We, Commonwealth Members of Parliament, meeting in Dhaka, Bangladesh for a Parliamentary workshop on Women's Political Party Caucusing, on Sunday 16 June 2013, recognise that,

The trends and patterns of women’s political representation vary across the Commonwealth. There is particular concern for women’s minimal presence and leadership role both in executive and political spheres. While appreciating the efforts of parliaments and governments in development, women are mostly excluded from the process. As a result, many women are not involved in representation, law-making and oversight, thereby unable to influence policies beneficial to women, girls, men and boys.

Women still face numerous challenges that continue to hinder their full participation in politics ranging from limited financial resources, disadvantageous electoral systems, inadequate skills, exclusion from influential networks, patriarchy and corruption. Political processes and practices continue to disadvantage women’s interests, skills and competencies; as a result many countries are yet to attain the global target of 30 per cent in parliaments and at all levels of decision-making.

Only a few Commonwealth countries have reached and exceeded the global target, while a third of members have a 20 per cent representation of women in parliaments, and West Africa and Pacific regions have the least representation of women in parliaments.

The Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians is particularly concerned of the role of Parliaments and Parliamentarians in advocating for gender mainstreaming and equitable representation of women. Members shared good practices and exchange learning on strategies that have influenced women’s access to and retention in leadership and decision-making, including measures targeting men and boys. Members emphasized the adoption and implementation of mechanisms to advance women’s effective participation, by considering affirmative action policies, including quotas, constitutional, legislative, electoral and political party reforms.

Members further acknowledged the importance of a gender-sensitive parliament; increased roles of women as Presiding Officers, heading parliamentary committees; rotation of leadership positions such as Chief Whip, Minority/Majority Leader(s); mentoring and shadow leadership; and encouraging debate on gender as a cross-cutting issue and gender responsive budgeting. They also recognized the need for developing the capacity of women once elected to Parliament, the need to strengthen national women’s machineries, the need for building links with civil society, and the need to encourage mentoring between experienced Parliamentarians and younger women entering Parliament and politics.

The situation in respect of Women’s Political Party Caucusing was found to be variable across the Commonwealth. Whilst there was not much evidence of its current existence in the relatively small parliaments in the Caribbean region, there is a good example of an effective cross party women’s caucus in the Parliament of Uganda which has influenced specific areas of legislation, including Maternal Mortality and Genital Mutilation.

Based on the positive experience of the Uganda Parliament, Members agreed that for there to be an effective Women’s Caucus in Parliament, there should be: political will, commitment and involvement of ALL women Members in Parliament; agreement on a minimum work programme; an advocacy plan carried out with Civil Society, and used to overcome differences between political parties; and funding to establish and sustain the Caucus.

Members recommended to Commonwealth countries, the Commonwealth Secretariat and the CPA should promote democratic values in specific areas to:

- encourage debate on achieving equitable democratic governance in Commonwealth countries;
- strengthen women’s representation in Parliaments and support once in Parliament; and
- share good practices and strategies to advocate women’s engagement in politics and decision-making levels.