywhere.*

The members of the resource team are:

Senator the Hon. Alincia Williams-Grant, President of the Senate of Antigua and Barbuda

And

Ms Jacqui Sampson-Meiguel, Senior Clerk at the Trinidad and Tobago Parliament

I am also joined by members of the CPA Secretariat team:

Mr Jeffrey Hyland, Editor of *The Parliamentarian*

And

Mr James Pinnell, Programmes Assistant

Honourable Members,

I wish you the very best in your discussions over the next 2 days. I am confident we will see many positive outcomes from this Seminar for this great Parliament, whilst also strengthening our CPA networks and friendships in this region.

I wish you well in your deliberations.

I thank you.

-ENDS-

¹ <http://archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>

² <http://www.nowgrenada.com/2018/06/new-parliament-building-officially-opened/>

³ http://www.caribbeanelections.com/gd/elections/gd_results_2013.asp

⁴ https://washdiplomat.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=9806:grenadas-new-war-battling-climate-change&catid=1511&Itemid=428

⁵ <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2017/09/18/small-island-nations-at-the-frontline-of-climate-action-.html>