GOODWILL MESSAGE FROM THE COMMONWEALTH WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS (CWP) CHAIRPERSON
HOM. SHANDANA GULZAR KHAN, MNA
MEMBER OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF PAKISTAN

CWP Africa Region Gender Sensitization Workshop on the theme of ‘Advancing Women’s Participation in Electoral Processes’
Arusha, Tanzania
25 to 29 October 2019

• The Honourable Madame Samia Suluhu Hassan, Vice-President of the United Republic of Tanzania
• The Honourable Job Ndugai, Speaker of the National Assembly of Tanzania
• The Hon. Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly of Tanzania, Dr.Tulia Ackson
• Honourable Dr. Zainab Gimba, Chairperson of CWP Africa Hon. Members of the CWP Africa Regional Steering Committee,
• Honourable Ministers Distinguished Members of Parliament and Delegates, Delegation Secretaries,
• CPA Africa Regional Secretariat
Habari, Asalamo alaykom & a very good morning

I am honoured to address this august gathering of highly accomplished Parliamentarians from the Commonwealth in the beautiful city of Arusha. The Speaker National Assembly of Pakistan, the Honourable Asad Qaisar has expressed his appreciation for the steady commitment of CWP Africa to the aims and ambitions of the global Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians against all odds - for a greater cause of promoting and protecting women rights while being in service to your respective countries - this is unparalleled.

The CPA Africa and Pakistan are among the developing countries which are aiming at rapid development and economic independence. There is a need to create awareness among our businessmen, investors and traders about the huge economic potential of Africa. Towards this end, our Speaker will soon be on embarking on a parliamentary look Africa initiative and ensuring that our traditional ties translate into stronger trade and economic ties.

As was stated in Kampala by my Honourable colleague, we need to help others understand; gender equality is not women's issue - it is a human right issue, a peace security, prosperity issue, a family and community issue- our presence here today is testament to one of the most crucial milestones of women's journey of claiming their due rights.

At the recent Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in Uganda, I was fortunate to witness the energy with which the Africa Region engages with our network and I look forward to equally enthusiastic and productive discussions across the next two days. Lest I forget, I am grateful to CWP Africa for a chance to witness and engage with, the working meetings over the last two days to help CWP International understand the priorities and vision of CWP Africa over the next three years, in order that we may continue to work for all women, across the Commonwealth.
Ladies and Gentlemen, I must also thank the generosity of our Hosts, the Government and Parliament of the United Republic of Tanzania for their kind and warm hospitality over the last two days. In addition to the care that has been extended to us, I will also be congratulating the United Republic of Tanzania for assuming the leadership role in landmark examples for the rest of us to follow.

Firstly, UN Women and the UNDP states that 'women’s full and equal participation in political and electoral processes can be considered to be one of the litmus tests for women’s empowerment and gender equality’. With the success in having more than a third of women as Members of Parliament, Tanzania has indeed passed that litmus test before many of us in the Commonwealth and this was already acknowledged by the Chairperson of the (CPA), Hon. Emilia Monjowa Lifaka, MP, Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly of Cameroon in her words: “Tanzania is doing better than 166 other Parliaments in the world in women’s representation. This is something for you to be very proud of.” Indeed

Secondly, the Highest Court of Appeals in Tanzania has recently upheld Article 13 of the Tanzanian Constitution by ensuring that the minimum age of marriage is 18 for both boys and girls; this is an achievement that few of us in the developing world have achieved.

This brings us to the third most impressive initiatives of Tanzania, the ban on the use of plastic - for the second time in two months, before landing on Tanzanian soil, our airline told us to ensure that we respect this law.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The world over the poor, the marginalised, women and children are disproportionately impacted by the use of plastic so thank you Tanzania for showing the rest of the way in this critical challenge to climate change and economic prosperity.
Honourable Members,

The struggle of Pakistani women is just as unique and difficult; the world stands witness to the fact that it was Pakistan which elected the first ever Muslim woman Prime Minister, Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto and the first ever Muslim woman Speaker, Dr Fehmida Mirza.

Despite a rich Constitution which provides for equality and positive discrimination, we continue to fight centuries' old traditions which slow down us down legally and economically; Founding father of Pakistan, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah stated that: "No nation can rise to the height of glory, unless women are side by side with you."

Today the National Assembly of Pakistan boasts 69 Women Parliamentarians, 20 Senators and we have 4 Federal Ministers, 3 special assistants to Prime Minister and 14 Parliamentary Secretaries. We have a very active Women Parliamentary Caucus which is earnestly channeling the cause of active women political participation. During the last year, Pakistan witnessed transition of power from one democratically elected civilian government to another and a winning factor was comprehensive electoral reforms for enhanced women participation in the electoral processes.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today and tomorrow, CWP International will listen and learn from Africa in these beautiful surroundings of Arusha; evidence of the work that was done by our foremothers, as well as the work that we continue to carry with us today. I look forward to continuing this work with you in the coming days, weeks, months and years.

Finally, I am fully aware of the fact that the journey of women and participation in electoral processes still has a long distance to travel; However, I have complete faith in our collective resolve to fulfil our mandate: and I will to end with a few lines by the poet Robert Frost

The woods are lovely, dark and deep, But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep. Asante Sana, and I thank you.