

# First Reading



News from the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association

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## The Secretary-General's File

In parliamentary democratic structures, there are three main roles of Legislatures: legislation, budget approval and oversight of the executive functions. The oversight function of Parliament is probably the most dynamic and challenging. It is dynamic because the membership of Legislatures has always had a high turnover, ranging from anywhere between 20 per cent and 80 per cent at general elections. The high turnover creates new learners and practitioners, knowing that democratic freedom gives equal opportunities to all citizens, regardless of gender, political affiliation and socio-economic status, to contest for presidential or parliamentary seats in elections.

The oversight function of Parliament is considered difficult to carry out because of two major reasons: the nature of government (executive) structures and the limitation of parliamentary resources. Under oversight functions, Legislatures are expected to diligently scrutinize how government expends the national budget, implements projects, promotes the welfare of its citizens and provides for their security. With regard to government structures, usually the executive has, by traditional practice, access to the national financial services, security and intelligence organs, knowledgeable and experienced civil servants and close relations with international organizations. On the other hand, Parliaments, especially in young democracies, often suffer from inadequate funds, insufficient skilled staff and limited access to information.

The difficulty of imbalance between the executive and Legislature prevails more in developing economies than their counterparts in industrialized countries. This leads to weak performance of Legislatures in their oversight role. For example, parliamentary committee meetings and programmes of work are usually

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## Tonga's new democracy



Prime Minister Hon. Tu'ivakano (left) and Democratic Party Leader Hon. Akilisi Pohiva (right) face each other in Tonga's Parliament, which has space only for Members in its Chamber.

Tonga ended 165 years of monarchical rule when its 25 November general election produced the Pacific island nation's first Parliament containing a majority of people's representatives; but a month later it elected a Nobles' representative to lead the first government chosen by Parliament.

Although the Democratic Party of the Friendly Islands (DPPFI) won 12 of the people's 17 seats, it was unable to elect its Leader, Hon. Akilisi Pohiva, as Prime Minister when Parliament met on 21 December. The five independent people's representatives reportedly joined Parliament's nine Nobles to elect Lord Tu'ivakano as Prime Minister in a vote of 14 to 12 in a contest against Mr Pohiva.

The Prime Minister later nominated two Nobles, four of the five independents and Mr Pohiva and two of his party colleagues as Ministers, along with two non-MPs. The Ministers were subsequently appointed to cabinet by His Majesty King George Tupou

V to become the first Tongan cabinet not to be selected by the king.

Mr Pohiva was named Minister for Health which he first accepted then resigned because non-MPs were appointed as Ministers. One of the two non-MPs had been an unsuccessful candidate for the People's Democratic Party.

Although the DPPFI won all of the 12 seats it contested, it won only 25.5 per cent of the popular vote as more than 67 per cent of Tongans voted for independents. Just less than 38,500 people went to the polls. The Tongan nobility also elected their nine representatives.

Lord Tu'ivakano said the independents supported his candidacy to protect Tongan culture as embodied in the nobility.

"They came over because they believe that the unity of the people and also the culture and every aspect of the Tongan is with the nobles, because the other side,

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curtailed by insufficient funds. Further, some of the committees are usually poorly supplied with departmental information and, as a result, Parliaments usually wake up to very disappointing reports by the Controller and Auditor General, in which case long periods of time would have elapsed after government expenditures and before committees note the misappropriation and/or embezzlement of funds.

Secondly, in the area of project implementation, where government has full access to internal and external funding, Parliaments lag behind in scrutinizing the tendering process, the maintenance of construction standards and payment processes to beneficiaries. Again, this would have been caused by weak parliamentary committee systems. It could also be due to the lack of enough resources and time for Parliaments to carry out sufficient research to ascertain the information and data provided to them by government departments.

In Legislatures with a dominant political party, there is further parliamentary disadvantage for the oversight function of Parliament because of "party whipping". In this case, the ruling party would normally require its Members not to work on matters that could embarrass the government, and therefore the party, of the day.

Thirdly, parliamentary oversight has often been weakened by an inadequate parliamentary structure. In developing countries particularly, Parliaments are still highly understaffed, to the detriment of parliamentary work and effectiveness. It is only recently that many young Legislatures came to learn that they cannot function effectively in their legislative, budgetary and oversight roles without a commensurate staff establishment for legal drafting, committee services and general research.

It is encouraging, however, that there have been improvements in recent years due to the establishment of Parliamentary Commissions to administer parliamentary matters. There also have been parliamentary Budget Committees to draw up, recommend and oversee expenditure of parliamentary budgets. These new practices have greatly improved the oversight machinery of young Parliaments.

Finally, the afore-mentioned parliamentary oversight difficulties underscore the

## Another hung Parliament

Australian voters on 21 August 2010 elected their first hung Parliament in 70 years, but it was only the latest in a line of Commonwealth jurisdictions which have not elected a majority government.

Following the lead of several Australian states and territories in recent years and other Commonwealth countries from Canada to the United Kingdom to Kenya to Tonga, no Australian party or coalition won majority support in the House of Representatives as the governing Australian Labor Party survived a 2.35 per cent swing against it to retain 72 seats in the 150-seat House of Representatives. The Liberal-National Coalition took 73 seats including a Western Australian National Member who aligned himself with it. Australia's preferential voting system, the "two-party preferred" vote, gave Labor 50.12 per cent to the Coalition's and 49.88 per cent.

Labor went into the election with a new Leader as Prime Minister Hon. Kevin Rudd, who led Labor into office in November 2007 after 11 years in opposition, stepped down in June as opinion polls showed a significant



Prime Minister Gillard.

decline in popular support for his government. He was replaced by Deputy Prime Minister, Hon. Julia Gillard, who was elected unopposed by her parliamentary party Members and became Australia's first female Prime Minister.

In the days after the election, Labor and Coalition representatives negotiated with the Independents and the Australian Greens to win their support to form a government.

Labor eventually received commitments of support on supply and no-confidence votes and formed a government with a majority of one.

A total of 93.2 per cent of the 14 million registered voters cast ballots. Voting is compulsory in Australia.

relevance of the century-old work of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. For many years the CPA has functioned mainly as a "school of Parliamentarians". Through its programmes and activities, Parliamentarians have exchanged experiences and practices. New Members have learned – not necessarily copied – the best practices in passing laws, scrutinizing and approving national budgets and overseeing the executive. We are indeed proud to have an organization which gives professional and functional service to its Members from within and from the larger world, particularly in strengthening the oversight role of Parliament. What remains to be done is for the Association to move on with innovations to fulfil the aspirations of the new Members from new generations.

Dr William F. Shija  
CPA Secretary-General

## New Brunswick election

Voters in Canada's Atlantic province of New Brunswick returned the Progressive Conservative Party to office after one term in opposition.

The party led by Mr David Alward won 42 seats in the election held on 27 September 2010, defeating the Liberal Party led by Premier Hon. Shawn Graham which took 13 seats. Mr Graham later announced he would step down as party Leader.

Mr Graham had been Premier since the Liberals came to power in the September 2006 election when they took 29 seats to the Conservatives' 26.





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the Democratic Party had a different ideology," said Prime Minister Tu'ivakano.

The election marked the start of a new constitutional dispensation with a government answerable to Parliament instead of to the monarchy.

Also on 21 December Parliament elected Lord Lasike as Speaker and Lord Tu'iafitu as Deputy Speaker. Both were unopposed.

Mr Pohiva and the DPFI tried to form a government between the general election and the meeting of Parliament but were unable to win over any of the independents or Nobles. Mr Pohiva is a long-time people's Member of the Tongan Parliament who has campaigned for a democratically elected government. After the general election, he called for further constitutional reforms so the Noble's representatives are popularly elected rather than being elected only by the nobility.

Constitutional reforms to replace monarchical rule with a constitutional monarchy were completed early in 2010. King Tupou remains as Head of State as abandoning the monarchy was never supported by the majority of the population.

## A Pacific first

The new Tongan Legislative Assembly early in 2011 became the first among small Commonwealth Pacific island states to establish a parliamentary committee on climate change.

The Environment and Climate Change Committee was one of three policy oversight committees established by the new Assembly. The others cover Social Services and Foreign Affairs, Defense and Trade.

The other four committees are the Standing Committees on Privileges; Business; Legislation, and Finance and Public Accounts.

"It is a sign of a healthy Parliament to have robust discussion and debate. Ministers give their opinions, Members give their opinions, sometimes they argue; but in the end, we are all committed to doing the best for our people," said Lord Lasike, the Assembly Speaker, at a parliamentary seminar supported by the Australian CPA, the New Zealand Parliament, the UNDP, AusAID and the Commonwealth.

## A reduced landslide in Tanzania

The ruling Chama cha Mapinduzi (CCM) party won Tanzania's fifth multiparty elections by an overwhelming margin, but with reduced parliamentary and presidential majorities.

The 31 October elections gave H.E. Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete his second term as President with a vote of 62.8 per cent compared to the 27.1 per cent won by Mr Willibrod Slaa, Secretary-General of the opposition Chama cha Demokrasia na Maendeleo (Chadema). Five other candidates split the remaining votes. Mr Kikwete's vote dropped from 80.3 per cent in 2005.

In the parliamentary vote, the CCM took 186 of the elected seats, 20 fewer than in 2005. Chadema won 23 seats, up from five at the last election, while the Zanzibar-based Civic United Front won 24 seats, compared to 19 in 2005. Six other elected seats were divided among three other parties.

The number of seats reserved for women was increased as Tanzania moves toward achieving gender parity in Parliament by 2020. The CCM took 72 women's seats, Chadema 21 and the CUF 10.

The Commonwealth Observer Group concluded the election was "a step forward" and a peaceful contest conducting freely and competitively. However, it noted that media coverage was dominated by reports on the CCM and that the ruling party was still too closely tied into the machinery of the state. The CCM, including its predecessor the

Tanganyika African National Union, has ruled Tanzania since before independence in 1961, ruling in a one-party system from 1965 to 1992.



President Kikwete.

On 12 November, Parliament further boosted the role of women when its elected Members chose Hon. Anne Makinda as Speaker of the National

Assembly in a drive to give women more opportunity in top leadership.

Out of the total 335 votes, Ms Makinda won 255 votes to become the first female Speaker of the National Assembly.

Ms Makinda, who was Deputy Speaker in the last Parliament, reportedly defeated two other female candidates for the CCM nomination the day before and was later elected and sworn in at the 10th session of the National Assembly. Men were reportedly excluded from the CCM nomination process so Tanzania would have its first female Speaker.

## Zanzibar unity government

A government of national unity was established in Zanzibar following a referendum in July 2010 and the October general elections.

The 31 October elections for the presidency and House of Representatives of the Indian Ocean island component of the United Republic of Tanzania returned the ruling Chama cha Mapinduzi party to office. Dr Ali Mohamed Shein won 50.1 per cent of the presidential vote. His party won 28 of 50 elected House of Representatives seats. Twenty women, eight presidential nominees and the Attorney General were appointed to the House.

The Civic United Front led by Mr Seif Sharif Hamad won the other 22 seats and Mr Hamad took 49.1 per

cent of the presidential vote.

The two parties then formed a united government as agreed by 66.4 per cent of voters who cast ballots in a July referendum on whether a unity government should be formed after the election.

Dr Shein became President, Mr Hamad became First Vice-President and the two parties shared ministerial positions.

In 2005, Dr Shein's predecessor defeated Mr Hamad by 53 per cent to 46 per cent and the CCM won 30 to the CUF's 20 House seats.

The archipelago, which is semi-autonomous within Tanzania, experienced violent confrontations between supporters of the two parties in the late 1990s as the CUF disputed elections. The dispute was resolved in 2000 following mediation by the Commonwealth Secretary-General.

## Commonwealth MPs share ideas to strengthen democracy

Effective parliamentary inputs and scrutiny will improve public policy and reinforce in all societies a commitment to the peaceful and democratic resolution of problems, concluded Commonwealth Parliamentarians meeting in Kenya in late 2010.

Extensive interparliamentary consultations can augment inter-governmental negotiations to help domestic governments and the global community identify the best solutions to global issues, agreed Parliamentarians attending the 56th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in Kenya which concluded in September.

An exchange of experiences on the effective performance of policies in matters as diverse as climate change mitigation and the management of migration issues was one of many measures contained in the Conference Summary Statement to strengthen Parliaments and enhance the contributions to governance of individual Parliamentarians. More than 800 Members of Commonwealth Parliaments and Legislatures gathered in Nairobi, Kenya, put forward the proposals during the annual conference of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA).

In opening the conference, Kenyan President H.E. Hon. Mwai Kibaki, CGH, MP, highlighted climate change policies and legislation, the subject of two sessions in Nairobi, as top-priority challenges facing all countries and Commonwealth MPs. The

conference was a unique opportunity for Members to exchange ideas and discuss solutions so they can press governments to commit to carbon emission reductions, sign a new global protocol to raise environmental stan-



Mr Speaker Marende (right) chairs the conference as the Chairperson of the CPA Executive Committee, Dato' Shafie, looks on.

dards and promote alternative energy sources to reduce reliance on fossil fuels.

CPA conference discussions enable Members to contribute to the strengthening of Parliaments so they are fully responsive to the needs of the people, he said. Parliamentary consultations will also assist MPs to identify the most effective policies to empower women so they achieve the Commonwealth target of electing women to at least 30 per cent of parliamentary seats, noted the President, adding that the protection of the rights of migrant workers will also benefit from Commonwealth co-operation.

In closing the meeting, Prime Minister Hon. Raila Odinga, MP, said the conference had focused the attention of Members on working together and sharing information to achieve Commonwealth solutions to climate change and human rights issues. Commonwealth co-operation also helped to raise the status of women, provide new economic development opportunities and improve the accountability of governments so democracies do not fall to military governments or personal dictatorships.

Commonwealth organizations must be pro-active in protecting the national institutions of democracy and applying democratic principles to prevent abuses of power.

These addresses were among the highlights of the meeting of Parliamentarians and senior parliamentary officials from more than 175 national, state, provincial and territorial Parliaments and Legislatures who discussed issues around the theme "Parliament

and Development in the 21st Century: Thus Far and Beyond". The conference was chaired by the 2010 President of the CPA, Hon. Kenneth Marende, EGH, MP, Speaker of Kenya's National Assembly, and hosted by the Parliament of Kenya at the Kenyatta International Conference Centre.

"Parliamentarians speak to development and make it happen...democracy must deliver," said Mr Marende,

urging MPs to use parliamentary diplomacy to establish a new consultative arrangement with Commonwealth Heads of Government to help the family of nations configure new policies to address issues of human rights and equitable development.

More than 60 Parliamentarians from about 30 of the Commonwealth's smallest jurisdictions, those with populations of up to 500,000 people, met for two days in advance of the full conference at the 30th Small Branches Conference.

They discussed the development of environmentally sustainable energy, political corruption, challenges to the sovereignty of small states and ways to strengthen accountability through parliamentary oversight of the executive.

Approximately 75 women MPs attended a separate one-day conference to assess "The Status Women in 2010". They considered strategies to increase the number of women elected to Commonwealth Assemblies, including through reforms to political parties.

They also discussed how to advance women in other decision-making positions and ways to protect the human and employment rights of female migrant workers.



President Kibaki.



Prime Minister Odinga.



## Members take office

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association enters its 2011 centennial year with a new slate of CPA Officers.

Rt Hon. John Bercow, MP, Speaker of the United Kingdom House of Commons, is President of the CPA for the year as



Mr Speaker Bercow.

## Support for Kenyan schools

A CPA programme with the private sector provided information technology assistance to schools in Kenya during the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference.

Computers and internet access to schools provided by The "Little Acorns Project" were presented by the Chairperson of the CPA Executive Committee, Hon. Dato' Seri Mohd Shafie Apdal, MP, Malaysia's Minister of Rural and Regional Development. The project is a joint venture to use modern communication technology to enhance youngsters' learning and understanding of democracy and help them to communicate with other young members of the Commonwealth family. It also enables the CPA to disseminate curriculum material on parliamentary democracy direct to participating schools.

The programme is sponsored by Malaysian oil company Petronas and its African affiliate Engen, and by Malaysia's Science, Technology and Innovation Ministry.

Dato' Shafie said projects like this promote the contribution of the CPA to the advancement of parliamentary democracy and interest young people in Parliament through information technology. He called on Parliamentarians to find creative new

Westminster hosts the 2011 Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in London to mark the centennial of the founding of the Association. The President was elected at the September 2010 CPA General Assembly in Kenya. The General Assembly also elected Hon. Chamal Rajapakse, MP, Speaker of Sri Lanka's Parliament, as CPA Vice-President as his Parliament will host the 2012 conference.

The Executive Committee then elected Hon. Marwick Khumalo, MP, of Swaziland as its Vice-Chairperson for the coming year.

Hon. Dato' Seri Mohd Shafie Apdal, MP, Malaysia's Minister of Rural and Regional Development, continues to chair the Executive Committee, and Hon. Hashim Abdul Halim, MLA, continues as Treasurer.

An earlier business meeting of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) elected Hon. Alix Boyd Knights,

MHA, Speaker of the Parliament of Dominica, as Chairperson of the CWP. The General Assembly also amended the CPA Constitution to make the CWP Chairperson an Officer of the Association. Ms Boyd Knights vacated her position as a Regional Representative for the Caribbean, Americas and Atlantic Region.



Madam Speaker Boyd Knights.



CPA Chairperson Dato' Shafie.

ways to build a new CPA based on Commonwealth unity and inclusiveness.

## CPA appeals for aid to Pakistan

The September 2010 CPA General Assembly in Kenya called for extra support from all member governments to help Pakistan resume the development of its economy and people and continue to deepen its commitment to parliamentary democracy. A report on the flooding in Pakistan and stood in silence to remember all those who died in that and other disasters which have ravaged Commonwealth countries. Members agreed the following appeal to governments to continue aid for Pakistan:

"Whereas the people of Pakistan, their democratically elected national government and National Assembly and its CPA Branch, and the governments, Legislative Assemblies and CPA Branches of the four provinces of Pakistan continue to fight to preserve democratic governance and the rule of law;

"Whereas those governments, Parliaments and Branches have been severely affected by this year's unprecedented nation-wide floods which have inundated 20 per cent of the country and deprived 25 million people of their homes and livelihoods;

"Whereas thousands of people have lost their lives and hundreds of thousands more have either been injured or will in the foreseeable future develop life-threatening diseases from contaminated food and water supplies;

"Whereas Commonwealth governments contributed generously to the immediate disaster relief efforts;

"And whereas the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association in August appealed to all CPA Branches to encourage their governments to support the recovery of Pakistan and its provinces;

"The CPA General Assembly meeting during the 56th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in Nairobi, Kenya, on 18 September hereby appeals to

all Commonwealth governments to provide further monetary, technical and humanitarian assistance to ensure the long-term stability of Pakistan as a vibrant democratic partner in the Commonwealth of Nations."

## New CPA programming

The CPA Executive Committee has approved programmes for this year to assist Parliaments and Legislatures to enhance their practices and to contribute to the professional development of Members and parliamentary staff.

The Committee provided funding for the CPA's Climate Change Task Force to conduct an investigation into the environmental threats facing the Commonwealth's small island states. Further arrangements to mark the centennial of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association in 2011 were approved, including a Commonwealth Youth Parliament and the publication of a book to record the evolution of parliamentary democracy since the CPA was established in 1911 as the Empire Parliamentary Association and the challenges facing the Commonwealth parliamentary community for the future.

The Committee, chaired by Hon. Dato' Seri Mohd Shafie Apdal, MP, Malaysia's Minister of Rural and Regional Development, approved a CPA budget for 2011 with funding for such projects as a seminar on Public Accounts Committees for West Africa, international trade workshops for Caribbean and Asian Members, a review of good practices in administering constituency development funds and added support for activities by regional chapters of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians. The Committee agreed the programme at a meeting on 11 and 12 September in advance of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in Nairobi, Kenya.

In light of the disastrous flooding which had hit Pakistan, the Committee agreed that the 2010 Commonwealth Parliamentary Seminar would not be held. It was to have been hosted by the provincial Legislature of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa so cancelling the Seminar would allow the Assembly and government to devote all



CPA Officers preside over the meeting in the Tsavo Ballroom of the Kenyatta International Conference Centre in Nairobi.

their resources to flood recovery. The Seminar would resume in 2011 in India, the next Region in the rotation. The Committee also agreed to ask the General Assembly to press for more Commonwealth aid for Pakistan.

## CPA welcomes Rwanda

The Parliament of Rwanda officially joined the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association on 1 January 2011 to tap into its parliamentary development expertise.

The General Assembly agreed unanimously that Rwanda's Parliament should join the CPA at the Assembly's 18 September meeting in Nairobi, Kenya. The Rwandan Parliament had resolved to join the CPA on 24 March at a joint sitting of the country's Senate and Chamber of Deputies. Rwanda became the Commonwealth's 54th member nation in November 2009.

Hon. Rose Mukantabana, the Speaker of Rwanda's Chamber of Deputies, said her Parliament hopes the CPA will help implement good parliamentary practices and deepen the country's democratic commitment as it rebuilds after the 1994 genocide. She told the General Assembly that CPA membership will help them fulfil their commitment to good governance, justice, human rights and democracy.

"The expertise of the CPA and its member Parliaments and Legislatures is now at

the disposal of the Parliament of Rwanda," said Hon. Dato' Mohd Shafie Apdal, MP, Chairperson of the CPA Executive Committee and Malaysia's Minister of Rural and Regional Development.

CPA Secretary-General Dr William F. Shija said the Rwandan Parliament would begin its CPA work at an October seminar on the role of Parliaments in conflict-affected countries. Its Members and staff will have access to a wide range of CPA programmes and information.

The Rwandan Parliament joins 56 other national, state and provincial Assemblies in the African Region of the CPA, the largest of the CPA's nine regions. The CPA is now composed of the Parliaments and Legislatures in 53 of the 54 Commonwealth nations and their overseas territories. It links more than 17,000 Members of national, state, provincial and territorial Assemblies.

The other Commonwealth country not currently a member of the CPA is Brunei. The Secretary-General had visited the sultanate earlier in 2010 for discussions with officials of its Legislative Council to determine if it qualifies for membership of the CPA should it apply to join. Brunei will be invited to send observers to certain CPA events until the Sultan of Brunei decides if the Council should apply for membership.

The Fiji Islands Branch of the CPA is currently in abeyance as the Parliament of Fiji has been suspended by the current military government.

# MPs' pay and the global financial climate

Members of Ghanaian and European Parliaments have received pay and allowance increases while the United Kingdom Parliament is implementing significant cost-cutting measures.

MPs in **Ghana** were awarded a 17-per-cent pay rise, backdated to 2008, and a free



laptop computer each, it was announced in October even though the International Monetary Fund reduced its estimate for oil revenue for the West African state in 2011.

"Ghanaian MPs are the lowest paid in Africa and will still remain the least paid even after the 17-per-cent hike," said Deputy Majority Leader Hon. Rashid Pelpuo.

Ghana's 230 legislators currently take home around £1,270 a month, including allowances, he said. The MPs had sought a 20-per-cent rise.

The increase came as a debate raged about who will benefit from Ghana's prospective oil production. The IMF warned that 2011 oil revenues would only just provide the funds needed to fund government pay reforms that put all public sector workers on the same scale.

MPs were given laptops "to make it easier for MPs to access information easily in their research work towards building a quality democracy," said Mr Pelpuo.

Members of the **European Parliament** (MEPs) will receive £90,876 in tax free expenses a year as part of an increased pay and allowances package.

A backdated salary rise combined with increased allowances meant all 736 European Parliament deputies received a lump sum of over £5,400 in early January. It will take an MEP's net income to £170,000 in 2011. No receipts are required for the expense money.

The increase in expenses comes with a two-per-cent pay increase for 2011. The salary of an MEP rises to £80,829, including

a back-dated amount. British MEPs now earn £15,000 more than Westminster MPs who received a 1.5 per cent rise.

MEPs receive a daily subsistence cash payment of £257 for each of the 184 days the Parliament is scheduled to sit in 2011. They also receive an allowance of £3,627 a month to help them run their local office.

At **Westminster**, the House of Commons is aiming to cut its £231 million annual budget by at least four per cent a year and one of the targets for a reduction is the current final salary pension scheme for MPs. A Member reportedly can now retire on more than £30,000 a year after 20 years' service. Members' pensions cost more than £8 million a year. The Senior Salaries Review Body has recommended that MPs' pensions be switched from final salary to an amount based on their average career earnings, and that the pension age be increased from 65 to 68, with a contribution rate of 5.5 per cent of pay.

The Commons Commission is aiming for savings of £12 million this year by spending cuts and price increases in House bars and restaurants.

Rt Hon. John Bercow, Speaker of the Commons and Chairperson of the Commission, said, "The level of savings

demanded by the current financial climate calls for a fundamental review of the services provided by the House.

"House management will work to identify where and how it can best be restructured to run most efficiently in future while more effectively achieving its aims."

Government spending is to be cut by £81 billion over four years. Government spending projections for 2011-12 total £702 billion and are expected to reach £740 billion in 2014-15 due to rising debt interest, pension payments and departmental spending. The spending rise is predicted to be less than inflation.

International aid will continue to rise so Britain becomes the first major country to hit the United Nations target of spending 0.7 per cent of GDP on aid, a level it will hit within three years. Health and school spending are also set to rise while welfare, the public service and public sector pension costs face the biggest reductions.

The Auditor-General, Mr Amyas Morse, refused to sign off Parliament's latest annual accounts. Of the £98.1m claimed, Mr Morse said there was insufficient documentation to prove nearly £14 million worth of Members' claims were for parliamentary purposes.

## Pay freeze in Scotland

The pay and allowances of Members of the Scottish Parliament are to be frozen for two years to save £1.5 million and show support for public spending cuts.

The decision by the Scottish Parliament Corporate Body (SPCB) and backed by all party Leaders was announced on 10 November.

"This gives an indication of how the SPCB sees the Parliament playing its part in responding to the financial pressures facing public sector finances over the coming years," said Presiding Officer Mr Alex Fergusson.

The budget for reimbursement of Members' expenses is also to be frozen at the 2010-11 level until 31 March, 2013.

Since 2002, MSPs have been paid at 87.5 per cent of the salary of Members of the United Kingdom House of Commons, based on a recommendation from a Senior Salaries Review Board. In April 2010, Westminster MPs' pay rose 1.5 per cent to £65,738 a year and so the salary of Backbencher in the Scottish Parliament rose to £57,521.

The link between the salaries of MPs and MSPs may have to be reviewed if Westminster does not freeze its Members' pay, it was reported.



## Escaping from the conflict spiral – The role of Parliaments and Parliamentarians

The prevention and resolution of serious conflicts that destabilize entire states require the active participation of Parliament and Parliamentarians, and both the institution and its Members must be properly equipped to recognize the danger signs and identify the solutions, a workshop of MPs from conflict-affected countries has concluded.

Parliamentarians from Commonwealth nations which have experienced violent conflicts in recent decades agreed with intergovernmental experts that Parliaments must play a far greater role in this area if conflicts are to be contained and global tensions reduced. Meeting at a Commonwealth Parliamentary Association-World Bank Institute workshop on "Parliament, Aid Effectiveness and Conflict Prevention", they analyzed the causes of the violent conflicts that continue to grip the world. While their discussions from 25 to 29 October 2010 at the Joint Vienna Institute agreed that solutions to disputes and to actual conflicts must always take account of the individual circumstances in each situation, they recognized trends and factors that contribute to the identification of dangerous disputes and to their resolution.

The workshop noted violence today



Commonwealth Parliamentarians from the Workshop meet Ms Petra Bayr, MP, who chairs the Austrian Parliament's Foreign Affairs Subcommittee, in one of the Parliament's committee rooms.

comes in many forms, from terrorism, to foreign incursions to serious crime.

They called for Parliament to be strengthened by improving democratic governance, particularly its oversight functions and systems for ensuring accountability by the executive, including the budget process, public sector financial management and the activities of the military and other security services.

Parliament must also raise standards of natural resource management, as the ben-

efits of petroleum exploration and mining developments are a leading cause of tension in many states. MPs must ensure that there are fair and equitable systems for the distribution of the benefits from resource extraction to all segments of the nation.

Parliamentarians and development partners must be proactive in responding to grievances before they become conflicts and in reducing tensions in post-conflict situations rather than waiting until violence erupts to respond to a situation.

Parliament must control the budget process to ensure that all programmes and all revenues are applied in a fully transparent and equitable way to prevent and resolve grievances and conflicts.

Parliament must also promote adherence to the best principles of democratic governance at the local, national and international levels. Respect for and adherence to the rule of law, the constitution and the concept of transparent and fully accountable of all public institutions are essential.

The group produced 30 specific recommendations to guide Members who find themselves in actual or threatened conflict situations. They are available on the CPA website at [www.cpahq.org](http://www.cpahq.org) and will be published in full in Issue Two-2011 of *The Parliamentarian*.

### New leadership in the Cook Islands

The Cook Islands Party (CIP) led by Hon. Henry Puna won the country's 29 November election, ending a decade of Democratic Party government in the South Pacific nation.

The CIP won 16 seats to the Democratic Party's 8, compared to the 2006 election when the Democratic Party held 14 seats, the CIP 7 and two went to independents.

Mr Puna was sworn in as Prime Minister succeeding Hon. Jim Marurai. The Democratic Party had been split by internal dissension.

As well as electing a government, Cook



Island voters cast ballots in a referendum on whether to reduce the size of Parliament. Although 59.2 per cent voted in favour of reducing the number of seats, this was short of the required two-thirds majority.