The lack of access to well-developed education and training systems for women's leadership in general and for orienting young women towards political life.

The lack of political will to promote women's rights and women's participation in politics.

Conflicts and wars in different societies result in women as the most affected victims.

The nature of some legislative systems, their rules and procedures are not favourable to women, including the starting times of House Sitting which do not accommodate young family life.

The nature of the electoral system may or may not be favourable to women candidates.

Having been convinced and enlightened through discussion, this particular male MP then committed himself to assist one female candidate to campaign during 2012 elections in Tonga. Indeed, the outcome of that campaign culminated in the election of one woman in Parliament.

I must indicate that in my experience as Chairperson of the Commonwealth Women's Parliamentarians, I have always observed that women who emerged to power through the First Past The Post electoral systems are not always in favour of a quota system for women. These women feel that they have worked hard to establish themselves in the political and social realm and that quota systems are to an extent unfair towards women who are already in power.

This could retard the promotion of women's participation in politics. The other experience is that countries where political power was attained through wars, liberation and struggles, tend to do better when it comes to equality and recognition of women (e.g. South Africa, Mozambique, Rwanda, Uganda and Tanzania to name but a few). One must indicate the fact that quotas are meant to be a mechanism to redress an imbalance and must also be coupled with capacity building mechanism, they may be phased out when the set goal has been achieved.

Having taken a moment to reflect on the path we have traversed to bring the question of gender equality to the fore with the context of the CWP evolution, a lot has been achieved, but there are still more challenges that lay ahead of us to dismantle the system of patriarchy. As such, this requires a concerted effort of both sexes and the inclusion of all the stakeholders for the confrontation of challenges facing women in Parliament and those who aspire to be in Parliament. This should not be a rhetoric, it must find expression in both legislation and budget planning, and in the allocation of resources for the process of Parliament.

The current CPA Masterclasses on gender equality must be pursued to advance gender advocacy and integrate them in the curriculum of our institutions of higher learning. Constant engagement with Heads of State within and outside Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings should be encouraged and be held accountable to their commitment of ensuring 30% women's representation in all Parliaments of the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians remains an important vehicle of championing the struggles of increasing women's representation and ensuring gender parity within the Commonwealth and beyond.

To this end, I would like to salute the women Parliamentarians who in 1989 had the vision and courage to fight for women's rights and recognition of women within the Commonwealth and beyond - Senator Norma Cox Ashcroft and those women who were with her in 1989. All the Chairpersons until 2003 and elected Chairpersons who succeeded me. One believes that we have capable women that will ensure that talking about women's election and representation will eventually be a way of life and not one to fight for, as men and women within Parliaments and beyond will continually be educated and conscientised on gender related matters.

In my country we say "Wathin' abaqai, Wathin' imbaskolo (You struck a woman, you struck a rock)." Forward to the women's struggle! Forward to the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians!!! Thank you.

Commonwealth Women in Politics: Progress on Global Change

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) plays a uniquely important role in bringing together MPs who are from very different countries with very different backgrounds, but who share the same commitment to democracy and equality. And, more often than people would think and certainly with women MPs across the Commonwealth, we find we are facing common problems.

It's 100 years since the first woman in the UK won the right to stand for Parliament. And all around the Commonwealth, and indeed the world, women have fought to be in their Parliaments and to be there on equal terms with the men.

And women MPs are breaking down barriers. The late Bheza Bhutu, Prime Minister of Pakistan, was the first woman to give birth in office nearly 30 years ago and the first woman Prime Minister in the Islamic World. Following her assassination in 2008, the women in Pakistan's Parliament set up a women's caucus in her memory. The caucus has spearheaded legislation strengthening the rights of women at work, set up rights commissions and run voter registration drives signing up hundreds of thousands of women. As a strategy it became a site of consensus building across party lines, and it involved their male colleagues too.

Women in New Zealand were the first in the world to win the right to vote in 1893. And now New Zealand has elected the second woman Prime Minister to have a baby while in office – and the first to take maternity leave – Rt. Hon. Jacinda Ardern, MP.

Now, Bangladesh has a woman Prime Minister, Hon. Sheikh Hasina Wazed and their first woman Speaker of Parliament, Mrs. Shriman Chaudhury, MP (who is also a former CPA International Chairperson). Zambia has a female Vice-President, Inonge Mutukwa Wina and Minister of Finance, Margaret Mwanakatwe.

The past 100 years has seen a transformation in women's legal rights, in our role in the home and the family, our involvement in the world of work and our participation in politics. It's been a social, economic, political and personal revolution. But it didn't just come down with the rainfall. It wasn't a natural process of evolution – we had to fight for it. So, a massive pat on the back for all of us women MPs. We are all pioneers. Though it is right and equality must be pursued to make progress in what remains largely a man's world.

One elected, a woman was expected to quickly produce results for other women and also faces bigger obstacles to achieving that progress. A woman MP enters an institution where she is in a minority. Getting change in an institution, when you are a minority, is hard. Women remain invisible to Parliament's procedures in many ways. The rules have been made for Parliaments of men and as more women come into Parliaments we need to change the rules.

Here is the UK Parliament in January 2019, we have finally voted to allow new MP mothers and fathers (and those who are adopting) to be able to choose a fellow MP to cast their vote for them while they are caring for their child.

When I was a young family life, the UK Parliament was 97% men. We are now 32%.
women Members. Today, women make up just 24% of all politicians and legislation so that they absolutely is the basis of the very discrimination that we women’s quota seats. Hon. challenge. “Our male colleagues call such seats ‘charity seats’ and remind women every day that they are not the actual representatives.”

Virtually all women MPs face opposition to their participation in public life. Women struggle with attacks on their integrity, they are on the defensive, and are unprepared to tackle the pay gap and at what rate. But it’s not just for women, management and unions - it’s for government to set targets for each government department and across the public sector, and to gear up the machinery to tackle the gap in the private sector.

We need further progress on tackling domestic violence, and in particular the scourge of domestic homicide. We would make a major drive on prevention. Domestic homicide rarely happens out of the blue. Public services and agencies need to focus and resources to respond to the warning signs. We’ve got a Domestic Abuse Bill coming up in the UK, I am proposing this for refuges we’ve done for women who do the majority of looking after children and elderly relatives. Women who are not MPs find that their husband struggles to accept their role in public life. One MP at our Women MPs of the World Conference in November 2018,” told us that her husband said she must choose between her marriage or her politics. Her children said “Don’t be in politics but when she became successful he relent, becoming happy to share the limelight.

In some countries, as soon as the woman is elected she is expected to provide financially for all her relatives in her extended family. Many women MPs, when they are elected, are overtly discriminated against – some have reported not being called to speak and not being able to get on with their actual job without threat or hindrance, and we need to change that.

Nafisa Shah, MP told the conference that in Pakistan the list system had become the basis of the very discrimination that we women are out there speaking in public? Shouldn’t they be at home looking after their husband? Shouldn’t they be in the kitchen?”

The more women there are in politics, the more misogynists feel under threat and respond with greater abuse and violence. Every time a woman MP takes steps forward, there are people trying to pull her back, so we have to be persistent.

Jessie Kabwita, the Malawian woman who spoke at the Women MPs of the World Conference told us that any woman in Malawi who strives to break through the glass ceiling is bantled with criticisms of the mistake of finding herself a woman Prime Minister, Joyce Banda, as if having a woman Prime Minister was a bad experience that shouldn’t be happening again. We must make sure that all men have always done the right thing. They have made so many mistakes, but nobody says that no man should ever be President again. We need to plan for the backlash.”

The in the age of the internet, social media offers great opportunities for women MPs to communicate with their constituents and to campaign together. A woman member of Parliament can talk to women all around the country. But social media is also a new vehicle for misogynists and xenophobes against women, intent on threatening and abusing women who have the temerity to venture into public life. There is still a reluctance among women MPs to reveal the full extent of the abuse and threats they and their families are subjected to. We fear that we can claim we’ve been seen, as only concerned about ourselves, not about our constituents. But threats to women MPs are not because we are weak and they are not just unwarranted attacks on individuals. They are an attack on our democracy.

Voters are entitled to elect whoever they want. Once that person has been elected they should be able to get on with their job without threat or hindrance, I think it is important that we say to ourselves and to one another that it is not that something that we should just expect, or that is normal or an occupational hazard. We have to speak out about it, because they are attacks not only on us but on our democracy.

When I was first in Parliament the political agenda was all ‘money, supply, motoring and visas.” We handled of women were used to being ‘told about’ women’s issues and we’d be seen to be narrow, not part of the mainstream, not serious politicians. But we, women MPs, insisted that there should be a change in what is seen as the political agenda - that it should include maternity leave, and tackling domestic violence, that we should make progress on unequal pay. And this is happening throughout the Commonwealth, women make up just 24% of all politicians and legislation so that they absolutely is the basis of the very discrimination that we...